

Amos Chapter 8

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Date: 11 November 2018

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[0 : 00] Now, Amos has had some visions that God has sent him. Picture language to give him. God speaks to us in that way at times.

Think of the parables of Jesus. They're often in things that the people of his day particularly could understand. Some of them we can understand about seeds that grow in the field and so on. God comes down to our level to make himself known.

He knows that we need him to speak to us simply because we're simple people. So this is going to begin with a vision. Amos in chapter 8, page 923.

This is what the sovereign Lord showed me, a basket of ripe fruit. What do you see, Amos? he asked. A basket of ripe fruit, I answered.

Then the Lord said to me, the time is ripe for my people Israel. I will spare them no longer. In that day, declares the sovereign Lord, the songs in the temple will turn to wailing.

[1 : 07] Many, many bodies flung everywhere. Silence. Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, when will the new moon be over that we may sell grain?

And the Sabbath ended that we may market wheat, skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

The Lord has sworn by himself the pride of Jacob. I will never forget anything they've done. Will not the land tremble for this? And all who live in it mourn.

The whole land will rise like the Nile. It will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt. In that day, declares the sovereign Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

[2 : 25] The days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land. Not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord. But they will not find it. In that day, the lovely young men and strong young men, sorry, the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.

Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, who say, as surely as your God lives, O Dan, or as surely as the God of Beersheba lives, they will fall, never to rise again.

Well, it's in chapter 8. Chapter 8. I was very encouraged to read in, I think it was in one of the Christian newspapers that we get each month, Evangelical Times, I think it was, that the thousandth New Testament translation has been completed just last month, and it was launched on the 11th of August, 2018, in a celebration in northwest Uganda.

The translation is for the Keliko people and represents the first time that they can hear and read the New Testament in their own language. A thousand translations of the New Testament.

[3 : 55] Translation represents a triumph over adversity. Twice the translation efforts have been interrupted by civil war in South Sudan. That's where the people came from and come from primarily.

On the first occasion, in the 1980s, most of the Keliko people had to flee from South Sudan into mainly Uganda. Then translation work resumed again in 1998, but after South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, a civil war broke out once more, and the team had to flee from South Sudan again to North Uganda.

But they continued their work there, so if you really think about it, then probably in the region of 30 years work. 30 years they've been working for a translation.

And James Poole, who's the executive director of Wycliffe Bible Translators, says this, The translation represents remarkable persistence on the part of the Keliko people to have the Bible in their own language.

However, he said, there is still much work to be done. One and a half billion, that's not really, one and a half billion people still do not have any scriptures in their own language.

[5 : 09] And the New Testament has so far only been translated into about 30% of the active languages in the world. And when I read that and thought about that, it made me think, how much do I value my Bible?

No, I mean, how much do I value it? Would I be willing to persist for 30 years that I might gain God's Word in my language? How much am I willing to do?

And really, the question is this, how much of a difference would it make to my life if I didn't have the Bible in my own language? Would I really miss it? How long would it take for me to miss it?

Would I really desire it? I'm sure nearly all of you will know the story of Mary Jones, the young girl in North Wales, who spent months and months and months scrimping and saving every tiny farthing she could to get and purchase her own Bible.

And then I'm not sure how many days she walked barefoot several days to Bala, a town where the nearest place she could buy a Bible. For some of us, it's a great effort to take the Bible off the bookshelf and open it, isn't it?

[6 : 30] And we should be ashamed of that if we are Christians. The reason I bring that illustration, the reason I bring that introduction is because when we get to Amos in chapter 8, Amos declares what is probably the most severe act of God's judgment against his people, Israel.

That's really been the theme throughout the whole of the book. The people of Israel were God's people. They had received such blessings. They had God's word. They had the temple and the sacrifices and the worship of God.

They had people who could teach them all these things. But they were people who were desperately wicked and turned away from God. And God gives them this warning, this judgment in verses 11 and 12 through Amos.

The days are coming, if you want to read it there, declares the sovereign Lord and I will send a famine through the land. Famine, of course, is when there is not enough of something. Usually it's food, isn't it?

Usually it's food or water. There's not enough to keep people alive. But, says God, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. He says people will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east searching for the word of the Lord.

[7 : 45] But they'll not find it. Why does God pronounce such a judgment against these people?

that they will not hear God's word anymore? That they'll not be able to find out God's will or know what God says? Well, to understand why God should do such a thing and take away his word from them, we need to go back to the beginning of the chapter.

The beginning of the chapter starts with this vision, doesn't it? This God-given vision, this picture that God gave to Amos. An illustration of God's attitude, of God's viewpoint, when he looked upon the people.

And what is the picture? It's a picture of a basket of ripe fruit. Almost certainly, I would say that this is a picture of figs.

Because if you remember and just look back a page, Amos knew all about figs, didn't he? Because we're told that his part-time job, he was a shepherd, but he needed to subsidize his income and so his part-time job was he took care of sycamore fig trees.

[8 : 54] So he would know exactly what these fruit were. Now these figs would always ripen in the very final months of the summer.

They were one of the last crops, as it were, the last fruits to be harvested at the end of the summer. And there's a sense of a play on words which we don't get so much in the English, though the NIV tries to bring it out by emphasizing the word ripe.

Notice a basket of ripe fruit and then God says the time is ripe. And that's helpful because actually there is a play on words here. The word for ripe fruit is the word for summer fruit or end of the season fruit, we might call it.

And when God says the end has come for his people, which we've got, the time is ripe for my people, it's a word which sounds just the same.

So in one sense God is saying these are, what do you see, the end fruit, well now it is the end for my people. There's that play on words, that connection in the Hebrew.

[10:05] We have it there, as I say, ripe fruit and the time is ripe, the time is ready, the time has come to an end of God's patience. God was the God who gave his people fruit.

Remember he promised them that when they were going to go into the promised land that there'd be a land full of fruit and harvest and bounty and all good things. But here, these fruits, these ripe fruit, these fruit which are in one sense coming to the end of their best, they symbolize that God's patience has come to an end for these wicked people.

If he says, the time is ripe for Israel, I will spare them no longer. God has been sparing them, hasn't he? Through the ministry of Amos and other prophets, God has been very patient with them and long-suffering as he is.

He's likening himself to a farmer who's been waiting and waiting for the crop to ripen, who's refrained from picking it too soon or too early.

So God has been watching the people, watching them ripen sadly in their sin. He hasn't stepped in before now, he hasn't acted before now, he's warned them and he's offered them forgiveness and he's said to them, turn to me and come to me, but they have kept turning away from him and finally God says, now is the time I'm going to send them into exile, I'm going to send them away from their homeland, from that promised land, they're going into another nation, the nation of Assyria.

[11:51] Again and again, I think, and when we look through Amos, we recognize that God is amazingly patient with his people and amazingly patient with you and me. He puts up with us and if we think not only beyond ourselves, but we think about our world and our nation, a world which is, we might say, becoming more and more wicked, though it has always been wicked and there's always been wicked people even as we have been celebrating and thinking especially this morning on this Remembrance Sunday of wars that are usually almost certainly at the actions of men, politicians, powerful people who want to gain more for themselves or oppress others or to command or to destroy.

We see that nothing changes as we look around the world and hear again and again of conflict and war where one man or one group of people is seeking to oppose their will upon another for power, for control.

God is patient with our world. Patient that he does not send judgment upon this world but in his goodness and mercy he continues to long for people to turn to him for forgiveness.

He longs for people to turn to him that they might be saved and delivered from that day of judgment which must come to us all. But the reality is this that God has appointed a time.

A time when God will say the time is ripe. I'll spare them no longer. Time is coming when our world as we know it will every person be called to stand before God to give an account for how we've lived and on that day there shall be judgment.

[13:43] Dear friends it's so important that we do not put God's patience to the test. It's so important that we don't test him by continually rejecting his mercy and grace and goodness to us.

We need to urge one another and we need to urge all people to turn to God now while there is a day of grace and forgiveness while there is mercy. Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth and he says to them now is the time of God's favour.

Now is the day of salvation. We can't just keep expecting that there will be another tomorrow or another year when we can put off getting right with God.

Therefore dear friends as Christians this is when we must earnestly pray and labour and serve and share and evangelise.

the reality is this as we see here in Amos' prophecy that when that day comes when God's patience comes to an end it's going to be a tragic day.

[14:53] Notice what he says in verse 3 it's an awful picture really we could almost say it's a picture that we've seen again and again of recent days of the battlefields of the psalm and others in that day declares the sovereign Lord songs will turn to wailing many many bodies flung everywhere.

Isn't that a picture of the battlefields of no man the land? Seen them haven't we? Men men's bodies scattered everywhere flung everywhere a deathly silence.

How much more will that be when Christ comes again? And now we begin to learn as to why God promises to remove his word.

Now we begin to understand why God reacts as he does after so much patience and love and says okay now I'm going to take away my word from you I'm going to you're not going to hear what I'm saying.

Why does he do that? Why does he threaten that? And we need to look at the attitudes and the actions of the people and ask ourselves is there any truth of their attitudes in my heart and in my life?

[16:07] And if they are there then we need to work against them and cultivate opposite attitudes. The first thing we hear really and we see and we've seen it again and again that they have disobeyed God's word.

They've disobeyed God's word. Verse 4 Hear this you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land. We've seen that all the way from the beginning haven't we?

Earlier on about how they mistreated and oppressed the poor. Chapter 2 6 and 7 This is what the Lord says for three sins even for four of Israel I'll not relent.

They sell the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor deny justice to the oppressed. Chapter 4 and verse 1 where he speaks particularly against the women.

Hear this word you cows of Bashan you women who oppress the needy oppress the poor and crush the needy. Chapter 5 verse 11 You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose tax on the grain.

[17:13] God is concerned about the way that the poor are treated and particularly with his people Israel they had received clear commandments from God through Moses again and again that they were to care for the poor to support them to love them to help them to comfort them not to take advantage of them not to abuse them here's Deuteronomy just one place Deuteronomy 15 and verses 7 and 8 if anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you do not be hard hearted or tight fisted towards them rather be open handed and freely lend them whatever they need therefore I command you to be open handed towards your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land God gave laws about the fields and so when you gather your crop in the field don't go right to the edge of your boundary leave a sort of a border all the way around so that the poor and needy can come and gather food for themselves we see that also in their disobedience to

God's word in the way they dealt with them boosting the price cheating with dishonest scales selling even the sweepings with the wheat that would make very nice spread would it sometimes when you buy really cheap tea you think they just got the sweepings off the floor and put it into a bag and sold it as tea no I'm sure they would never ever do that you can imagine it can't you there's the wheat or the flour and they get the dust and they add it to it altering the scales and the weights to give less than they should selling the waste along with the wheat all these things God had forbidden in his word all these things God again had said to them you must not do this is not the way you are to treat one another Deuteronomy 25 15 and 16 you must have accurate and honest weights and measures so that you may live long in the land the

Lord your God is giving you the Lord your God detests anyone who does these things anyone who deals dishonestly so they had God's word they were privileged in all the world to have the word of God his wonderful commandments and when you think about dishonesty and cheating one another it clearly is a breaking of the eighth commandment is it do not steal from one another well that's exactly what you're doing if you're cheating one another and of course that great commandment that God gave the first is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength the second Jesus said is just as important love your neighbor as yourself do we like to be cheated no do we like people deceiving us and being honest with us no so these sins showed that they had scant regard for the word of God God was going to take his word they had his word and they disobeyed it they ignored it they rejected it so

God said well if that's the way you treat my word take it away you not going to have my word to guide you speaks to us in his word clearly about an action or an attitude or a way of life do we pick and mix his commandments well I like these ones because they're easy to keep that one's a bit close to the knuckle that one's a bit more costly that one's a bit more hard I don't keep that one quite as faithfully we must be faithful in all we do consistent we can't read God's word and declare ourselves to be servants of God and Christians and live as those who don't have God's word James

that very practical apostle wrote this do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves do what it says do what it says notice that blessing that

God said to the people if you do this and you use honest scales and you don't dishonor one you'll live well in the land it's blessing and obedience and Jesus said himself if you love me you'll keep my commandments one of the evidences that we are truly Christians is that we take God's word seriously and we seek to obey it yes of course we will fail yes of course we aren't perfect but we'll seek to obey it the second thing we see here as well that the people showed their disregard for the word of God is they despised the blessings that God's word contains they despised the blessing they disobeyed God's word and they despised God's word notice verse five they say to one another when will the new moon be over that we may sell grain and the summer be ended that we may market wheat what's he talking about well throughout the old testament

[22 : 34] God had given special festivals religious festivals the week of tabernacles the Passover the week of the unleavened bread and so on these were festivals and sabbaths rest days as it were that God had prescribed in his word for joy for blessing and when they thought about them they said oh when can we get them out of the way so we can make more money many years ago when Andrew and I were first married we lived in a town called Bridge North in Shropshire and there was a motor factors up in the top part of town I used to go there to get oil and filters and dark plugs and things to service my car and so on and it was just coming up to Christmas and I went to see him and I said oh you're looking you know as you normally do looking forward to Christmas it's a lovely time of year isn't it Christmas he didn't quite say bar humbug but he might as well have said bar humbug he said oh I don't like Christmas I've got to shut up the shop I thought what you know

I won't be making any money for three days or however many days it is he had lost all the joy of Christmas or even even on a worldly scale of having time off work no I want Christmas out the way so I can get the shop open I can start getting customers in and taking their money that's exactly how the Israelites thought of these festivals and holidays these times that God had given his people to refresh them that they might think upon the word of God that they might encourage one another they just thought of these things as a hindrance got in the way of their cheating and deceptive lives but again God had given his these instructions to his people particularly for their blessing for their joy here's just one Deuteronomy chapter 16 verse 14 the festival of tabernacles be joyful at your festival you your sons and daughters your male and female servants the Levites the foreigners the fatherless the widows who live in your town for seven days celebrate the festival to the Lord your God at the place that God will choose what a wonderful thing they'd lost the joy of keeping God's word they'd lost the joy of God's word as if somehow it was an impediment to them enjoying life or rather sinning they kept the feast days of course they didn't do them with a joyful heart they did them because they had to unwillingly they saw God's word as an inconvenience getting in the way of doing what they wanted to do well dear friends do we do that sometimes do we read God's word and do we read it with joy do we read it and say well God has commanded this for my blessing he's commanded to think of the encouragement of course in God's word that we should meet together on a Sunday say in Hebrews 10 25 don't give up the habit of meeting together as some have done but encourage one another as you see the day approaching do we see it as a bit of a blessing a bit of a nuisance well I don't I don't want to I don't want to miss my TV program on Sunday we can tape it can't you

I don't want to miss out on that meal that I was looking forward to or the family who are coming to visit or whatever it may be God's word is a nuisance to me think about other things as well in our lives that God has given us to strengthen our faith think about those times once a month or so when we celebrate the Lord's supper and the service goes on a bit longer doesn't it because we have the preaching and everything else and we have an extra 15 minutes where we gather around the table oh I'm going to have to leave because I've got a roasted in the oven I don't want to have more time in church goodness me can't we cut it down a bit further can't that preacher just be you know getting down to about 20-15 minutes 10 would be even better that's how we feel if we're not careful don't we we allow these things our own self-interest our own selfishness what has God given us the communion table for the Lord's supper for our blessing what has he given us fellowship for one another for for our blessing why has he given us the opportunity to meet twice on a Sunday for our blessing and a midweek meeting when we can come to that these are all instructions from God for our joy not our bondage that's that's how the world thinks people outside the church outside of Christ think I don't want to be a Christian all those rules regulations and laws

and things you can't do and things you must do even despise God's word and the blessings that he brings there's one more thing as well here isn't it that shows why God will take away his word if you if you count my word a stumbling block to your life then I'll take my word away third thing is this they deafen their ears to God's warnings in his word they deafen their ears to God's warnings verse 7 of this chapter the Lord has sworn by himself the pride of Jacob

[27 : 58] I will never forget anything that they have done will not the land tremble for this and all those who live in it mourn the whole land will rise like the Nile and he coax about terrible days awful days sad days mourning days days like the loss of a dear child and so on why was God going to do that well because as we've seen all the way through Amos' prophecy God has been warning the people that judgment was going to come upon them and they had ignored those warnings they had rejected those warnings they had treated them with contempt they had deafened their ears to those warnings because God had said again and again to them come to me it's that lovely passage wasn't there in chapter four if you turn back there for a moment where God says I've sent you warnings through circumstances as well as through Amos' word verse six I gave you empty stomachs in every city lack of bread in every town yet you've not returned to me declares the

Lord later on in verse eight people staggered from town to town for water did not get enough to drink yet you've not returned to me says the Lord verse nine locusts devoured your fig and olive trees yet you've not returned to me and so on and so forth five times God says if you've not turned back to me I've warned you I've urged you I've pleaded with you I've said to you please come back to me turn away from your sin it's a gospel message Amos is a gospel message it's the same message that we preach that Jesus preached that Paul preached this that sin alienates us from God and places us under his judgment and yet God in his grace and mercy calls to us again and again turn away repent from your sin and you'll be forgiven and reconciled to God and entered into the love and the joy and the celebration of Christ it's a message that we preach to the people around about us the gospel message and yet again like the people of Israel isn't the attitude one of metaphorically sticking your fingers in your ears

I don't want to know I'm not interested I don't believe God's warnings or your warnings I don't believe what God says but the reality is just because you don't want to believe something doesn't make it untrue just because you don't want to hear something doesn't mean it's going to go away imagine going in to see your doctor and I've had a blood test and I'm sorry to say that you're diabetic you're going to have to change your habits of eating and you're going to have to lose some weight and you're going to do these things because diabetes is a serious illness and it doesn't matter the fact that you don't want to hear him say it or don't even believe it it's not going to stop that illness from escalating you've got to act upon it see God says I'm never going to forget anything they've done verse 7 we may think we're good enough we may think that we haven't got any sins to be forgiven we may think that we're going to somehow squeeze into heaven by the good things we've done

God says I will never forget I know what you've done I know your sins they're ever before me and if you continue to ignore me if you continue to live without me and to reject my word then there's going to come uproar as it were upheaval he uses an illustration here which again Amos and the people would know he talks about this will not the land tremble for this and all who live in it mourn the whole land will rise like the Nile will be stirred up and sink like the river of Egypt the river Nile is unanimously recognised as a river that has the greatest movement over the season between its height and its depth 12 metres in difference between the top of the river when it's in full flood to the lowest that's 40 feet what's God saying in one sense he's saying this if our attitude to his word is that we ignore it then we're going to find upheaval in our lives we're never going to be settled we're never going to be at peace we're never going to find that place of contentment is our attitude to God's word deafness especially and particularly if it's something we don't like to hear isn't that the attitude of many people in the world and around about us and even sadly some who are religious and they'll say well yes we can believe this part of the Bible we can't believe in the virgin birth and we can't believe in the resurrection of Jesus and we don't believe in hell anymore so we cut those bits out we just leave the bits we like God is love heaven is a wonderful place and so on dear friends we can't do that we cannot pick and mix with the word of God three simple things as we close three simple exercises in one sense as we approach God's word whenever we read God's word let's remember these three things one this is God's word whatever people will tell us oh it's just a collection of writings by people who lived after

[33 : 42] Jesus day blah blah blah it's not true we have concrete manuscript authority that what we have here before us is the very historic word of God so when we come to let's remember this is God word Paul as he writes to Timothy says that all scripture is God breathed that's amazing thing a wonderful thing that God has given us his word he's spoken to us and he's spoken to us through the prophets through the apostles he's used them they've been the instruments through which he's spoken to us but it's God's word nonetheless remind ourselves can't take pick and mix it's like going and taking up the highway code and saying well here's the highway code this is the law of the land for how I must conduct myself in the in the in on the road and in the traffic I can't just pick and mix these things this is the law of the land it has authority so it is with

God's word secondly remind ourselves it's God's word to me to you it's not just God's word generally in a general sort of sense it's something which God has given to us particularly as believers which is specific again in that 2 Timothy sorry we read there at the beginning didn't we from Hebrews and chapter 1 didn't we about how God has spoken to our forefathers in the past through many prophets but what does he say in these days he has spoken to us by his son this is God's word to you and to me it's personal it's his letter it's his authority it's his truth to us and then remind ourselves dear friends that God's word is always for our good everything that God has said he has said for your good and mine everything that he has given to us he has spoken out of love God's word is always a word of love even when it's a chastisement a correction even when it's a warning it's a loving warning you see somebody over at the west cliff and they've gone over the railing and they're standing on the edge of the cliff and there's the drop behind them and you shout them don't do it don't jump look out you're doing that spitefully hatefully nastily if you didn't care about them you'd let them just carry on the way they're going because you love them because you care about them even if you don't know them you say no stop you're going to kill yourself there's God screaming in one sense calling to this world as a world and perhaps even you this evening as somebody you're on the very edge of the precipice of the cliff and you can look down you can see the stones falling beneath your feet and you can look down you can see the rocks beneath and there's only one end to you continuing to live your life in this way but God is calling to you come to me turn to me before it's too late before judgment falls for the cliff gives way before life is lost this is God's love letter to you and I in all of its shape and form so in one sense God is saying to the people of Israel use it or lose it use it or lose it and dear friends we need to take notice of that ourselves we are blessed to have the word of God in our own language today but there may come a day when you and I will not have access to a Bible that's what it was like for the men and women who were Christians in the eastern block for the men and women who were Christians in North Korea in North Korea if you possess a part of the scripture it's instant death just own part of the Bible for other parts of the world if you're found with a Bible it's taken and destroyed and you're imprisoned there may come a time dear friend dear Christian friends when we too will find that possessing a Bible in the United Kingdom is counted as a crime we may find ourselves perhaps through ill health being unable to read with all of that losing our sight let's make the best use of God's word while we have it let's treat it as a treasure it is let's drink of its depths let's eat of its goodness its banquet let's make sure that every day we're found in the word and our prayer is Lord speak to me what are you saying to me what do I need to know help me to obey some of us perhaps it's hard we haven't we find it difficult to read the Bible please come and have a word to myself or some others perhaps we can help you with with things to get you started help notes and things help you to read the scriptures let us be men and women of the book once more that we might not lose it but use it well let's sing together our final hymn