

# Amos Chapter 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] So please sit down, please turn in your Bibles back to Amos. Hopefully you haven't lost the space, but if you have lost the page, it's 918 in the church Bible, page 918.

Amos, amongst the minor prophets as they're called, not because they worked underground, but because they were a little bit smaller than the big prophets, the major prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

And Amos is there in the mix, and as I said earlier on, he'd been given this message from God. He'd been a shepherd, which explains one of the illustrations he uses in a little while, but God had called him to be a prophet.

And we read chapter 3, and we're going to think about that now. I have to admit that my dislike of golf, and I do occasionally poke fun at people who play golf from the pulpit even, which is very naughty.

But it goes back to my childhood, to an event when I was having a picnic with my family on Lancrest Common in Guernsey. And it's on the edge of the golf course, and while we're having a picnic, I was hit by a golf ball.

[ 1 : 13 ] And since then, I've just got a grudge against golf completely. No, I haven't got a grudge against it. I just don't see the point of it. Anyway, that's another thing. But there was no warning.

There was no shout for anything. Suddenly, there's just this whack, and a golf ball hit me right on the back of my knee. And yeah, it was a bit of a pain, to say the least. But why do golfers, have you thought, why do golfers shout for?

You know, it's not F-O-U-R, is it? It's for, F-O-R-E. Why don't they shout, look out, duck, or something like that? Well, apparently, it goes back a long way, as many of these things do.

It goes back, actually, to a time when cannons first were used in warfare. And, of course, the early cannons were not what you'd call very accurate. And so the problem was that as the troops were advancing and the cannons were shot over their heads, occasionally they'd end up harming or killing their own troops.

So it was decided that before the cannon was fired, the officer or the artilleryman would shout, beware before! And so all the troops could look out for where the cannon might hit them.

[ 2 : 23 ] How on earth they heard, beware before! With all the noise that was going on, I'm not sure. But that was the idea. And over time, the beware before was abbreviated to before, eventually shortened to for, and then found its way into golf, all the way back even into 1881, when a warning that a volley was coming, and to keep out of the way.

Now when we come to Amos, and many of the prophets as well, we find really God shouting a warning to his people that there was a volley coming. In fact, a volley of judgment.

There was a time of distress and sorrow and grief coming. We see that there, verse 13. Hear this. It's a bit like a town crier.

Hear this and testify against the descendants of Jacob. On the day I punish Israel for her sins. A warning shot, as it were, across the bowels.

A warning saying, this is coming. You need to take action. You need to repent. Now last time when we looked through chapter 2, we noticed how God had begun to rebuke Israel for their many sins, their awful sins.

[ 3 : 43 ] And you can read that for yourself. Really, sins which cried out towards God. God is not a God who is indifferent to wickedness. He's not a God who looks down upon atrocities, the wickedness of things that are happening around the world and in people's lives, and just sort of shakes his head, or says, ah, que sera sera.

Oh, that's just the way it is. No, God is offended. God takes action. God is concerned. And these people were guilty. Guilty against God because they had turned away from him to worship idols. But they were guilty because they had oppressed one another and abused positions of power and money. They had sold, as we see, the innocent for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals, the trample on the heads of the poor.

God is concerned. God is angry with sin. We should never forget that. We should never, ever think that as our society becomes more tolerant of sin, accepting of sin, somehow God also goes along with the flow.

He doesn't. He is a God who hates sin. And because of the sin was committed by Israel, his people, as we see that at the very beginning of chapter 3, his chosen people, the people he brought into a covenant with himself, a relationship with himself, God was committed not only to save them, as he did when I brought the whole family out of Egypt, but he's also committed to deal with their sin, to deal with their wickedness.

[ 5 : 15 ] Just as a loving father will discipline and care for his children, not only giving them good gifts, but also warning them and calling them away from those things which are evil.

So God does the same here. He warns his people that unless they repent, unless they turn away from these sins, then there will come punishment. There will come judgment.

So God begins to raise an unmistakable message for the Israelites through the preaching of Amos that judgment is coming, that punishment is coming for their sin.

Beginning there of chapter 3, we have God through Amos using picture language, illustrations, to get them to grasp just how serious this is.

Get them to understand what God is going to do. And God uses, through Amos, common illustrations, things that Amos would have seen and known about particularly, but maybe a little bit different and strange to us.

[ 6 : 20 ] But each one of them is based upon a question. A question that God asks them. A question which is to drive them to the clear conclusion that when God says something, he means to do it.

that everything that God is about, everything that God promises, everything that God warns, he does. That he doesn't play fast and loose.

He doesn't just say, and we've done it ourselves, unfortunately, and it's not a good thing. I think I remember seeing, I'm sure you've come across it as well, and I'm sure none of us have ever done this as parents, but there's a child who's misbehaving and they won't get back in the car.

You say, right, well if you don't get back in the car, you'll have to walk home. No, it's an empty threat, isn't it? It's an empty threat. You're never going to leave your child and drive home without them. But there's that threat that God isn't like that.

He doesn't make empty threats or empty promises. And so he asks these questions which have very clear and simple and straightforward answers. There's no sort of grayness about the answer to the question.

[ 7 : 30 ] They're rhetorical questions, is what we call them. A rhetorical question demands the answer no, apart from one question in particular that has the answer yes.

So Amos asks in verse 3, do two people walk together unless they've agreed to do so? Well, clearly the answer is no. You know, if you're going to go for a walk together, you agree to go for a walk together.

It doesn't just happen without reason, without motivation, without agreement. So it's with God and his people. Notice he says in verse 2 there, you only have I chosen.

Speaks of a relationship between God and his people. If we are to walk with God and enjoy the presence of God, there's got to be an agreement. We can't walk out of step with God and expect him to walk with us.

We can't walk in sin and do our own thing expecting that God somehow is going to follow along behind us. He's not. If we're going to walk with God in a relationship with him, it's got to mean understanding.

[ 8 : 39 ] It's got to be us towing the line with him. There's got to be agreement with what is right and what is wrong. These people sadly, though they had agreed to walk with God, were now breaking that agreement, breaking that covenant, breaking their promises by sinning and acting in wickedness.

And then he says, verse 4, something perhaps we may have seen on a David Attenborough Planet Earth program. Does a lion roar in the thicket when it has no prey? Well, no, it doesn't.

When a lion is stalking its prey in the thicket, in the bushes, it's quiet, isn't it? It doesn't growl and give itself away. It's hunting. It only begins to make a noise.

Does it growl in its den when it's caught nothing? Again, the answer is no. When that lion has its prey, takes it back to its den, then it growls to warn the other lions, stay away.

This is mine and you're not going to have any of it. These are things, of course, that Amos would have seen as a shepherd. Quite often, he would have come across these wild animals. David was a shepherd, remember, and he talks about having to kill a lion and kill a bear that would come and steal the sheep.

[ 9 : 52 ] Amos almost certainly saw these things as well. If the lion is roaring or if the lion is quiet, it's for a reason.

And so it is with God. When God roars, verse 8, when he speaks, it's for a reason. He says things because he means us to understand something.

If we can discern and understand when a lion is quiet and when a lion roars, surely we should be able to understand God. He uses another rhetorical question. Does a bird swoop or fall down on a trap on the ground when no bait is there?

That word bait, some translations just have the word snare or trap. In other words, is a bird caught in a trap when there is no trap? Clearly not.

And then, does a trap spring from the ground if it's not caught anything? Traps don't set themselves off. It's when a bird or an animal is trapped in the trap. So again, the rhetorical questions, things happen, birds are caught in a trap.

[ 11 : 04 ] A trap is sprung when there's something to catch. In one sense, God has set a trap, a snare for his people. It's where he's going to punish them for their sins.

It's all set out. It's all prepared. And it's going to go off. God does things with a reason. Look at verse 7.

Surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets.

Don't think for an instant that it's just by chance, Israel, that you're going to suffer the overthrow of your city.

Don't think by chance that there is going to be punishment for your sin. Just don't think that it's bad luck. God is in it. God has a purpose in it, Israel, in the things that he does.

There's one more question, isn't there, as well, to press home this final illustration. And it does come home because it's really bringing them and focusing their minds, not just to the things of nature around about them, but to what actually will really take place.

[ 12 : 12 ] 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 sounding of the horn, the sounding, what would have been a ram's horn, was a warning for the watchmen on the walls of the city to say, look out, an army is coming or invaders are coming.

Does a city tremble when it hears the trumpet sound? Yes, it does tremble. When disaster comes to a city, yes, God caused it, yes, he has caused it. During the Second World War, it was established that if there was ever an invasion by the Germans, that the parish churches would ring their bells.

In fact, for five years, apparently, they weren't allowed to ring their bells at all, only when an invasion was coming. It was a warning to everybody. Similarly here, with the sounding of the ram's horn.

the attacking army that will come. We know that they're the Assyrians because we know the history. We know what's going to happen some years after this.

When they come, they aren't coming just because they are a wicked people, a conquering people. They're coming because God has sent them. Joel likens them in his prophecy to being like a great flock, a great herd, a great company of locusts sweeping through the land.

[ 13 : 38 ] An army which destroys everything in its wake and that's exactly what the Assyrians were like. But it wasn't happening simply because it was a matter of history or a matter of something that would happen anyway.

No, it was part of the purposes of God to deal with his people, to bring them back to himself, to turn them away from their sin. And so these illustrations, these questions are simply this.

If the lion roars for a reason, if the trap springs for a reason, if the trumpet sounds for a reason, don't you think it's pretty obvious that the Lord speaks for a reason? That you better pay attention to the voice of God. You cannot afford to ignore his word or his voice. When he speaks to his prophets, it's for a reason. He's going to do something. Something is happening. This incredible verse 7 goes all the way through the Bible. We see the reality of it, the truth of it.

[14:39] Surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants, the prophets. That's the wonder of the Bible. It's God telling us what he's done, yes, but also what he's going to do.

God reveals his plan to the world and to his people concerning salvation, yes, but concerning judgment as well.

Remember that time in Genesis 18 where we're told that God came down and met with Moses and spoke to Moses about Sodom and Gomorrah and he said, I'm going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

I'm not going to keep it from my servant Abraham. I'm going to tell him about it. And there's this wonderful exchange between God and Abraham. God revealed to him judgment was coming over this city which was full of so much wickedness.

God is faithful to his word. God is faithful to his word.

[15:43] Whether that's a word of salvation, a promise, a blessing, an encouragement, or whether that's a word of warning, of judgment. That's why when we go through this chapter, do you notice how often we're told who is speaking?

It's not Amos, even though Amos is the prophet and Amos is relating all of this message to the people. Notice it's always God who's speaking. Verse 1, hear this word, people of Israel, the word the Lord has spoken.

Go on then to verse 8, the sovereign Lord has spoken. Verse 10, they do not know how to do right, declares the Lord. Verse 11, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

Verse 12, this is what the Lord says. Verse 13, hear and testify against the descendants of Jacob, declares the Lord, the Lord God Almighty.

At the very end of the chapter, the mansions will be demolished, declares the Lord. We can afford to, how can I put it?

[16:50] We can afford to ignore the words of men sometimes. We've got a freedom of choice. We may go and see our doctor and he may say to us, well, you know, could do with losing a bit of weight.

Could do with cutting out some of those cream buns that you eat and so on and you can say, well, I don't know, weighed in the balance, yes, it probably would be good for my health but I happen to love cream buns and I just can't think of living life without them.

I'd rather take the risk. Can't do that with God's word. You can't afford just simply to say, I'll take it or I'll leave it.

I'll mull it over and think about it. When God has spoken and God has said, we must sit up and take notice because he is faithful.

Amos felt compelled to speak the words of God. He didn't feel he had any option. Notice what he says, the Lord, the sovereign Lord has spoken. Who can but prophesy?

[17:51] That's what often God's servants feel. That they cannot help but proclaim the message that God has given them and given in his word. Paul felt the same about the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9, 16 he says, I'm compelled to preach. And Jeremiah, one of the big prophets as it were, felt the same way. This is how he described about what happened to him in Jeremiah chapter 20 in verse 9.

If I say, I will not mention God's word or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire. A fire shut up in my bones.

I'm weary of holding it in. Indeed, I cannot, cannot help but speak what God has given him to say. It has to come forth. And Amos felt that way and Paul and many other pastors and preachers have done so ever since.

God is so certain that his word will be fulfilled that he calls people to witness his faithfulness. Notice there in verse 9, you might say, what's going on there?

[ 19 : 02 ] Amos, we're told, is in one sense to take his message to the fortresses of Ashdod and the fortresses of Egypt. That's some of the nations around about. And he's saying this, come to Samaria, that's the central city of Jerusalem, come and see what God has said he will do being done.

Come and bear witness to it. He invites the nations. See, God doesn't do things in a corner. He doesn't do things, if I can put it that way, quietly or in whispers or in some secret and hidden code. God has spoken clearly for the world to see. In fact, if you read 1 Corinthians, we're told that God has spoken through his creation that all people are without excuse for not believing in him or coming to know him.

When that day comes, when Jesus returns again, when judgment is brought upon this world, no one will be able to say, well, I didn't expect that. Nobody warned me.

Nobody told me. God hasn't hidden away. God isn't hidden away. The reality is that many people say, well, I can't see God and I don't hear God and so far I don't believe in God but actually what the problem is they don't believe God and so they won't see God and they won't hear God.

[ 20 : 20 ] It's a big difference, isn't there? They won't find out the truth about the living God. One day his enemies, just as his enemies here, will see that what God has done, he's done according to his promises and his warnings.

And so that Israel might be certain that this is God speaking and so that they might be clear to understand what's coming, God gives them quite a lot of detail about the type of judgment that they will face.

Verse 11 says, therefore this is what the sovereign Lord says, I'm telling you how it's going to be, what's going to happen. An enemy will overrun your land and pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.

Notice that God doesn't give this sort of vague warning, a bit like the horoscope. Please don't read your horoscope, absolute waste of time. But if you ever do happen to look at one it will make you chuckle because it's so general.

Something bad will happen to you this week. It could be anything, can't it? It could be stubbing your toe, it could be scratching your car in the car park, could be anything, get a big bill.

[ 21 : 37 ] God isn't general, he's specific. He says an enemy's coming, it's going to overflow your land, he's going to steal all your goods. That's what's going to happen. It's not just you're going to have a bad harvest or the rains aren't going to come or it's going to be a poor summer or whatever.

God is specific in his word about many things. Now of course there's many things as well that we cannot fully grasp. There are mysteries of God and the universe and heaven and hell which are just, our language is just too small, it's just too weak as it were to carry the weight of those realities. But God tells us what we need to know. He's clear. He's clear that there is a heaven for us to seek and pursue and there is a hell for us to flee from. that there is judgment for sin and there is salvation in Jesus.

He's made the truths of the gospel plain and clear as we know so even just a child can understand them and put their faith in him. God keeps his word and it's plain for us to see.

What are we to make of this verse 12 then? He's talking about the enemy who's coming and the stronghold being pulled down and the fortress being plundered and then we get this strange illustration at least to our ears this is what the Lord says as a shepherd rescues from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear.

[ 23 : 11 ] No doubt Amos had done that on many occasions a lion or a bear or some other wolf had come and attacked the flock and all that was left these just sort of scraps of the poor old sheep as he's been devoured.

So the Israelites living in Samaria will be rescued with only the head of a bed piece of fabric from a couch. Two elements to this first of all a shepherd when an animal had killed one of his sheep he was responsible for that sheep to the sheep's owner and he would have to get a bit of evidence even if it was just the bone of the leg or the ear just to show and prove that he hadn't actually sold the sheep or done something else with it or stolen it.

But also in there there's just the glimmer isn't there? The tiniest glimmer of hope so the Israelites living in Samaria will be rescued.

Though this enemy is coming and judgment and punishment are coming there will be some who will be rescued. They may just be the scrag ends. That's us actually isn't it? We're the scrag ends.

Been rescued from this world. Only the head of a bed or it's a bit like there's a leg of your chair that's left of your furniture in the house and there's what was your best coat is just the sleeve that's left.

[ 24 : 35 ] There's not much really to hold on to but that's what's left over. God promises actually and hints at the reality that there will be some who will be saved even though this judgment is coming and we know of course when we look at those two judgments upon Israel and Judah that ultimately those who are taken into captivity were returned later on.

Returned as part of God's purpose of salvation for the world but the Messiah may come through them. But what will really happen and God is just pressing a point you know sometimes you've got to press a point and press a point and enemy will come in hardly anything will be saved and rescued and he's saying it again hear me hear me hear me verses 13 and 14 on the day I punish Israel for our sins now we understand why it's happening why are the enemy coming why?

Because God is punishing Israel for our sins and those two sins particularly that were so abhorrent to God are the two sins that God will judge and punish one will be the destruction of the altars of Bethel they'd set up these altars hadn't they not to the Lord but to their false gods their idolatry they're going to be destroyed the horns will be cut off the whole thing will fall to the ground what they worshipped and trusted in will prove to be false but also there's a hint there surely verse 15 about the other sin that we picked up in chapter 2 where they sell the innocent where they trample on the heads of the poor where they deny justice to the oppressed where they take and take and steal and rob these people were so rich they had two houses a winter house and a summer house but the reality is that they're both going to be lost and destroyed and even though these houses were beautifully decorated weren't they with ivory

I know we frown upon ivory rightly so now but that was the height of luxury it's going to be nothing left but the leg of a chair and a piece of the sleeve of their coat everything will be lost all their ill-gotten gains as it were will not protect them will not save them will not comfort them when this day comes not only does God say these things are coming and we've seen that he's spoken this is the word of the Lord this is what the sovereign Lord says but notice here very powerfully that God talks about the punishment being carried out by himself verse 14 on the day I punish verse 14 I will destroy verse 15 I will tear down it's hard for us to comprehend isn't it we can look at circumstances in the world and we can look at how things happen and we can see evil in the world and we can see and understand that evil is at work in the world and God does not partake in evil or wickedness but also dear friends we need to recognise that when God deals with us it's him personally who deals with us not an angel he may work through the life of someone else or work through particular circumstances but it's the Lord he's the one who's in relationship with us he's the one who's brought us into this this wonderful covenant with himself so that he is responsible for us just as the shepherd is responsible for the sheep

God makes the promise God fulfills the promise that's why we can have faith in his word that's why we can trust him yes we can take heed of those warnings and we must and when we speak with those who are without Christ we need to tell them and speak to them of the warning of God and assure them that God will do these things that Christ will come again that there will be judgement but let us also encourage and assure people that God has promised he will save those who put their faith in Christ and he will do it let us encourage one another that when we read God's word and it assures us he'll meet our needs he'll be with us in times of difficulty that he'll never leave us forsaken that he himself will fulfil those promises and so do you take God at his word dear friends do you love his word do you read his word do you delight in his promises and take them as coming from God himself do you trust him trust him in regard to all the things pertaining to your life do you trust him for this coming week do you trust him for the future that he knows it and that he has a purpose in it do you trust him in the difficult times and the dark times that he will prove himself faithful to you as you trust in him that what he has said he will accomplish do you trust him about your salvation in heaven that he has said

[ 29 : 54 ] I've gone to prepare a place for you and I'll come back and take you to be with me where I am that you may be where I am do you trust him and believe his word do you rest in it and delight in it there's nothing else in the world that is more secure than the word of God there's nothing no one that we can trust who will never fail us or let us down than the Lord and his word now close with this reading from Psalm 119 that wonderful psalm you can look it up a bit later on verses 49 and 50 remember your word to your servant for you have given me hope my comfort in my suffering is this

your promise preserves my life your promise preserves my life well let's sing