

# An Introduction to the Book of Amos

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.
- But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.
- Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.
- I was shown mercy, says Paul. And our first hymn speaks of that mercy of God. The mercy, thy mercy my God, is the theme of my song, the joy of my heart and the boast of my tongue.
- Let's stand and sing to the praise of the mercy of God to us sinners for whom Christ Jesus came. The boast of God's mercy. Let's come to him in prayer.
- [ 1 : 2 1 ]     Let us pray together. You, O Lord, our God, are the merciful God. The God of all mercy.
- The one who looks upon us in our sin, in our failing, in our foolishness and pride. You're the one who looks upon us, O Lord, and looks with eyes of mercy.
- You pity us in our sin. You are moved and have compassion upon us in our sin. You do not look at us in our great need and walk by.
- Neither do you, in your mercy, O Lord, forget us, or give up on us, or stop loving us. We come this evening again acknowledging that the words of the Apostle Paul are true of us.
- That trustworthy saying, we affirm by being here that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But for those of us who know you, for those of us who have known the forgiveness of our sins, then, O Lord, we cannot help but say with Paul, we're the worst of sinners.
- [ 2 : 3 7 ]     The more we see our heart exposed by your Holy Spirit, the more we realize just how black it is, just how rebellious it is, how selfish it is.
- The more, Lord, we get to know you, the closer we draw to your light, as it were, and your word, then the more your light exposes those hidden recesses of our lives, our hearts, our minds.
- And they show us just the ugliness that's there. They show us those areas which, Lord, we have left untouched by your mercy, which we don't want you to touch and handle.
- We don't mind you dealing with those big sins or those other things. We don't mind your Spirit changing and transforming us so that we bear the likeness of Jesus more and more.
- But there's certain places in our lives, Lord, we confess this evening, that we don't want you in. We would rather that we could keep them a secret to ourselves.
- [ 3 : 3 7 ]     We'd rather that we could keep them as those things that we love, as those things that we take pleasure in.

Perhaps nobody else knows them, but you know them, Lord, because you know us entirely. And yet, Lord, the more we cling to them or the more we try to hide them, the more ugly they become, the more they spoil, the more they impair the likeness of Jesus in us, the more they cause harm to others, the more they keep us from enjoying the blessing that you long for us to know and to have.

And so we pray again, even this evening, oh Lord, as we begin this time of worship, as we come later to your Word, we pray, oh Lord, that you would search us again, that, Lord, you would not only reveal to us those secret sins, those hidden attitudes of heart and mind, those pleasures that we do not want to give up, those things that we put before you and before your Word.

We ask, oh Lord, not only that you might expose them to us, but we ask for grace and mercy to be delivered from them, to be set free from them. Come, oh Lord, we pray, and cleanse those areas of our hearts and lives, that we might more and more enjoy the light of your blessing and of your mercy.

Thank you, oh Lord, that in spite of the blackness of those parts of our hearts, you have not given up on us, but you're continuing to work in us. That's why you brought us here, Lord, this evening, that we might know more of you, and that we might rejoice in you and praise you and delight in you, and that our faith may be strengthened in you, and that our lives may be lived more for you.

[ 5 : 30 ] Come amongst us, come upon us, come and bless us, we ask. For we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, the one who died for us and has cleansed us from our sin.

Amen. Now we're going to read together. We're going to start a new series this evening, so I'm glad you're here. Welcome to each one of you.

I'm just looking at, we haven't got any outside of the town sort of visitors, just our usual folk and a few hangers on who pop in from time to time. But we do, we're going to start a new series, and it's in a book called Amos.

Amos. Now, okay. I wonder if anybody can find it without me giving them the page number. Yeah, well, you should be able to. You're nailed. It would be most disappointing if you couldn't.

Well, if you can't, then it's page 917. Amos is one of the minor prophets. That doesn't mean he worked down a mine, okay? It means that he's one of the smaller prophets.

[ 6 : 36 ] That doesn't mean he was short either. It means that his book of prophecy is a shortish book. In fact, Amos is actually one of the longer minor prophets, or the bigger minor prophets. But we think of Isaiah and of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as being the big three, as it were.

And then the minor prophets are Daniel and Joel and Hosea and Amos and Obadiah and then some others. Okay, so we're going to be looking at Amos, one of the minor prophets, this week and in the coming weeks on a Sunday evening.

And I hope that I'm sure we will find it, as we do all God's Word, profitable, helpful, instructive, applicable as well. So tonight is a little bit of an overview, a little bit of an introduction.

So we're going to be popping in and around the book of Amos, those nine chapters. And our reading is going to be, so if you find chapter one and verse one, we're going to read the first two verses there.

Then stick your finger in that bit and then find chapter seven. And we're going to read a little bit from chapter seven. I'll tell you where that is when we get there.

[ 7 : 49 ] And then stick another finger in there. Hopefully you've got more than two fingers. And go over to chapter nine. My apologies if you haven't got more than two fingers. And chapter nine at the end. Okay?

So it's going to be a beginning, a middle and an end. But when we come to preach on it, then we'll be in other places as well. This gives you a little bit of a background of what's going on.

So Amos, page 917, verses one and two of chapter one. Let's read them. The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoia, the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, was king of Israel.

He said, the Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem. The pastures of the shepherds dry up and the top of Carmel withers.

So over to chapter seven and verse 10. Okay? That's page 923, Amos chapter seven, verse 10. You should have, if you've got the NIV, a sort of a subheading, Amos and Amaziah.

[ 9 : 01 ] Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, king of Israel. 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.

Then Amaziah said to Amos, Get out, you seer. Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there. Do your prophesying there.

Don't prophesy any more at Bethel because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. Amos answered Amaziah, I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd and I also took care of sycamore fig trees.

The Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, Go prophesy to my people Israel. Now then, hear the word of the Lord. You say, Do not prophesy against Israel and stop preaching against the descendants of Isaac.

[ 10 : 10 ] And finally, over the page to chapter 9 and the last part of the book itself, chapter 9, verse 11, under the subtitle, Israel's Restoration.

Verse 11 to the end. In that day I will restore David's fallen shelter. I'll repair its broken walls and restore its ruins and will rebuild it as it used to be.

So that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord, who will do all these things. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.

New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.

They will plant vineyards and drink their wine. They will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I've given them, says the Lord, your God.

[ 11 : 25 ] What's all that about? Well, may the Lord help us and speak to us through his word. Turn back then to Amos.

That's page 917. That's chapter 1. We're going to be darting in and out a little bit of a few of these pages just to give us a little bit of a background and an insight into who Amos was and the time in which he was a prophet and what God was doing and what the message was that he had to bring.

And I hope as we do that, we'll see again that the whole of God's word is for our blessing, for our benefit, for our understanding, for our day. Amos was one of around about eight prophets who all overlapped one another around about the middle of the 8th century BC.

So in other words, around about 2,750 years ago, Amos and others were there. So people like Jonah, we know of course that name very well.

Hosea, we might not know so well. Micah, and possibly Isaiah as well. Isaiah had a tremendously long ministry and so did Jeremiah. They were raised up by God at a similar time to take God's word to his people and ultimately to the world as well beyond.

[ 12 : 48 ] Jonah's ministry, as we know, was to Nineveh. And so what we're going to do is do something of an insight, a little bit of an introduction to Amos and to this book together this evening and then really start digging into it in the weeks ahead.

So what do we know about this man, Amos, this prophet? We already know his name. We know he's called Amos. Amos. And we also know some more things about him as well.

We know that he was a shepherd. He tells us there, one of the shepherds of Tekoia. Now Tekoia was an area of hill country around about 10 miles south of Jerusalem, so in Judea, in the southern part of the country.

And it wasn't a particularly nice place to live. It was one of the, it wasn't a land where it's all green and flourishing. It's quite a barren sort of an area. There weren't lush pastures. It was hard work to be a shepherd there to raise sheep.

And being a shepherd anyway, even if you did have lush pastures, was no easy job. Ask even a shepherd today. Shepherds usually range over a great distance. But in Amos' day, shepherds were particularly of the lowest class, not in school, the lowest class of people.

[ 14 : 04 ] They were the poorest people really. They were the ones who did the job that nobody else wanted to do, which was looking after sheep. And often that meant that they didn't have a lot of money. They didn't have a lot of income.

They often had great difficulty. Some of them had to get part-time jobs to supplement their income from the sheep. And Amos tells us that's what he did himself.

If you turn over to chapter 7, where we were just a few moments ago, he tells Amaziah, the priest, in verse 14 of chapter 7, I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.

I was a shepherd and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. So on the side, as it were, part-time job, he was a gardener or a sort of fruit picker. We know that they aren't paid very well.

As well as a shepherd. So he wasn't really what you call coming from a well-established position. He came from very humble beginnings, we might say.

[ 15 : 06 ] Very lowly position. And yet Amos was called to serve the Lord. But Amos wasn't the only shepherd, was he? Well, who else were shepherds at one time in the Bible who also God called to serve him?

David, of course, was a shepherd, wasn't he? Before he went to slay Goliath, he'd had to kill a bear and a wolf. Who else were shepherds? Moses was a shepherd, wasn't he?

In Midian. And he was one for 40-odd years. And that was very difficult as well. Anybody else got some answers? Jacob was a shepherd, yeah.

He was quite a successful and canny shepherd, wasn't he? With Laban, his uncle, he managed to get himself quite a good flock of sheep by using some very devious means, which is what he was known for.

Anybody else? Sorry? Or did you sneeze? Sorry. Abel was a shepherd, wasn't he? Right? Go back to Genesis in chapter 4. Abel was a shepherd who brought sheep and lambs as an offering to the Lord.

[ 16 : 17 ] And Abraham was a shepherd, yeah? He was a shepherd. He had many, many sheep and so on. And then, of course, they were the unknown shepherds in Bethlehem, weren't they?

They were the first preachers to say that the Messiah was born, the new king was born. They were shepherds out on the hills who the angels appeared to.

They had this incredible privilege. So shepherds, probably quite a common enough work in that sense, but over and over again, God called shepherds to serve him in different ways and at different times.

Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, doesn't he? In John chapter 10 and talks about himself as his care for the sheep. He's the good shepherd.

In the New Testament, he's also called the great shepherd and the chief shepherd. But also we find as well that ministers in the church, pastors and elders are called to be shepherds.

[ 17 : 19 ] The word pastor comes from the word to shepherd and they are to care for God's people as a shepherd cares for sheep. And certainly for Amos, the background of being a shepherd would have been very helpful for him because shepherds often have to deal with very difficult sheep.

Sheep are not the cleverest of animals. They're a bit daft. And that helped him, of course, in dealing with God's people who have always been a bit daft and a bit difficult, haven't they?

So that was good for him that the Lord grounded him in dealing with stubborn, difficult sheep. And he often refers back to his experiences as a shepherd when he brings God's word.

We read it there, didn't we, in chapter 1 and verse 2. The Lord roars from Zion, the thunders from Jerusalem, the pastures of the shepherds dry up. And then in chapter 3 and verse 12, just turn the page there for a moment, this is what the Lord says, as a shepherd rescues from the lion's mouth.

Only two bone legs or a piece of an ear. Oh dear, there's not much left of that poor sheep, is there, in that situation. Amos must have had to do that. We know, again, David fought the lion and the bear and so on and the wolf.

[ 18 : 39 ] And certainly Amos would have had to deal with that too. So it must have been an incredible transformation in the life of Amos to have been simply a poor shepherd amongst other shepherds in this very sort of desert-y type of hill country to becoming a prophet of the Lord.

Becoming God's mouthpiece, God's preacher. And if he was a shepherd, as we see that he was, it was almost certainly he had a very basic, low-level education.

He wouldn't have had the time as a shepherd to be able to go and learn. He may have been able to read and educate himself, perhaps, but he wouldn't have had all the training that the prophets had. Elijah had set up a school of prophets to train and equip men to take God's word.

But he was a man very lowly, a man who had given all his time to the sheep. And now, it seems anyway, when we read it out of the blue, particularly in chapter 7, he's called to be a prophet by God.

Neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, go and prophesy. So somehow, at some time in his life, as he's tending the sheep out on the fields and in the hills, God speaks with him and meets with him and says, I want you to go and be a prophet for me.

[ 19 : 59 ] Can you imagine how he must have felt? I can't do that. A bit like Moses. Remember when Moses was called by God? He said, I'm a man of faltering lips. I can't go and speak for you.

Even though he didn't perhaps have a formal education or we might call a Bible, a Bible institute or seminary education, he still knew his Bible very well as he speaks against particular sinful practices in Israel.

Turn over to chapter 2 and verse 8. Amos is speaking about the sins of the people and about the way they treat the poor and so on.

Verse 8, they lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. Why is that so bad? Well, we won't go to it but in Exodus 22, part of the law that God gave to the people was this.

If you take somebody's cloak in a pledge, in other words, they say, can you lend me some money and you can have my cloak and I'll pay you back. You mustn't let them, as it were, go to sleep or go to bed at night without their cloak because they needed it to keep them warm at night.

[ 21 : 10 ] But here were people, they were taking the cloak and they weren't returning it. So he knew about the law of God. He knew about the consecration of Nazarites as well. Just look a few verses later, verse 12.

You made the Nazarites drink wine. The Nazarites were people who were particularly committed to God and there were certain things they couldn't do. One of them was they mustn't drink wine or fermented drink.

Samson was one of those Nazarites who made that vow but they were forcing the people to do that. He knew about the different types of offerings that God commanded each person to make.

There in verse 4 and 5, of chapter 4, bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes, burn leavened bread as a thank offering, brag about your freewill offerings.

He knew about these sort of things. But he also knew about God. He knew about what God was doing. He knew about what God had done. Like all of God's people in the Old Testament, he would have heard about the amazing things that God had done for his people through history.

[ 22 : 21 ] He knew about the God of creation. There's a wonderful verse there in chapter 5 and verse 8. Look at it. As he's talking about the Lord God, he says, He who made the Pleiades and Orion.

Now we probably maybe not have heard of the Pleiades but we've heard of Orion, that star system. God who created the stars and the universe. He knows about these things.

He knows about how God saved the people from Egypt in chapter 2 and verse 10. I brought you up out of Egypt. He knows about how God prepared and kept the people and led them through the wilderness for 40 years before taking them to the promised land and led you for 40 years in the wilderness.

He knew about how God defeated the enemies of God's people. Verse 9 of that same chapter, I destroyed the Amorites before them though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks.

He was particularly aware of the very special privileges that God had given to the people of Israel. They had incredible privileges because God had chosen them for himself.

[ 23 : 35 ] Chapter 3 in verse 2. You alone have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Goes back to God's word right back in Deuteronomy in chapter 7 where God speaks to Moses to tell the people the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people his treasured possession.

So here is Amos a shepherd but someone who knows God's word and who God sent to serve him.

We've got to bear in mind again and again dear friends that God can and does work through all sorts of people and that he will use anyone in his service no matter what their background no matter what their weaknesses no matter what their strengths no matter what their restrictions he's not restricted by anything he will equip us to do the work he calls us to do in fact God has wonderfully at times raised up people from the very lowliest positions to do the most incredible jobs yes he's taken somebody like the prince of Egypt Moses and made him a great commander and leader then he's taken people like Amos the shepherd and he's taken others as well who were nobodies and he has given them special gifts and abilities to serve him think of Peter and the apostles fishermen he was going to give to fishermen the most important message the world would ever hear he was going to give to fishermen the incredible privilege of turning the world upside down and establishing the church not to the theologians not to the philosophers not to the religious leaders but to fishermen so dear friends whoever we are whatever abilities we do or do not have

God can and will use us to bring about his purposes to share his gospel to build his church to glorify his name two men that come to mind for me particularly were the two men that God used to bring about the incredible change the social change which was the ending of the slavery the abolition of slavery one was an ex slave trader John Newton the other was William Wilberforce a member of parliament two very different people working together where has God called you to serve him you may say well I fall far too short I don't have those gifts those abilities I don't have the natural advantage of perhaps a very good education or a good position in society or this or that but if

God has called us then like Amos we must be obedient we must be obedient obedient to his will obedient to his call and the wonderful thing is that he has gifted us to do just the work he wants us to do here's Peter in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 10 each one should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms again and again dear friends I stress to you and want to say again each of us has a ministry in this local church and this community each of us has a place each of us is a part of the body of Christ and we are called to do different things to one another we're not all called to preach and we're not all called to do children's work and we're not all called or gifted to do youth work or whatever it may be but God has a purpose and he has gifted you for that purpose and notice again as we have already that Amos' shepherding past though it may be seen as a disadvantage was actually an advantage to him in serving the Lord our experiences painful or good are part of what makes us us part of what makes us what the person God wants us to be to serve him as we should he was a shepherd and so he was able to shepherd the people remember when

[ 28 : 03 ] Jesus spoke to the disciples he said I'm going to make you fishers of men I'm going to take that past experience and I'm going to shape it into something spiritually productive there have been times in all our lives where we have thought why oh Lord have I experienced this why oh Lord have I had to go through this particular heartache or sorrow or loss why have I had to go through this hardship why have I felt those times of difficulty almost certainly I would say to you dear friends it's so that God can use them for his glory he can use them for his praise remember we read at the very beginning how Paul talks about himself as the chief of sinners and he said why is God saving me in one sense he says as an example to those who will believe after me so they might see just how patient God is yes I was a blasphemer and I persecuted the church and I hunted

Christians down and I imprisoned them and yet he saved me and sent me as a messenger why did he do that because I deserved it no because it was for his glory what have you gone through what are you going through what history have you got or past experiences have you God can and will use them for his own glory and praise but Amos his past work was not just the only thing that challenged him as he went to preach God's word the real challenge he had as well was where he was called to serve God that brought about its own problems remember I said that Amos was from Tekoa and that was in Judah but now he was being sent by God not to his own people in Judah he was being sent by God to go north to Yorkshire to Israel that's right

Israel it's me who's been sent north to come to Yorkshire he was sent to Israel and you know what northerners are like lovely warm hearted they never call a spade a spade they're always gentle in the way they talk to you am I talking about no perhaps not no the northern kingdom of Israel was worse than Yorkshire worse than Lancashire even can I say if you know your history then you'll know that some centuries earlier the whole nation Israel had been divided into two parts the north which was the ten tribes of Israel and the two other tribes Judah at the bottom in the south where Jerusalem was and there was rivalry between them they were governed by two separate kings and often they came to blows with one another they were not what you call the best of friends very rarely they might have got together against a common enemy but on the whole a Judean going to

Israel to tell them off from God was definitely not going to be welcome at all so we find poor Amos facing very stiff opposition don't we remember we read there in chapter 7 of this man Amaziah the priest of Bethel he wasn't a priest of the Lord he was a priest who misled the people and falsely taught what does he say he goes and tells the king he goes and tells tales on Amos to the king and says always creating a conspiracy he's trying to overthrow you he's a troublemaker then he goes to Amaziah and says get out clear off sling your hook we don't want you preaching around here go back to Judah so he wasn't going to a very easy place but such was the power of God's hand upon him that God says to him verse 15 go prophesy to my people

Israel you say do not go stop preaching nothing's going to stop me because the Lord is with me now dear friends again we shouldn't be surprised that if we follow Christ if we seek to be obedient to him and faithful to him we shouldn't be surprised that he will put us into very challenging situations that he'll place us in positions where we'll face opposition whether that be in school or work or in our family or in our neighbourhood or wherever it may be sometimes we think oh well if I was sent to Pakistan or Afghanistan that would be really really really hard yes it would but dear friends it can be just as hard where we are and often it is to witness to our own families of Christ can mean all sorts of repercussions remember Jesus Jesus never left his own country apart from once when he went out he ministered to his own people the

[ 33 : 17 ] Jews all through his life yet he was opposed he was rejected he was ultimately crucified we looked a little bit at the beginning of the opposition this morning in Luke 4 didn't we we're in his own town they took him to the edge of the cliff and we're going to throw him off to his death so don't think that you've got an easy time or be surprised that it's tough for you where you are what's famous God puts us not in places of ease but in places of difficulty remember this the opposition that we face from people is not opposition which is personal it feels personal it feels like they're having a go at us but actually it's not us but it's actually the message that we bring that causes the problem Amos had a message didn't he from the Lord the Lord spoke to him and told him what to say it's not you personally that that person takes offence though it feels like it's not you personally in the family that cuts you off though you feel it it's the message it's because you're Christ it's because you stand for him that's the reason isn't it we know why there are many people who will not put their faith in

Christ and follow him publicly because they are afraid of the consequences because they know it will mean that they will be ostracized or judged or criticized and such is their desire to be popular and accepted that they would rather lose eternal life than lose friendship what did Jesus say what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul dear friends we can't afford to lose our souls for the sake of popularity we have to be men and women who are willing to pay the price to take up the cross that Jesus spoke about and follow him one final thing and really this is what comes out and we've already touched on it in one sense Amos's message was not the message the Israelites wanted to hear they wanted to get rid of him as we've said and they tried to turn against him like all the prophets that Amos and those ministered in that time they ministered in a time where there were lots of prophets but the sad truth is that the people of God were in their most wicked state they were the furthest away from

God they could possibly believe they had overthrown his commandments and his laws and they had become completely rebellious against God so the message that Amos brings is a message of judgment this is what the Lord says chapter 2 verse 6 for three sins of Israel even for four I will not relent the sins of Israel were great just like the sins of Judah before them and the sins of the other nations but it was to Israel he was sent to speak of God's judgment against sin and that's hardly going to be a popular message is it it's never going to be something that's well received it's never going to be something that people are going to clap to and applaud you to when you stand up and say God hates sin there was a day when they did rejoice in that message was a day when men and women thought that was wonderful and great and rejoiced in it not today not in Amos's day hardly ever in history it's non palatable message isn't it a hateful message this was a nation that engaged in idolatry a nation that engaged in immorality social injustice we saw that particularly there in verses 6 and following

I'm not even going to mention it because there are children here what happened in the way of immorality you can read it for yourself later in chapter 2 it was the grossest vilest most horrific type of immorality that was going on between these people and so Amos came and says this is wrong not because I say it's wrong because God says it's wrong and yet amazingly in spite of this following after sin seeking after wickedness in one sense not surprisingly though it may surprise us this was a prosperous land Israel people were rich people were doing well for themselves turn over to chapter 6 and verse 1 listen to what he says there woe to you who are complacent in Zion to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria you notable men of the foremost nation that's not the one I want it goes down to say where am I this

I don't 4 verse 4 you lie on beds adorned with ivory lounge on your couches dine on choice lambs and fattened calves you strum away on your harps like David and improvise musical instruments you drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions there's a people there having a party life is great in Israel there's furniture made of ivory they got all the wine they can drink all the finest food they can eat they are having a whale of a time so it seems and they are completely complacent about God we know historically that Israel was doing well the king before the present king Jeroboam had defeated the Syrians their enemies and they had enlarged their country why on earth should they worry about God's judgment when everything they had and wanted was there after all they were also quite religious it wasn't as if they had completely given up on religion

[ 39 : 29 ] God talks about it earlier on in chapter 5 he says I hate I despise your religious festivals your assemblies even though you bring a burnt offering and grain offering so they were going about all the religious stuff but really they were nowhere near God it was all a sham a show a pretense so really the main message that Amos brings to them is this God is not only angry with your sin but he's going to judge it he's not going to pass it by or sweep it under the carpet as he were he's not going to turn a blind eye to the things that you are doing and the way that you're living he's going to bring an army who will judge you and ultimately destroy you chapter 3 and verse 11 therefore this is what the sovereign Lord says an enemy will overrun your land pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses the message of God to these people was turn back to me it's a message of judgment but it's a message of mercy

God was saying yes your sins are great and you're in an awful predicament and judgment is coming but you see I'm still a God of mercy turn back to me repent and turn to me chapter 5 and verse 4 this is what the Lord says to Israel seek me and live verse 6 seek the Lord and live isn't it amazing how God is patient and gracious and faithful why hasn't he why hasn't Jesus returned and wiped all humanity out of existence why hasn't he come and brought judgment upon our world upon our nation with its immorality and wickedness with even just yesterday as you know the law in Ireland being changed to allow the murder of unborn children which we've been doing for 50 years by the way in England why doesn't he do that because he's merciful because he gives men and women time to repent because he has given us the incredible message to proclaim to the world there is judgment but there is mercy with

God there is forgiveness if you will but turn to the Lord God who made you and sent his son as the saviour yes the world in which we live is a different world to 2,800 years ago in Israel but it's the same people with the same problem we're in rebellion against God and we're far from him and his judgment is hanging over us do you think that the God who hated those sins in the past now puts up with them and doesn't think of them quite so bad in our day has he changed no he hasn't has he become well soft around the edges more liberal no he hasn't sin is still sin wickedness is still wickedness evil is still evil no matter what we call it put it under the banner of love and it still is wicked put it under the banner of freedom of expression it still is evil dear friends don't we live in a country like

Israel a country which is complacent isn't that the greatest challenge we have men and women are complacent and indifference like Israel of old they can drink as much as they want until they fall over they can eat themselves to death they can absorb all sorts of comforts and pleasures luxuries they can do whatever they like and they can continue to sin they can continue to do evil they can continue to cheat one another and to hate one another and to rob from one another but of course aren't we as a country well we're religious aren't we just look at the royal wedding just the other week it was in a church and there was a man who preached and God's name was mentioned thousands upon thousands if not millions of people saw it doesn't that show that we are religious country so why should we fear God why should we fear his judgment why should we be concerned about the day of his wrath because God hasn't changed dear friends therefore our message cannot change we cannot hear the words of Amos and the example of

Amos and say well we're going to do nothing about it we're going to we're going to bend our message a bit we're not going to talk about judgment anymore we're not going to talk about hell we're not going to talk about God's anger and wrath we're not going to talk about sin we must our message is unchanged it's a message that says repent turn to the Lord isn't this a message we need to speak to our people seek me and live says the Lord seek the Lord and live you're not living you're merely on a conveyor belt on death row awaiting the time when you will fall off this mortal coil and stand before God in judgment you're just going through the motions of life but this isn't all there is this world must come to an end and yet God is merciful he does not wish for any to perish but all to come to faith and repentance so through this book of Amos we find again the mercy the grace the goodness the love of God in fact we find it building to a wonderful culmination which we read there at the end of chapter 9 where God promises what we might call revival he promises great spiritual blessing upon people when he speaks about the fact that he will restore what was broken that he will repair what is torn down that he will rebuild and there's those lovely words in verse 13 the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes

[ 45 : 52 ] God is going to work with such power and grace that actually it's not going to be in the natural order if I can put it in that way there's going to be a supernatural work of God where the fruit and the blessing comes even before the seeds planted this must mean spiritual revival so dear so dear friends Amos in you he's called by God he's placed in a particular situation he's given a message to share and to teach yes one of judgment which speaks against but one of mercy which speaks forgiveness and he's looking forward and he's trusting in God that even though it is hard God's promises and purposes will be accomplished dear friends like Amos we go knowing that we're weak knowing that we're inadequate but knowing that God is great now may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord

Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep may he equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever Amen