

The Minor Prophets

Amos

AMOS 1

Someone has said that Old Testament prophets are members of God's awkward squad. Their methods may be unorthodox and their message unwelcome to those in power, but their refusal to let the status quo go unchallenged marks them out as men of courageous faith.

I like the way The Living Bible introduces us to the prophet Amos. (LB Ch 1: verses 1 and 2) "Amos was a herdsman living in the village of Tekoa. All day long he sat on the hillsides watching the sheep, keeping them from straying. One day, in a vision, God told him some of the things that were going to happen to his nation, Israel."

Tekoa was about 12 miles south of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah and God was going to send Amos, a southerner, up north to the northern kingdom of Israel. He had a very unpleasant message to deliver, but he did it in a very strategic manner.

Working on the principle that we're all ears when someone else is going to be on the receiving end, but switch off quickly when we are ourselves targeted, Amos gained the full attention of his hearers by first delivering six judgements from God on the surrounding nations.

Let's set the scene. The date is around 760 BC. Both kingdoms were enjoying great prosperity. The southern kingdom of Judah under Uzziah: the northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. Outwardly everything appeared to be just fine – a time of affluence, political strength, national stability and expansion – surely this indicated the favour of God. However, the inner life of the nation was decadent – rotten to the core. To a spiritual person the 'feel good' factor was a mirage. Idolatry, immorality, exploitation of the poor, corruption in the courts, and excessive indulgence in luxurious living – all this invited the wrath of God. Justice and righteousness were conspicuous by their absence.

There was also a growing military danger looming on the horizon. The Assyrians to the north were ambitious to extend their territory and God was going to permit this to happen.

God raises up a man with a fiery message and makes him roar like a lion. Chapter 1 verse 2 "The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem." Amos, a shepherd, was sent to Israel to warn her that he had heard a lion roar and the lion is none other than the Lord Himself who has only wanted to be Israel's shepherd.

The divine lion roars first to denounce the outrageous sins of Israel's Gentile neighbours.

You may recall that in Judges 14 Samson heard such a roar as he walked through the vineyards of Timnah. 'Suddenly a young lion came roaring towards him.' A savage, vicious word. Can God really be likened to a roaring lion?

We forget, to our cost, that salvation which rescues and judgement which punishes are equally aspects of God's fiery holiness. Wrath comes late in the day – long overdue, but it comes after mercy has waited and patience has watched and sin still

abounds. At last judgement will fall. The roaring lion, who hates sin, will pounce upon it, sooner or later.

Swingeing judgements are announced on 6 nations surrounding the northern kingdom of Israel. They will be judged because of their inhumanity to man.

Here's the sorry list:

In verse 3 against Damascus – God says “I will not turn back my wrath, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael.” Divine judgement has been provoked by the barbarity of King Hazael who treated people as if they were things. Such unjust violence angers God.

In verse 6 against Gaza – God says, “I will not turn back my wrath - I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza.” These Philistines have been engaged in slave trading. There is not the slightest remainder of their community surviving nowadays.

In verse 9 it is Tyre – God says “I will not turn back my wrath – I will send fire on the walls of Tyre.” These Phoenicians were guilty of promise breaking. A treaty of brotherhood counted for nothing.

In verse 11 judgement is proclaimed against Edom – who were guilty of unnatural hatred: God says, “I will not turn back my wrath ... because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked.” All compassion was stifled. They showed no mercy.

In verse 13 against Ammon – God says, “I will not turn back my wrath” Guilty of sickening atrocities against helpless people. “He ripped open pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders.” The Ammonites were guilty of the most awful war crimes.

And finally, in chapter 2 verse 1 - Moab – God says, “I will not turn back my wrath – I will send fire upon Moab.” Guilty of blatant disregard for the dead and for royalty “He burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom's king.” Such vindictiveness brought down God's wrath.

These six nations did not have special revelation like God's chosen people, but they still had moral responsibility and were still accountable to God. Everyone is, believer or non-believer. Ultimately we are all answerable to Him. As it says in Hebrews 4:13 “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

It is a sobering thought to recall that none of these six nations mentioned at the start of Amos exists today. All have been wiped out of existence, but Israel endures.

AMOS 2

We're looking at the sermon notes of the shepherd Amos. He had a fiery message to deliver at a time when commercial sharp practice was normal and standards had deteriorated. He preached around 760 BC in the N. kingdom of Israel.

After delivering half a dozen judgements from God on the surrounding nations, he now gets very personal. Having grabbed the attention of his hearers who are very keen to know what's going to happen to others, because surely they deserve it, he now launches into what God thinks about the country where he came from – the southern kingdom of Judah. Remember he's operating in the northern kingdom of

Israel, and with no love lost between the divided kingdoms, one can imagine the crowd are all ears.

The message is blunt and stark. God declares "I will not turn back my wrath because they have rejected the law of the Lord ... not kept His decrees ... and been led astray by false gods ... I will send fire upon Judah." Fire represents the holiness and judgement of God. Deuteronomy 4:24 reminds us "The Lord your God is a consuming fire."

Imagine the glee and surprise expressed by his hearers in the northern kingdom. Fancy a Jewish prophet from Judah having a go at his own people – fancy classifying God's chosen people with Gentile dogs that reject God.

One can imagine the startled people of Judah saying, "We know we aren't perfect, but at least we worship the true and living God." However, they did not do it in God's prescribed way. Partial obedience is no obedience at all.

Then, suddenly, the northern kingdom itself was in the frame. This frank and fearless prophet, gripped by God, uttered a stinging judgement on Israel and he didn't pull his punches. It's in Amos Chapter 2 verses 6 and 7: "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.'"

The poor had fallen into slavery because of their debts. When they sought justice in the law courts they were heartlessly pushed aside because the judges had already been bribed by the wealthy and powerful.

It's strikingly clear that his hearers in the northern kingdom of Israel, who had received revelation from God, were blatantly ignoring it. Holy living was old fashioned. Drunkenness was the order of the day. Moral deterioration had set in big-time.

Chapter 2 verse 12: "You made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy." They have forfeited God's favour and now God's after them. The Message Bible paraphrase puts verse 13 into God's mouth: "You're too much for me. I'm hard-pressed – to the breaking point. I'm like a wagon piled high and overloaded, creaking and groaning." The New International Version translates it this way: "Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain." There'll be no escape – no hiding place. None will get away – the swift, the strong, the warrior, the archer, the fleet-footed soldier, the horseman – judgement will overtake them all. No one can outrun God.

Romans chapter 11 verse 22 in the Authorised Version urges us to "behold the goodness and severity of God". How we need such proclamation in our pluralistic society. It might not be politically correct to speak about the wrath of God, but it is biblically correct. Here is the jealousy of God at work to punish transgression in His chosen people and to discipline unto greater holiness.

Israel had conveniently forgotten 'the vengeance of the covenant' – i.e. what God promised would happen if they forsook Him.

I can sense a weary sadness in the heart of God at the deep ingratitude of Israel. Don't you think God's got feelings too? Hadn't he brought them up out of Egypt and led this mob of ex-slaves for forty years in the desert? Hadn't he destroyed the Amorite – that's another name for the Canaanite – before them and given Israel the land he'd promised them? In return the people of God had sinned against mercy

and grace. They had sinned against redemption and the revealed word of God. Their utter ingratitude was outrageous.

Amos was living dangerously. He's just delivered a massive wake up call to the people in the northern kingdom. He's a foreigner (he's from the south) and a layman, but above all he's a true man of God.

It's to his advantage that he's not an official member of the Jewish religion, nor is he from the political establishment, but it would be difficult to misinterpret his God inspired message. The games up – be sure your sin will find you out.

Do you ever pause to consider whether your religion is nauseating to God? In the New Testament letter of James we read these pointed words (Chapter 1 verses 26-27) "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

AMOS 3

Chapter 3 in the minor prophet Amos begins with a major message to the northern kingdom of Israel. "Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel ... you only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

You will recall that God's gracious call to Israel – to be His chosen people – was exclusive and unique. The privileges were immense – so were the responsibilities of being His alone.

For too long divine warnings had been disregarded; the nation assumed it was God's favourite and impervious to judgement. Israel had charged heedlessly through all the red lights and an imminent crash was inevitable. They were running out of time. Only about 40 years remained before the nation would be no more – swallowed up by Assyrian invaders by 722 BC.

There's a sobering verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 verse 11 "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong."

God has called Amos – a rustic farmer, a feisty and focused preacher – and he asks some rhetorical questions, all suggesting that something's up. Each example, drawn from daily life, is of cause and effect.

Amos 3 verses 3-6 "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 the 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?"

The implications are clear. God never makes idle threats, nor is He mocked. Calamity never falls without the directive hand of God. We so easily forget that God is sovereign and judgement is not uninvited. The Providence that controls world history is holy and just and the Lord has let Amos in on His secret counsel so he might be God's spokesman to His wayward people.

Verse 7: "Surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets." God has been inspecting the lives of His people in the kingdom of Israel and what His scrutiny revealed was not good.

The book began in verse 2 with the words "The Lord roars from Zion" – now in chapter 3 verse 8 we read, "The lion has roared – who will not fear? The sovereign Lord has spoken – who can but prophesy?"

Amos calls two of Israel's pagan neighbours, the Egyptians and the Philistines, to bear witness to the great unrest within that kingdom and the oppression among her people. Israel may very well feel shown up for life as those with no special claim on God are invited to rise up and judge the waywardness of His chosen people.

God declares (in verse 10), "They do not know how to do right." God's had enough. An enemy will overrun the land and the Sovereign Lord will use this enemy – the nation of Assyria – as the rod of His judgement. God – who is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy – is now poised to act in judgement. Verse 14 "On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel."

God had tolerated the break away northern kingdom for two centuries. Now this counterfeit cult set up by Jeroboam at Bethel as an alternative to worship in Jerusalem was about to be demolished. A man-made religious system was due to be annihilated. Heresy was judged by God's truth and lost hands down.

Hear God's verdict on their luxurious and indulgent life style verse 15: "I will tear down the winter house, along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished."

How we need an Amos today. Nowadays we are in the interim of grace between the lion's roar and the onset of well-deserved judgement. Religious declension is all around and the prophetic voice is urgently needed to ring out in our lands to call us back to God. Fear of judgement may not be the highest motive for obeying God, but the Lord will accept it.

The shepherd, Amos, declares in the most graphic terms that just a small part of Israel will be saved from the roaring lion. It's in verse 12: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved ... "

As the NIV Study Bible puts it: "Only a mutilated remnant would survive. The nation as such would be more than wounded – it would be destroyed." How we need an army of men like Amos to address our nations and teach us the fear of the Lord.

AMOS 4

The task of an Old Testament prophet was to address the present in the light of the future. Psalm 25 verse 14 says: "The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them." In Amos God found such a man – one who had been walking in fellowship with Him.

By and large we have forgotten a salient truth that Amos underscores. God can turn and become our enemy. Remember what happened after the Exodus – Isaiah 63 verses 9 and 10: "He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. So He turned and became their enemy and He Himself fought against them."

Sometimes people wonder why the church is so powerless. God's not lost His power ... We have lost His power.

Isaiah 59 verses 1 and 2 says it all: "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

In many ways Amos's message must have seemed quite bizarre and ridiculous to a people who couldn't see beyond what their natural eyes observed. It didn't seem to fit or make sense. Outwardly both kingdoms, North and South, were doing very nicely thank you. They were enjoying an economic bounce greater than at any time since the golden days of David and Solomon.

Nation-wide there was a mood of optimism – the feel good factor. Such 'security' under King Jeroboam the second had blinded the people to their need of God. The whole nation was like a great Titanic heading for unseen icebergs. As Alec Motyer puts it in his commentary: "Israel's Indian summer of prosperity and affluence was coming to an end."

When we reach chapter 4 of Amos, the prophet couldn't be more blunt or direct. It's hardly polite to liken wealthy, sophisticated women of the day to cattle, but that's exactly what he does. Chapter 4 verse 1: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan – a place noted for its breed of cattle – you women who oppress the poor and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"

Verse 2: "The sovereign Lord has sworn by his holiness: 'The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fish-hooks.'" The mental picture is startling. Archaeologists have unearthed pictures engraved on stone depicting how the Assyrians dealt with their prisoners of war. They were led away with a rope fastened to a hook, which pierced their nose or lower lip.

Verses 4 and 5 are spoken in irony by Amos. The Living Bible catches the tone superbly: "Go ahead and sacrifice to idols at Bethel and Gilgal" – these places used to be associated with real God-encounters by Jacob and Joshua.

"Keep disobeying – your sins are mounting up. Sacrifice each morning and bring your tithes twice a week! Go through all your proper forms and give extra offerings. How you pride yourselves and crow about it everywhere!"

Here's the problem in a nutshell. They loved the forms and rituals of religion – but where's the substance, where's the heart for God Himself? They manifestly didn't love what God loves – goodness, mercy, and kindness. It's a gross affront to a holy God to organise religion on the basis of what we like and not as He has ordained.

God uses all the weapons in His armoury to steer His wayward people back to His ways, but none of His disciplines does the trick. They're listed in chapter 4 verses 6 to 11:

"I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord.

Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me, declares

the Lord. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord."

Have you got the picture? While the Israelites were busy making money by fair means or foul, God was busy sending famine, drought, blight, locusts, plague, war, earthquake – but they still didn't get it.

Someone objects that doesn't sound like God. Surely He's not like that - He wouldn't do that. Check it out – it's in the Bible. Our modern concept of God is often unbiblical. If God isn't nice enough to suit our emotions or small enough to fit within our logic, we often have a tendency to reform Him and make Him in our own image.

Amos suffers from no such delusion. Because he fears the Lord, God confides in him and anoints him to speak on His behalf.

AMOS 5

Amos was not a graduate of the school of the prophets. He was a layman- a contemporary of Hosea, Isaiah and Micah. He's been charged with an unpopular message – a pronouncement of punishment – not what people living in comfort wish to hear. The idle rich and immoral lounge lizards can hardly fail to catch the gist of what he's saying.

The date line is around 760 BC. The Israelites wanted a religion that met their needs and never stopped to ask, "What does God want?" It never dawned on them that if they reneged on the covenant, their covenant keeping God would implement the penalties spelt out in that same covenant. Deuteronomy chapter 28 outlines the blessings and curses in explicit detail.

They have forgotten that their God formed the mountains, created the wind, turns dawn to darkness and treads the high places of the earth – He is the Lord God Almighty.

This God 'reveals His thoughts to man' and Amos has clearly heard what God is saying. It's in chapter 4 verse 12: "This is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." Is this hell-fire preaching or the last glimmer of hope when Amos says "your God"? - The God Israel had covenanted with at Sinai, the God she had now so grievously offended.

Chapter 5 begins on a sombre note. It's a song of grief. "Hear this word, O house of Israel." You've stopped listening, so now actions will speak louder than words. An invader will waste you – Quick "Seek Me and live" – a remnant could yet escape extreme judgement.

Avoid the idolatrous shrines at all costs. "Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal. Do not journey to Beersheba." Going on a pilgrimage to a one-time holy place is no substitute for a relationship with the all time Living God.

They need to reflect that they turn justice into bitter injustice, but the Lord God can turn night into day. Time's up for casting, 'righteousness to the ground'. Time's up for those who 'despise him who tells the truth'. God says to Israel "You won't profit from your ill gotten gains won through exploitation and trampling on the poor. You'll forfeit them all"

Amos is longing for his hearers to make a pilgrimage to God – to set aside time, not to go to Bethel or Gilgal or Beersheba – as if there were any virtue in making the journey – but rather to have a transforming personal encounter with the Lord and have their inner spiritual life renewed.

Isaiah 55 verses 6- and 7 announces the same message: “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.” These pilgrimages to the idol shrines have been likened to Bank Holiday family outings devoid of serious religious or spiritual content.

The people don't want God to make a difference in their lives. They don't want change. They like things as they are. Practise their religion at the shrine. The last thing they wanted was for God to speak to them. Perhaps they'd forgotten that it was the speaking God who encountered their ancestor Jacob at Bethel long ago.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, Amos tells us what's going on:

Chapter 5 verses 11 to 13: “You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.”

Amos – the prophet who feared no man – is making his words count. Because the tone of voice is not included in a translation, we don't know if he was ranting and raving or, only with great difficulty, able to hold back the tears. His cry is urgent, a matter of life or death.

Verses 14 and 15 “Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”

Do we presume on God's grace? – Reckon He's with us when we live contrary to His commands? Maybe it's high time we all began to seek Him and live.

AMOS 6

At the time of the Exodus the Lord said something very significant to Moses (Exodus 12 verse 12) “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every first born – both men and animals - and I will bring judgement on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.” He goes on in the next verse to say, “When I see the blood I will pass over you.”

The people in Amos's day assumed God would always pass over them – they would avoid judgement – God would always by-pass them. They were His chosen ones. Imagine their alarm when the prophet from Tekoa declares (Amos 5 verse 16) “This is what the Lord, the Lord God Almighty, says, ‘There will be wailing in all the streets, and cries of anguish in every public square ... There will be wailing in all the vineyards for I will pass through your midst.’”

Not pass over, or by-pass, but pass through your midst. The Lord Himself will just quietly walk through the midst – His glory, His person, His presence, His greatness, His awesome majesty – and they will weep.

Amos alerts the people to the fact that they've been missing the point for ages. They've proudly assumed that when the Day of the Lord comes and God manifests Himself, and rights wrongs, and judges faithlessness, they will be exalted and avoid censure of any kind. Their classic mistake has been to convince themselves that judgement is only for other people. Amos shocks them with his message. In the Living Bible paraphrase verse 18 reads: "You say, 'If only the Day of the Lord were here, for then God would deliver us from all our foes.' But you have no idea what you ask. For that day will not be light and prosperity, but darkness and doom! How terrible the darkness will be for you; not a ray of joy or hope will shine. In that day you will be as a man who is chased by a lion – and met by a bear, or a man in a darkroom who leans against a wall – and puts his hand on a snake. Yes, that will be a dark and hopeless day for you."

Amos's message rings out loud and clear. "Listen – you're not ready for the Day of the Lord. What makes you think you'll escape being judged?"

Their religion was practised at the shrines, but it was a dead-end religion. It was going nowhere. Were they to stop for a moment – get off the roundabout of ritual performances and ask God what He thinks of their services so far, His response would be "rubbish." Verse 21: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I can not stand your assemblies." Literally, "I do not inhale with delight (your offerings)."

God's desire, then as now, was for His people to live holy lives, relate to Him and then their service would be acceptable. What Amos was highlighting was that godless living made religious offerings worthless and they kidded themselves if they imagined they were getting through to God.

Let me ask you a question. If a person is really walking with God, how will it show? Surely their beliefs will affect their behaviour, their creed will colour their conduct. If there's a gap between what we believe and how we behave, then we're play-actors, hypocrites. And that's the problem Amos outlines in chapter 5 verses 22-23 "Even though you bring me burnt offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps." God's not interested. Why? Because lifestyle speaks louder than occasional religious ceremonies.

Here's the clarion call of God's heart: verse 24 "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream."

The Living Bible puts it this way, "I want to see a mighty flood of justice – a torrent of doing good." The next verse says, "You sacrificed to Me for forty years while you were in the desert, Israel – but always your real interest has been your heathen gods."

Here's the heart of the matter – Israel's right relationship with the Lord was never established primarily by sacrifices. It was, as the NIV Study Bible points out, above all based on obedience.

The bottom line, the deserved punishment, is spelt out in verse 27 "Therefore I will send you into exile ... says the Lord ... God Almighty."

Amos, the prophet of justice and righteousness, has a grim message for Israel – you've been going nowhere for a long time: now you're going somewhere else away from your God-given land to live in exile amongst pagans who really know how to worship idols!

AMOS 7

It's about time we did some stocktaking. We're studying the little book of Amos in the Old Testament. He was one of the first of the writing prophets and his message delivered around 760B.C still has relevance today because, in one sense, not much has changed.

Amos had a message from God for the northern kingdom of Israel. The kingdom bore all the outward signs of material success and appeared politically secure. But spiritually it was a very different story. Unfaithfulness, smugness, no commitment to God's law and perversion of justice was the order of the day.

No one had imagined that God's chosen people could ever be evicted from the Promised Land. It was unthinkable to suppose that God would use a pagan nation to effect His judgement on His ancient people. But that is precisely what Amos declares will occur unless national repentance diverts imminent judgement. Because God does not change we need to take careful note of how Amos reveals that corrupt conduct can alienate God and cause Him to oppose His own people.

Eugene Peterson says, "More people are exploited and abused in the cause of religion than in any other way. Sex, money and power all take a back seat to religion as a source of evil." In effect, he's simply echoing Amos. It's as if prophets, like Amos, have x-ray eyes and can see through hypocrisy that appears very religious. They are more aware of standing before the invisible God at all times than they are before a powerful priest or important rulers. Amos tells us he'd had a vision (chapter 1 verse 2) of things that were going to happen. He faithfully spoke of what he had seen and heard from the Almighty. God's people were such a disappointment to Him – they never got hungry for God, but engaged in religious cover up as if nothing was wrong.

Israel's religion was not neglected, it was perverted and it took the prophet Amos to explode the charade. While crushing and exploiting their fellow citizens, the Israelites still kept up their religious façade. Everything was coated with a thin veneer of religion as if God could be bought off with a handful of ceremonies. This was 'insurance policy' religion and a mockery of the real thing.

We've seen how God has used the candid and straight talk of Amos to shatter their erroneous beliefs. Firstly he redefined "covenant". Don't glibly assume God is always on your side. Rather make sure you are on His side. Don't forget there are penalty clauses in God's covenant and they will be automatically activated by your non-compliance.

Secondly don't be too eager for the Day of the Lord to dawn – that wonderful golden age when they would be delivered from oppression and joy and happiness would be theirs forever. What makes you suppose you will dodge judgement if you've lived immoral and corrupt lives? You can't say "we're God's favourites, we're His people" and chant it like a mantra supposing that anything goes as long as you worship God. God's special relationship to His own Jewish people meant not privilege to do wrong, but responsibility to do right.

Thirdly it was unwise to trust in the strength of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. Excavations reveal how well fortified this stronghold had been by Omri, Ahab and Jeroboam the second, but the only impregnable fortress is God Himself, not a walled city.

The calf images at Bethel and Dan, the shrines of the counterfeit cult set up by Jeroboam the first, were in full operation and open for business. They were all show with no substance. In fact Israel was littered with "sex and religion" shrines and Samaria was the "sin and sex centre" of the northern kingdom.

Remember how Amos has denounced the six pagan nations that surround the Promised Land – they sinned against conscience and will be annihilated. God is still Lord of the nations. Judah and Israel will not be wiped out, though they have sinned against mercy and grace and the revealed Word of God. The chosen people of God will survive. They are learning the hard way that predestination is not favouritism but a call to a closer walk with God, an intimate relationship with their Covenant-keeping God.

Will the message sink in? God, who changes the seasons of the year, who controls history with the rise and fall of nations, can bring about massive changes with the greatest of ease, whenever He wishes. The God of Israel who, at Bethel, changed deceitful Jacob from a crafty shuffler into a man of godliness and integrity, can effect radical change in the entire nation. Last minute repentance might bring last minute rescue from God who does not change.

In a nutshell the holy demands of God were these: self-pleasing, self-centred religion must be outlawed. An abundance of righteousness – not a little trickle or a dribble – must flood down like an ever-flowing river. For the nation faced "Make your mind up time" and time was ticking away. Amos thunders out God's heart-desire. "Do you know what I want? I want justice – oceans of it. I want fairness – rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want."

AMOS 8

We're studying chapter 6 of the book of Amos, the prophet of justice. He begins by delivering a great broadside to the self satisfied and self-pleasing people in both kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

Verse 1 says, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion – that was Judah's capital city – and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria – that was Israel's capital. "You notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!" Pride had really got a hold on these people and their overweening arrogance angered God who resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The Message Paraphrase Bible starts the chapter this way: "Woe to you who think you live on easy street in Zion, who think Mount Samaria is the good life. You assume you're at the top of the heap, voted number one best place to live. Well, wake up and look around."

Amos insists that there's really nothing to choose between pagan cities such as Calneh and Hamath, both in northern Syria, or the Philistine city of Gath compared with Israel, now she's forsaken her special relationship with Yahweh due to her practice of disobedience. You'll remember that in chapter 1 verses 3 to 8, Syria and Philistia had already been condemned and now God's judgement, like the sword of Damocles, was hanging over Israel. Surely catastrophe was just around the corner!

Amos spells out the problem of their careless, godless lifestyle in verse 3, " You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph."

Again the Message Paraphrase Bible is most vivid in painting the scene: -

“Woe to those who live only for today, indifferent to the fate of others! Woe to the playboys, the playgirls, who think life is a party held just for them! Woe to those addicted to feeling good – life without pain! Those obsessed with looking good – life without wrinkles! They could not care less about their country going to ruin.”

Complacency and disregard for the needs of others are not insignificant sins. There's a crucial scripture in Zephaniah chapter 1 verse 12 that makes the same point: “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’”

What shocks Amos about the complacent Israelites is that they “do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.” There is an ungodly self-concern, which progressively blinds them to the state of their decadent nation or ‘the ruin of Joseph.’

You recall that Joseph was the teenage lad who wailed his heart out in a deep pit, while his brothers sat down to eat.

God's verdict on such heartless unconcern for other people is announced in verse 7, “Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.” Suddenly the pleasure-seeking aristocrats of Israel will discover the party's over.

The Sovereign Lord is outraged at the pride of these people. Their lazy luxury has created in them total indifference to the ruin of the nation. They've made a shambles of justice, exploited all and sundry and couldn't care less. They even brag of their trivial pursuits.

In reality, when the crisis came they had for so long walked out of step with God that there was no liberty nor inclination to mention His name. Why did it happen? Who's to blame? We're so used to hearing guilty people protesting their innocence and claiming “We've done nothing wrong.”

Surely judgement was invited by the arrogant pride of the Israelites and the lawless conduct of their leaders. Such actions were a provocation to God. The Assyrians were territorially ambitious and God would use them as His rod of punishment to censure His people.

Chapter 6 concludes with a couple of absurdities expressed so graphically in the Living Bible verses 11 to 13, “For the Lord commanded this: That homes both great and small should be smashed to pieces. Can horses run on rocks? Can oxen plough the sea? Stupid even to ask, but no more stupid than what you do when you make a mockery of justice and corrupt and sour all that should be good and right. And just as stupid is your rejoicing in how great you are, when you are less than nothing! And priding yourselves on your own tiny power!”

There are some lessons we need to learn from this sacred history, lest unwarranted self-confidence becomes our downfall.

Are we in danger of confusing assurance with complacency? Are we so settled in our comfort zones, ‘sitting at ease in Zion’, that we've ceased to seek the lost?

Amos indicates how ridiculous it is to think a country can continue as a “holy nation” and yet major in exploitation, carnality and godlessness. May the teaching of Amos, the prophet, challenge us to examine our own walk with God. Is it truly godly?

AMOS 9

One of the lessons biblical history surely teaches us is that when nations become pleasure-mad, it's a sign that the end is near.

Belshazzar and his nobles were carousing in the palace in Babylon when the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall. The message to the godless revellers was that God had numbered the days of that kingdom and it was being terminated that very night. Babylon the great fell to the Medes and Persians.

In Imperial Rome the populace hankered after 'bread and circuses'. The Empire was decaying morally and eventually fell to the invading hordes. One of the clear prophetic signs that we are in the last days is spelled out in 2 Timothy chapter 3, "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

In Amos's day the warning prophet declared (Amos chapter 6 verses 12 and 14) "You have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness – The Lord God Almighty declares, "I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel" and that nation is the rising dominant power of Assyria.

In chapter 7 it is clearer than ever that time is running out for all complacent sinners. An unavoidable, destructive calamity is heading their way. One wonders, will any one be spared? Is there any hope whatsoever for Israel?

Amos has had two visions – one of locusts, the other of fire. We read in The Living Bible verses 1 to 3: "This is what the Lord God showed me in a vision: He was preparing a vast swarm of locusts to destroy all the main crop that sprang up after the first mowing, which went as taxes to the king. They ate everything in sight. Then I said, "O Lord God, please forgive your people! Don't send them this plague! If you turn against Israel, what hope is there? For Israel is so small!" So the Lord relented and did not fulfil the vision "I won't do it", He told me."

Amos was an intercessor standing in the gap before God for His ancient people. No natural calamity such as a locust invasion can destroy God's people.

The second vision is of divine fire – but no supernatural means, the holy fire of God's holiness, will be able to exterminate the people of God. Verses 4 to 6 record, "Then the Lord God showed me a great fire He had prepared to punish them; it had burned up the waters and was devouring the entire land. Then I said, "O Lord God, please don't do it. If you turn against them, what hope is there? For Israel is so small!"

Then the Lord turned from this plan too, and said, "I won't do that either." Again the Lord shares His secrets with His servant, the prophet. Again the intercession of Amos prevails.

But now a time is dawning when even intercession will be useless. There comes a time when God's judgements are in the land, when the Lord speaks as in Jeremiah chapter 11 verse 14: "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to Me in the time of their distress."

1 John 5 verse 16 says, "There is a sin that leads to death, I am not saying that he should pray about that."

There can come a time when sin has reached its climax when intercession won't make any difference, when the prophet cannot renew the people to repentance and when one need not recommend any more prayer.

Such a situation has been reached in Amos chapter 7 verse 7, with the third vision - the plumb line test. "This is what He showed me: the Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb-line in His hand. And the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line", I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."

In verse 8, for the first time in Amos, God calls Israel 'my people'. They were called to be holy, trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord. Like a wall built to certain specifications, true to plumb, they were now being measured to see if they were still upright and true. It's obvious that when the divine plumb line was dropped into the midst of His people they were all over the place. The all seeing God was carrying out a very precise and accurate spot check taking note of what met the requirements and what didn't.

How would we fare, my brother, my sister, if the sovereign Lord were to drop His plumb-line down into the midst of our daily lives? Would we be valiant for truth or shown to be way off course, deviating sharply from the original design specification? Would we emerge from such a close scrutiny faithful and true, or unfaithful and false, having drifted away from God's holy purpose for our lives?

AMOS 10

The game's up! "Righteousness" and "Fair play" have been meaningless fictions for too long in Israel. Fooling around at the sex and religion shrines and running roughshod over the poor is over. It's time to face hard reality, no more fantasy. Here comes a black cloud with no silver lining. The Lord, the God of heaven's armies, has now taken the field, a plumb line in His holy hand. His people, when tested, were completely out of plumb. The crunching judgement lands in Amos chapter 7 verse 9. "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

How courageous Amos is. He speaks the unpalatable truth where the people were, at the pilgrimage shrines. He's like Daniel in the lions' den. This lion roars at Bethel where the opposition is amassed at the very place where grace was being abused and God's law had been forsaken.

Prophetic preaching often arouses opposition. It lands prophets in big trouble because what is declared is not airy-fairy nonsense or vague. It is the specific, personal, blunt and direct word of God. In the New Testament in James chapter 5 verse 10 we read, "as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Amos is verbally attacked for being a foreigner and is told in no uncertain terms by the priest of Bethel, Amaziah, to go back where he came from - back to the southern

Kingdom of Judah and to get out of Israel.

In Jeroboam the second's kingdom, Bethel was a royal chapel and the equivalent to a national cathedral. The resident priest, Amaziah, didn't like what he heard and reported Amos to the king. His words are recorded in chapter 7 verse 10. "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.'"

Whenever preaching criticises the establishment or the official religion there is bound to be a reaction from the powers that be, defending their own vested interests. But Amos refuses to be intimidated. He gives as good as he gets. He's no vulgar little upstart easily dismissed as of no consequence. He's God's man willing to stand alone

and not readily silenced.

Verse 12 reads, "Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy any more at Bethel because this is the king's sanctuary and temple of the kingdom.'" "

Amos retorts that being a prophet was not his idea in the first place. It was God's. God conscripted him. He's in this job by divine appointment. Verse 14 contains his response. "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flocks and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" "

Now fearlessly Amos takes the initiative "You say, Do not prophesy against Israel and stop preaching'" (verse 16). Literally this phrase 'stop preaching' is 'do not drop, trickle or drip your word.' Far from hectoring or ranting, Amos is speaking in a gentle, welcoming, winsome, refreshing manner.

However Amaziah the priest has rejected the word of the Lord and God rejects him. You may recall a similar situation confronted King Saul when faced by the prophet Samuel.

Here Amos of Tekoa prophesied – Amaziah the priest replied, "Do not prophesy." He heard the word, but wouldn't listen.

It's as if the Lord of the plumb line drew near and measured both men. One was taken and the other was left. One bowed before the word, the other did not.

The consequences were dire for Amaziah. The Message Paraphrase Bible puts it this way in verse 17. "Here's what God is telling you:

Your wife will become a whore in town.

Your children will get killed.

Your land will be auctioned off.

You will die homeless and friendless.

And Israel will be hauled off to exile, far from home."

One can imagine the stunned silence that would follow such a declaration. The message was spoken with such assurance and certainty but it must have been extremely offensive to the priest. It was an accurate and precise prophecy, which focused on Amaziah's wife and family, the land and the nation.

In chapters 1-6 the prophet's words were addressed to the leading people of Israel and Samaria as a whole, but here Amos names the priest and the king. Jeroboam the second, after a reign of forty-one years, died and his dynasty came to an end. Amos had been accused of being a traitor. Far from it, he was God's spokesman. Centuries later Jesus spoke these words in Palestine.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me... Rejoice and be glad; because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who went before you." (Matthew chapter 5: 11-12 (NIV))

Perhaps He even had Amos in mind.

AMOS 11

Amos chapter 8 begins with the fourth vision, after the locusts, the fire and the plumb line. The Sovereign Lord showed the prophet a basket of ripe fruit. Then the Lord said, "The time is ripe for my people Israel: I will spare them no longer." Here are a people ripe for judgement. They have come into the presence of God not just with ripe fruit, but as ripe fruit, ripened over all the months and years of moral and spiritual probation.

"In that day", declares the Sovereign Lord, "The songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies – flung everywhere! Silence!"

Israel has been sowing bad seeds of idolatry and injustice. Now it's harvest time but instead of festival celebrations and songs of thanksgiving for this harvest, only the despairing sound of silence remains.

God is not mocked. What we sow, we reap. This is true individually and in the life of a nation. At the time of Amos's ministry, northern Israel had been deteriorating for a couple of centuries. Gods of fertility were worshipped. Sanctuaries were crowded with worshippers, but they were places of paganism. Over the decades the seed has been sown; the crop is growing; soon 'the end' will come. It's harvest time. As Michael Eaton explains in his commentary throughout, the long days of Jeroboam the Lord was giving Israel its last offer of survival. The nation had one generation left before the volcano would erupt. Anyone who witnesses the end of Israel as a nation would stand still in awed silence at the severity and thoroughness of God's closing judgement.

In chapter 8 verses 4 to 6 (The Living Bible) we're again given an insight into some of the crimes that have been perpetrated. "Listen, you merchants who rob the poor, trampling on the needy; you who long for the Sabbath to end and the religious holidays to be over, so you can get out and start cheating again – using your weighted scales and under-sized measures; you who make slaves of the poor, buying them for their debt of a piece of silver or a pair of shoes, or selling them your mouldy wheat.'

It's deeply significant when God, who cannot lie, underlines His integrity by taking an oath. In chapter 4 verse 2 the Sovereign Lord swore by His holiness, in chapter 6 verse 8 He swore by Himself. Now in chapter 8 verse 7 He swears by the Pride of Jacob – how ironic is that? – "I will never forget anything they have done."

It can be argued that when man gets out of step with God, nature itself gets out of step with man. Their covetousness has led them to ride roughshod over their fellow men. Leviticus chapter 19 verses 35 to 37 made it abundantly clear. "Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah (that's a dry measure) or an honest hin (that's a liquid measure). I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord."

False religion, which had gripped the nation, shows no mercy and is insensitive towards the helpless. Jesus in Matthew chapter 18 spoke so clearly of the servant who lost mercy because he failed to show mercy. God looks for mercy in the human race. It is part of human wickedness that men and women without God become unmerciful, heartless and ruthless. The Babylonians had no mercy (Isaiah chapter 13 verse 18 and chapter 47 verse 6).

When judgement comes the land will shake. It will be like an earthquake, a flood and an eclipse all combined. It will be like a bitter bereavement. The Message

Paraphrase Bible puts it this way (verse 9) "On Judgement Day, watch out!" These are the words of God, my Master. "I'll turn off the sun at noon. In the middle of the day the earth will go black. I'll turn your parties into funerals and make every song you sing a dirge."

Amos was no ignorant peasant, but a godly man in touch with the One who holds the destiny of all peoples in His hands. He longed that his awesome God should be honoured and revered. He knew the psalmist was right when he declared, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance." (Psalm chapter 33 verse 12)

Amos was the champion of the poor, the defender of the downtrodden and the accuser of the powerful rich. He was adept at sniffing out injustice especially when it was dressed up in religious garb. There is no more Amos can do now he has faithfully delivered God's message in its undiluted form.

Here is an alarming truth we need to take to heart in the 21st century. A nation dying on its feet can only live if it gets on its knees and repents, because God will not wait forever. The prophet Isaiah was a contemporary of Amos and he expressed similar sentiments in the memorable words of chapter 55 verses 6 to 7, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and He will have mercy on him and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

AMOS 12

Recently I read that the Bible has been translated into the aboriginal language of Kriol spoken across Northern Australia. The task has taken almost thirty years. The linguists found it difficult to translate the phrase "to love God with all one's heart" into the Kriol tongue. There was no exact equivalent so they lighted upon an idiom familiar to the Aborigines. In their Bible it now reads, "to want God with all your insides". Unfortunately, that was not the situation in northern Israel, when the people were ripe for punishment. They didn't want God at all.

In Amos chapter 8 verse 11 Moffat's translation says, "The time is coming says the Lord Eternal, when I will send a famine on the land, no famine of bread, no drought of water, but of hearing the word of the Eternal, till men go wandering from sea to sea, and run from north to east, in quest of the Eternals word – and all in vain."

If we don't treasure the truth, we lose the truth. Here's a gracious warning. Blessings that have been despised will be withdrawn. Heaven will be silent.

'A famine of hearing the words of the Lord' will result in men wandering in search of God's Word. The word 'wander' is the same word used in Isaiah chapter 28 verse 7 to describe 'the rolling gait of drunkards'. It's the word Isaiah uses in chapter 7 verse 2 for the 'swaying of trees in the wind' and it's also used in 1 Samuel chapter 1 verse 13 of Hannah with 'lips quivering in agitation'.

If there's an embargo on God's Word people will hardly know what they're doing. They'll be flapping in panic or agitation. The young ones will be the most vulnerable and will suffer when the famine of truth hits the land. "In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst" (verse 13). They will be fair game for the religious quacks and isms of the day.

When the Word of God is driven out, man-made religion rushes in. The cults arise to fill the vacuum. It is vital, in our own day, that the truth and worship of God is guarded against the importation of false religions and cults. Religion is the most dangerous

thing in the world. It can only lead to eternal loss.

Amos knew that when the Word of God is lost, the upcoming generation would know no better than to turn to the popular gods of the day, only to be drawn into superstition instead of into the life of godliness.

Chapter 9 begins with his fifth vision. A veil is drawn away from the future and the prophet sees the coming destruction that God has warned about. The day of pretence was over. God is no longer acting as if everything is just fine. "I saw the Lord standing by the altar" (verse 1).

About 200 years earlier in 931/930 BC King Jeroboam the first set up the shrines when the breakaway Northern Kingdom of ten tribes separated from the south. He invented his own religion. He built shrines on high places and appointed priests, even though they were not Levites. He offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel.

We know from I Kings chapter 13 verse 1 that a man of God came from Judah to Bethel at that time 'as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering'. He cried out against the altar. Now, nearly 200 years later, another man of God from Judah, the prophet Amos, is declaring the same message, But look who's standing by the altar this time: -

"I saw the Lord standing by the altar and He said: 'Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape.'"

Samson had pulled down the temple of Dagon on the heads of the uncircumcised Philistines. Now the temple of the counterfeit religion is crashing down, God says, "I will bring them down." There will be no hiding place. No runaways will make it.

The Living Bible, verses 2 to 4, is quite dramatic. "Though they dig down to Sheol, I will reach down and pull them up; though they climb into the heavens, I will bring them down. Though they hide among the rocks at the top of Carmel, I will search them out and capture them. Though they hide at the bottom of the ocean, I will send the sea serpent after them to bite and destroy them. Though they volunteer for exile, I will command the sword to kill them there. I will see to it that they receive evil and not good."

This is surely the end of the line. The nation that walked all over the poor and weak has been found out on a large scale. Those who have been living in a spiritual dream world, forgetful of holiness, are waking up to the realisation that this is God's world. He is the Lord and He reigns on high. No one can throw a cloak of religion over selfish, self-serving lives and get away with it.

The Lord God of heaven's armies touches the land and it melts, and all its people mourn.

God is on the scene.

AMOS 13

The date line is around 760 BC. The northern kingdom of Israel is facing meltdown. Pampered and indolent, they'd been grinding the penniless into the dirt.

God wants His people to be distinctive and sharply different from the world. The Israelites must stop thinking, because they are His chosen people, they can get away

with blue murder. The Lord is the invisible mover and shaker in every nation's history, not just the God of the Jews. The same divine government operates worldwide. He is the Agent behind every racial migration – not just the Exodus. All are subject, Jew and Gentile, to God's sovereign decrees.

The Living Bible in chapter 9 verse 7 says: "O people of Israel, are you any more to Me than the Ethiopians are? Have not I, who brought you out of Egypt, done as much for other people too? I brought the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete) and the Syrians out of Kir."

If the salt has lost its saltiness, if the chosen people lose their distinctiveness from other nations due to their backsliding and lack of faith in Yahweh, is it not time to throw them out to be trampled under foot?

"Surely the eyes of the Sovereign Lord are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth – yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," declares the Lord. (verse 8)

God-of-the-Angel-Armies does not say from now on Israel has a changed status in His sight – they are still his chosen people – but He does declare that one divine government rules over all and judges all.

"I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," means that the covenant given to Abraham is safe. There will always be a remnant according to grace, the Israel within Israel.

The only hope for Northern Israel no longer lies in Northern Israel. It lies in the house of David, in Amos's own land, the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel is being thrown into a sieve. As a breakaway nation she will cease to exist.

The Message Paraphrase Bible puts verses 9 to 10 like this: "I'm still giving the orders around here. I'm throwing Israel into a sieve among all the nations and shaking them good, shaking out all the sin, all the sinners. No real grain will be lost, but all the sinners will be sifted out and thrown away, the people who say, "Nothing bad will ever happen in our lifetime. It won't even come close." The sieve is an instrument of discrimination. It gathers out impurities and leaves intact that which passes the grade. No pebble will remain.

A new day will dawn. Though the bulk of the nation will be wiped out, a tiny remnant shall survive. Their hope lies in Judah in the house of David. When the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold in 722 BC mass deportation started and survivors made their way to the southern kingdom.

Verse 11 says, "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins and build it as it used to be." Even the Jewish Talmud regards these verses as messianic. There is hope. God will bring blessing after judgement and will not ultimately annihilate Israel. "That day" remains unexplained and undated in the future. Living late in time we can see that though the southern kingdom fell around 586 BC and they were exiled to Babylon, after 70 years they came back again.

Amos had a worldwide vision, which takes in everything in one sweep. It's a panoramic view, but the fulfilment unfolds in stages. It's Israel's God who commits to raise up the king in His kingdom, restore the fortunes of His people and plant them with eternal security in their inheritance.

In Amos's time the house of David was like a ruined and broken down hut, but God

would raise up a house to dwell in. The kingdom of God was magnificently restored in the church of Jesus Christ where Jews and Gentiles were eligible to enter. In fact that is how James at the Council of Jerusalem interprets Amos' prophetic words (Acts chapter 15 verses 15 to 18).

The future is bright. The days are coming, Amos prophesies, when you won't be able to keep up. Everything will be happening at once and everywhere you look, blessings.

God's unalterable promise rings out with new hope at the close of Amos' prophecy. "I will restore ... I will repair ... I will do these things ... I will bring back my exiled people ... I will plant Israel in their own land."

A day of colossal fruitfulness is on the horizon "when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills." (verse 13)

This little book, which began with "the words of Amos" ends with "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them", says the Lord your God. The rejected prophet from the south spoke the very words of God.