

Bristol Conference 1962 - Part 6

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald explores the themes of judgment and restoration in the book of Amos, emphasizing the need for repentance among God's people.

Duration: 36:03

Scripture: Amos 3:2-4, Amos 3:7-8, Amos 5:18 - 6:1, Amos 7:1-9, Amos 9:11-15

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the issue of luxury, complacency, and ease in today's society, particularly within the church. He references 1 Corinthians chapter 4, where the Apostle Paul describes the apostles as being appointed to death and made a spectacle to the world. The preacher emphasizes the need for Christians to forsake accumulation and instead focus on the things of God. He outlines the structure of the section, which includes three summons to hear and two rows of woes. The preacher also addresses the oppression of the poor and the luxurious lifestyle of the people of Israel, urging them to remember that God has given them a promise of peace.

Transcript

Now, shall we turn tonight to the book of Amos that I'd like to introduce you to, if you've never met him before? And I think, first of all, what I'll just do is give the four main parts of the outline of this book, and that might help our tips a little, and then we can depart from the outline to return to it evermore. There are four major parts of the book of Amos. The first is threatened judgment on eight nations.

If you look at chapters one and two, you'll find that in those chapters Amos lists eight nations and speaks of judgment which God threatens on them. Threatened judgment on eight nations, chapters one and two. Then the second section extends from chapter...oh, and incidentally, you could leave space under that and miss the eight nations, and that would be a pretty complete outline of those two chapters.

The second section is the guilt and punishment of Israel, and that extends from chapter three through chapter six, the guilt and punishment of Israel, and you could leave five lines under that for subheading, if you'd like. Chapters three through six, the guilt and punishment of Israel. Then the third major section of the book, symbols of approaching judgment.

God uses a lot of object lessons in his words, and here he uses some symbols of approaching judgment. Chapter seven, verse one, through chapter nine, verse ten. Symbols of approaching judgment, chapter

seven, verse one, through chapter nine, verse ten.

And then finally, the future restoration of Israel, chapter nine, verses eleven through fifteen. The future restoration of Israel, chapter nine, verses eleven through fifteen. Now, let's talk about Amos for a while.

We already mentioned that the land was divided into two kingdoms, north and south. Amos lived down in the south. He was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit.

He was just a humble peasant, and he lived down in a little town called Tekoa, near Bethlehem, T-E-K-O-A, and he lived a very quiet pastoral type of a life, and all of a sudden God put his hand upon him. He felt the divine tap on the shoulder. God said, Amos, I want you to go up to the capital of the north, to Samaria, and I want you to cry out against the sins and abuses that are prevalent in the land of Israel.

Mind you, that was quite a commission, wasn't it? Here's a humble fellow dressed in the plainest type of clothes, and God calls him to go up and stand in the palaces, really the palaces of Samaria, where the people are lounging around, living in luxury, complacency and ease, and this poor little old fellow from Tekoa is going to go up there, and standing in the presence of the king and the royal family, and all the couriers, and all the rest, he's going to be a voice for God in it all. Well, I want to tell you it takes spiritual fine, doesn't it? Thank God when he calls a man to do a task, he gives the grace to do it too. The Lord's commands are his enablement, and so Amos turned his back on Harvest and on his herd, and up he traveled to the city of Samaria.

Samaria was situated up on the top of a hill, magnificent building at the time, and he went up. Talk about a fish out of water, eh? Well, that was poor Amos. He goes into the middle of that type of a scene, and he begins to prophesy, and he began prophesying against eight nations.

For instance, he started with Damascus. Damascus was the capital of Syria, and Damascus had been exceedingly cruel to the two and a half tribes of Israel that were east of the Jordan. God hadn't forgotten, and so Amos stands in the middle of the people of Samaria, and he says, for three transgressions of Damascus and for four, I'm going to visit this country with judgment, says God, because they were cruel to my people who were living in the land of Israel, and all the people of Israel really applauded.

They said, my, that's fine, we're glad to see Syria take a licking from the hand of God. And then when Amos finished with that, he started on Geza, which was one of the cities of the Philistines, and he says, God has a controversy with Geza and with the Philistine people, because they turned over captives of Israel to the cruel Ebanites. Now, we don't know too much about this from history, but all we know is that the Philistines performed this act of cruelty to God's people, and my, the people of Israel applauded.

They were really enjoying it, and they put down their cocktails, no doubt, to clap their hands for Amos. They thought he was rather a queer sort of a fellow in many ways, but at least he was denouncing their enemy, so they let him go on. And then he began on the city of Tyre, which was one of the coastal cities along the Mediterranean there, and he said, yes, Tyre, God has a controversy with Tyre, because Tyre also delivered captives of Israel over to the Edomites, and not only that, but they broke a treaty with the people of Israel, and God has decreed judgment on Tyre, and the people said, my, that's the best sermon we ever heard preached.

Amos, he cried at it, and so he began on the country of the Edomites, which were really half-brothers of the Jews, you know. They were descendants from Esau, and the Edomites were perpetually cruel

enemies of the people of Tyre, and so Amos cried out against the Edomites and promised that God would punish this wicked nation, and my, I tell you, he was becoming more popular all the time with the people up in the north there, the people living in Samaria, living high off the hog, living it to the hilt. And so then Amos came to the Ammonites, and he reminded the Ammonites that they had committed atrocities on the people of God over there in Gilead on the east side of the Jordan again, and once again the people were most grateful to think that the Ammonites were going to receive their due from God.

And then he came to the Moabites, and there's an interesting thing. All it says about the Moabites is that they burned the bones of the king of Edom in line, and what I think it simply means is that they denied the king of Edom a decent burial. You know, one of the worst things you could do in Bible times as far as inhumanity and seeming cruelty was to deny a decent burial to anyone, and so God has a controversy with the people of Moab for all of that.

But then the shocker comes, because after mentioning six Gentile nations, Amos goes on to speak of Judah, and you know this was shocking. Even to the Israelites, who were no special friends of Judah at this particular time, you know, separated, divided kingdoms, here was Judah placed on the same basis as these Gentile heathen nations. How could that ever be? Well, dear friends, it was because through their sin they lost any special place of privilege they might have before God.

God is no respecter of persons, and the people of Judah, it says, did not respect the law of the Lord. They rejected the law of the Lord and turned themselves over to idolatry, and God says, Judah, I look at you now right alongside the nations of the world, the Gentile nations, the dogs of the world. I have missed you right alongside.

Well, maybe the clapping among the people of Israel was a little more subdued at this point. It was getting kind of warm under the collar, and then dear Amos came out with the last and final blow. He said, the nation of Israel is next on the catalog of God, and he cried out against the nation of Israel and the terrible sins that they had committed.

He says, why the, you Jewish people, you people of Israel, you're so greedy for money that you pant after the dust in the head of the poor. Imagine that. I can think of them going out and trying to buy land and getting as much land as possible, but my, their greed and their covetousness went even so far that they panted after the dust in the head of the poor, and then they committed terrible forms of immorality that read about in verse 7 of chapter 2, and that the very significant thing, God says, I raised up prophets to speak to you, and you told the prophets to keep quiet, and I raised up Nazarites in your midst.

I raised up in your midst men who lived separated lives, men whose lives were devoted to God, and what did you try to do? You tried to corrupt them. You tried to make them do the same things that you did, so that their testimony would be nullified, and so that their lips would be silenced. Now, just picture Amos up there in the midst of this scene, with all the brocaded curtains and garments, and all the luxury, the golden and silver vessels, and here he is crying out and announcing to these people that God was sick and tired of it all, and that God was going to visit them with judgment, and the Assyrians would come in and devour their nation.

Now, in chapters 3 through 6, you have the guilt and punishment of Israel, and I'd like you to notice at the beginning of chapter 3 something very interesting. First of all, in this section, you have three summons to hear. Notice verse 1. Hear this word that the Lord has spoken.

Hear this word, chapter 4 verse 1, and chapter 5 verse 1. Hear this word. And so, in outlining this section, I call it the first summons to hear. This is under the second main section.

The first summons to hear, chapter 3, the second summons to hear, chapter 4, and the third summons to hear, chapter 5 verses 1 through 17. In other words, those words here you get form kind of the outline of the first part of this section. First summons to hear, chapter 3, second summons to hear, chapter 4, third summons to hear, chapter 5 verses 1 through 17, and then after that you have two rows.

The first row, chapter 5 verses 18 to 27, and the second row, chapter 6. So, in this section you have three summons to hear, and you have two rows. First summons to hear, chapter 3, second summons to hear, chapter 4, third summons to hear, chapter 5 verses 1 through 17. The first row, chapter 5 verses 18 to 27, and the second row, chapter 6. Now, I wanted to point your attention to verse 2 of chapter 3. Here's Amos speaking again, a man of courage, a man of conscience, a man of fearlessness, because he was speaking the word of the Lord.

And listen to what the Lord is saying here, "...you only have I known of all the families of the earth." You'd think it would say, therefore I will have mercy on you, wouldn't it? It isn't what it says. It says, "...you only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquity." In other words, this verse teaches us that privilege brings responsibility, and the greater the privilege conferred upon the people of God, the greater will be their punishment if they fail in the carrying out of that privilege. And then God says, "...can two walk together except they be agreed?" And, of course, the two in that verse are the Lord and his people.

Then the next verse is, "...will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey?" And here the lion, of course, is the Assyrian. The Assyrian armies were practically at the gates, you know, and it was as if a lion were out there roaring, and God is saying, is he roaring without a reason? Well, he's not. Just let me tell you that.

"...will a young lion cry out of his gin if he hath taken nothing?" The answer is, he certainly won't. Then it says, "...can a bird fall and a snare upon the earth, for no gin is for him?" And that bird, of course, is Israel. So, will one take up a snare from the earth and have nothing at all? And the thought of this passage is that every effect has a cause, and what's going to happen to the nation of Israel is going to happen because of the terrible sins of the people.

And so the Gentile nations are summoned in the latter part of this chapter to come and view the oppression, and the violence, and the injustice, and the robbery, and the greed in the nation of Israel. Then, in the beginning of chapter four, came a speech of the people of Israel. I'd like you to notice this.

Hear this word, you kind of bastion. It wasn't easy to call them that. Kind, of course, are cows, and bastions were the rich, fertile fields over on the east side of the Jordan, and cows that were fed over there in bastions got fat and unmanageable.

They were like the wild steers out in the west where the cowboys had to go with the sheep and catch them. So, he likens the people of Israel to the kind of bastion feeding on the other side of the Jordan, and he gets after them because they oppressed the poor, and crushed the and lived luxuriously. He says, I know, I see you're going ahead and sacrificing that Bethel and Gilgal.

Go ahead with your sacrifices, but he says to the people, I want you to know this, I've given you a cleanness of feet. And that didn't mean pestilence, that meant famine. You wouldn't need to use any heat kicks when you had cleanness of feet.

God says, I've given you cleanness of feet, I've sent drought in your midst, I've sent blasting, I've sent mildew, I've sent the farmer worms, I've sent pestilence and swine. And he says, since none of these things seem to have moved you, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. I tell you, they're solemn words, aren't they? Once again, we're reminded of what we had last night, that God speaks to people through these visitations of nature, as we call them.

And then there comes that final summons to appear before God himself. And then in chapter 5, Amos takes up a lamentation for the people of Israel, and he says that when the destruction comes, and when the Assyrians come in, only one out of ten will survive in that day. Verse 3, For thus saith the Lord God, the city that went out by a thousand shall leave an hundred, that which went forth by an hundred shall leave ten for the house of Israel.

It's going to be a pretty complete desolation, pretty complete destruction in that day. And then in the verses that follow, you'll notice there's a repetition of the word seek. He's saying, even at this last minute, seek the Lord.

Don't go and seek the golden calf. Don't go to Bethel and worship there. Seek him that made the skies.

Seek the creator of the universe. Verse 14, Seek good and not evil, that ye may live. And so the Lord God of hosts shall be with you as he has spoken.

Then in this chapter also, he says to them, Now you've been praying for the day of the Lord. You know, we spoke about the day of the Lord last night, and these people had. They had been praying for the day of the Lord.

Why? Well, they thought God's going to march forward before us in victory, and he says to them in this chapter, Don't pray for the day of the Lord, because you're praying against yourself when you pray for that. The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness, a day of night, a day of suffering, and a day of tribulation. He said, I know one evil will overtake another in the day of the Lord.

He says, Verse 19, As if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. In other words, when the day of the Lord really did descend upon them, there wouldn't be any escape. Everywhere they turned, it would be calamity in the city.

He says, I see you going through your rituals, I see you going through your sacrifices, your vain oblations. I hate, I despise them, the Lord said. I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assembly.

Why? Because they thought that merely by going through certain rituals, they thought that by doing so many cartwheels and tennis, that they were pleasing God, and God had nothing in it at all, because their lives were corrupt and their business dealings were shady, and God wouldn't be fooled by any series of religious rituals that they might go. He reminded the people of Israel as they lounged on their couches up there in Samaria, and as the wine and liquor were flowing freely, that even back in the wilderness, while they professed to be worshiping the God of Israel, actually they were worshiping Moloch and other heathen, idolatrous gods. And then in Chapter 6, he gives a very vivid description, and I want you to

picture Amos standing there in Samaria.

He wasn't speaking to them over television or over the radio or over the phone, either. He was standing right there in their midst, and he says, verse 3, He that put far away the evil day, and caused the seed of violence to come near, that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, eat the lambs out of the flock. They'd only eat in Junkenheim's presence, you know, in those days.

Lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall. What is it? Luxurious living. You know, it's what you hear sometimes today, that in some circles, I'm glad to say not the assembly circles, but in some circles you hear it among servants of the Lord.

Servants of the Lord going forth and living in the utmost luxury, and there is nothing too good for the servants of the Lord. Pretty poor attitude for those who are followers of the one who could say, foxes have holes and birds of the air, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head. The one who said the servant is not above his master.

Well, this is the type of thing that's going on today, and it's the type of thing that went on in his day. The chance of the sound of violin is vexed with themselves just because of music like Jesus. They drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with a teapot, but they're not used for the expression of Joseph.

They're in the living to cater to the lusts of the flesh, and there's no spiritual burden in their life. You know, that's the meaning of the name Amos. His name means burden, and as you read the book, it can help dealing with a burden that he felt as he spoke to these people.

And so he said to the people, the Assyrian captivity is coming, and you might as well get ready for it, and there are going to be few survivors when God meets in upon this people. And then in the third section of the book, God speaks to Amos through a series of symbols, and the first symbol is the devouring locust in verses 1 through 3. He looked, and after the first mowing which went to the king, he saw a plague of locusts, the devouring locusts, come in, and dear Amos should be for God and interceded for the people. This was a kind of a preliminary invasion, you know.

It was the first trial of the Assyrians into the land, and Amos took an eight percent offering, as it were, before the Lord, and he pled for the Lord to spare this people, and you know the Lord did, and the devouring locust was saved. And so that was the first symbol of judgment. Perhaps that was one of the kings of the Assyrians coming in.

And then he looked again, and he saw a consuming fire sweeping into the land, and this was kind of a second preliminary invasion, a consuming fire. Once again, Amos lifted up his hands to God, and he cried out as a prophet of the Lord, spare the people, Lord, and the Lord spared the people, and the consuming fire was saved. And the next time he looked, he saw the Lord standing upon the wall, and he had a plumb line.

I don't know how to describe a plumb line. I'd have to use my hands, but anyway there's a string, and there's a weight at the other end of it, and I think carpenters use it, and I'm pretty sure that, I was going to say morticians, but that's not the right word. Masons use it to make sure that the wall that they build is straight.

Well, God is holding the plumb line, and the plumb line speaks to us of his inflexible justice, and the idea is I'm not going to pass by my people anymore in mercy. The plumb line is set, and judgment is going to

come upon the house of Israel. Let's look at verse 8 for a minute, and I think it'll help you in your understanding of this verse if you add the words in parentheses in mercy.

Not that they belong there, but just helps to explain the thought. The Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumb line. Then said the Lord, behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel.

I will not again pass by them anymore in mercy. We have twice already in the previous two symbols. There's a symbol of the devouring locust, and the symbol of the consuming fire.

We are passed by the people. Now here's the third symbol, and God says I'm not going to pass by them anymore, and that means the Assyrians are going to come in, and they're going to devour the land. And then in the middle of this section, we have kind of a parenthesis, and I'm so glad this parenthesis is there.

It tells about a little encounter between a false prophet, Amaziah, and the true prophet, Amos. Amaziah was a priest of Bethel, I should say, and he said to Jeroboam, king of Israel, he said, why this fellow is just a public nuisance. He's crying out against the people, and he's predicting your death, and that people will carry away into Assyria into captivity.

And then he said to Amos, look Amos, all you're doing up here is causing trouble. Why don't you go back down to Bethlehem and earn your bread there? You know what he was accusing him of. He was accusing him of being in the ministry before he got out of it.

In other words, he was judging Amos by himself. That's what he was doing. And Amos said, listen here my friend, I've got something to tell you.

I wasn't a prophet by choice, neither am I a son of a prophet. I'm a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. That's what I am.

But God put his hand upon me, and God called me into this work. And I want to tell you this Amaziah, God has decreed judgment in your house, and your wife is going to wander as a harlot in the city, and your family, your sons and daughters, will die by the sword. The land will be divided by line, and thou shalt die in a polluted land, and Israel will surely go into captivity.

I thank God for a man that can stand up with such fearlessness, such valor, such bravery, and speak to a false priest at a time like that. And then the Lord came to Amos with the hawk symbol. He said, what do you see Amos? Amos said, I see a basket of summer fruit, Lord.

The Lord said, that's right, that's right, you see a basket of summer fruit. This is the beginning of chapter eight. And he said, he said, that fruit is ripe, isn't it Amos? And he said, Israel's ripe for judgment too.

Don't you ever forget it. And when the judgment comes, they'll carry out the dead to bury them, and they'll bury them in silence. There'll be earthquakes and bitter retentions, and one of the most serious things of all, at the end of this chapter, God says, the days are going to come, Amos, and there'll be a famine of the word of God.

Notice verse 11. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine into the land, nor a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, and shall

not find it.

You know, that's a serious thing, isn't it? I wonder if in some way there isn't a famine of the word of the Lord today. We have a lot of gospel preaching. I don't suppose there's ever been a time in the history of the world when the gospel has gone forth as much as it is today.

But, how much actual prophetic ministry is there, such as Amos delivered in the palaces of Samaria? Is it possible that with all the gospel preaching that we have today, that there is a famine as far as this type of prophetic ministry is concerned? Then in the first part of chapter 9, the Lord is seen standing upon the altar, perhaps a steppe, and he says, smite the loophole of the door. And this last symbolism is the final blow on Israel, the descent of the Assyrians that Israel carried away into captivity. God has done it to other nations, and he can do it to Israel as well.

And then the book closes with the ultimate restoration of Israel in a coming day. Isn't that lovely, that after all the storm clouds have passed, God has spoken in a voice of thunder, yet at the end of the book we see Israel, a believing remnant of the people, restored to the land. I wonder what Amos would say if he came back today.

Would he be like this, do you think? Well, I think he is. I think this is a very accurate description of what we have in Christendom today. Luxury, complacency, and ease, and a lack of real fanatical, devoted, passionate reality in the things of Christ.

Dear Christian friends, tonight we're wearing our crowns instead of bearing our coffins, as it would be. The Apostle Paul said it before I did, in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. We'll just turn to that for just a minute. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 9 to 13.

For I think that God has set forth us, the apostles, last, as it were, appointed as death. But we're made a spectacle unto the world of the angels and of men. We're fooled for Christ's sake that ye are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are honored, though we are despised. Even under this present hour we boast hunger and thirst, and are naked and abuffed, and have no certain dwelling place.

And labor, working with our own hands, being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we suffer it. Being defamed, we entreat that we are made as a filth of the world, and are the off-powering of all things unto this day. What is the picture? Well, the picture is this.

The Apostle Paul sees a stadium. He sees a stadium. Down in the middle of the stadium you find the place where men are thrown to the lions.

All around the stadium you find the box seats. And he says, you Christians and Christians, you're sitting around there in the box seats, and you all have your crowns on your head, and we're down there in the stadium being thrown to the lions. We're the filth and the off-powering of the earth, because you're reigning before the time.

You know, there is a day coming when the people of God will put the crown on their head, but that time hasn't come yet. It's often been pointed out that in circles where they have a king or a queen, when the king or queen is being crowned, of course all the lords and ladies and heirs and heiresses and all the others are around there, but not one of them ever puts on his diadem until the monarch puts on his. And there's a day coming, in fact, when the Lord Jesus will be revealed to this world in glory.

He'll be seen as the King of kings and Lord of lords, and until then it's premature for us to be reigning. God's intention is that we should be pilgrims and strangers to this world, and instead of that we make a home in it. We make a home in it.

Somebody has said, this world makes a mighty poor home, but a mighty good school. And that's what God intended it to be. It intended to be our training time, but not our home.

But I believe that Amos came back today to have something straight to us about this. You know, people who invest in a breaking bank are not wise, as this whole world is a breaking bank. And people who build their nests in a tree that's about to be cut down are not wise, as this whole world's about to be cut down.

A person was walking to his study one day, and he passed a public park in London, and he saw a little bird. It was in wintertime, or perhaps in spring, or whenever they build their nests, I don't know. But anyway, he saw a bird building its nest in the tree, and when he came back at five o'clock at night, he saw a woodman down there with an axe at the bottom of a tree.

He said, poor foolish little bird, building in a tree that so soon to be cut down. You know, that's what a lot of us are doing, I hear. We're accumulating instead of forsaking.

Isn't that a strange thing? You don't believe it, but figure it out. Accumulating instead of forsaking. The Lord Jesus said, forsake.

Now, that isn't a word that's very common in our Christian vocabulary today. We're laying up treasures on earth instead of laying up treasures in heaven. It was Anthony Norris Bowles that said, I repeat it, some of you, that it's just as wrong, just as contrary, I should say, to the word of God to lay up treasures on earth as it is to deal or submit adultery or murder.

They're all contrary to the word of God Jesus was the one who said it. If the truth were told, Amos would remind us that we're giving our fair evenings to the Lord instead of our lives. You know, I think it was Lennon who said he wanted a group of men who would give not their fair evenings, but all lay ahead to the cause of Communism.

It breaks my heart to think that there's more reality today visible in fanatical Communists than there is in fanatical Christians. Why is it that we don't want to be fanatical Christians? Will you please tell me? Nobody wants to bear that reproach. And even more serious still, dear friends, we're raising our young people for the unworthy world instead of for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in many cases we are raising them for hell. Why Christian parents don't want to hold the work of the Lord before their children as a worthy way for them to spend their lives on their own. But I could introduce you to some Christian parents tonight who wish they had.

They wish they had. The lifetime is gone. These are some of the things I think that Amos would speak to us about if he should come back, and I think maybe tomorrow morning, instead of going on with another prophet, we'll just continue on perhaps with more of the application of this book to our own lives.

And I do hope that in just going through these few books of the Minor Prophets that we'll sweat our appetites a little, and they do have a message for today. It's all there. I think it speaks very, very loudly, and I can see why the devil would want us to neglect them as books of the Bible, because they do have a piercing, cutting note for them that gets under your skin, just the same as the Christ that gets under your

skin.

May the Lord speak to our hearts and hearts.

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