

Doing What's Right in a Wrong World: Lessons from the Book of Amos

It is easy to look at the world around us and point out what is wrong. It is much harder to let God turn the spotlight on our own hearts. The book of Amos does exactly that, and its message is just as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

What Is the Book of Amos About?

Amos was a shepherd and farmer from Tekoa, a small town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He was not a priest. He was not from a royal line. He was an ordinary man from the southern kingdom of Judah whom God called to deliver a hard message to the northern kingdom of Israel.

The northern kingdom was prosperous. Business was booming. But underneath the surface, idolatry, immorality, and hypocrisy were spreading. God loved them enough to send a warning before judgment fell.

Can God Use Ordinary People?

Amos described himself plainly: "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. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" - Amos 7:14-15

God does not require a polished background or an impressive resume. As Paul wrote:

"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things which are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him." - 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

If you have ever felt disqualified because of your background, your family, or your past, take heart. God can use anyone who is willing to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me."

The Core Message: Knowing God's Truth but Missing God's Heart

Here is the central tension Amos brings to the surface. It is possible to know God's truth and still miss God's heart. We can look at the world and say, "They need to hear this," while never asking, "Lord, what about me?"

It is easy to put the spotlight on others. It is uncomfortable when God turns it on us.

What Does God See When He Looks at How We Treat Others?

Before addressing Israel directly, God speaks judgment over seven surrounding nations. Each one is judged for how they treated other people. These are not abstract sins. They are patterns that show up in everyday life.

1. God Sees Your Cruelty

Damascus invaded Israel with brutal force and showed no mercy. God said He saw it and would judge it. Cruelty toward others does not go unnoticed by God, whether it happens on a battlefield or in the way we speak to people around us.

2. God Sees When You Exploit the Helpless

The Philistines took advantage of the vulnerable, selling captives for profit. God defended the poor, the widow, and the orphan then, and He still does today. Taking advantage of those who cannot protect themselves is something God takes seriously.

3. God Sees Betrayal

Tyre had a longstanding covenant of friendship with Israel but broke it when it was convenient. God called it out. Broken promises, dishonesty at work, and betrayed trust in relationships are not hidden from Him.

4. God Sees Hatred and Violence

The Edomites were descendants of Esau, blood relatives of Israel, yet they pursued them with relentless anger. God said their wrath would consume them. Harbored hatred and unchecked anger are things God sees and will address.

5. God Sees Selfishness

The Ammonites destroyed families simply to expand their own territory. Living only for yourself, willing to harm others to get ahead, is something God judges. Selfishness dressed up in justification is still selfishness.

6. God Sees Dishonor

Moab dishonored the position of a king, even a wicked one. There is a standard of dignity and respect God calls us to, even toward those we disagree with or dislike.

What About the Everyday Moments?

Before moving on to Israel, there is a practical and honest illustration worth sitting with. Think about driving. Inside a car, it is easy to feel invisible. Words come out. Gestures happen. Attitudes surface that would never show up in a Sunday morning conversation. But God sees those moments too.

The big, obvious sins are easy to distance ourselves from. It is the small, daily attitudes where God often does His most searching work.

What Does God Say to His Own People?

When Amos finally turns to address Israel directly, the message is the longest and the most pointed. God's people are held to a higher standard because they have been given His word.

God identifies five specific problems among His people:

- Lying: They were not walking in truth.
- Exploiting the poor: They were selling the righteous for silver and trampling the needy.
- Sexual immorality: There was no honor for the covenant of marriage or sexual purity.
- Drunkenness and self-indulgence: They knew what was wrong and did it anyway.
- Idolatry: They had left God while still going through religious motions.

Going to church and keeping up religious appearances while living in unrepentant sin is not something God overlooks. He calls it hypocrisy, and He calls His people to repent.

Why Does God Confront Sin in the Lives of His People?

God reminded Israel of everything He had done for them. He destroyed their enemies. He led them through the wilderness for 40 years. He brought them into the promised land. He sent prophets to guide them. He provided witnesses of holiness among them.

All of that was an act of love. And the confrontation of their sin was also an act of love. God does not expose sin to crush people. He exposes it because He does not want sin to destroy them.

"Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." - James 4:8, 10

Entitlement vs. Gratitude

Israel began to feel entitled. They assumed God's grace meant they could live however they wanted. But God's grace is never meant to produce entitlement. It is meant to produce gratitude.

Entitlement is focused on self. Gratitude is focused on God. One leads to spiritual decay. The other leads to a life that reflects God's heart.

Three Heart-Searching Questions from Amos

1. Look inward. Are there sinful habits you are excusing in yourself while condemning in others?
2. Look backward. Have you forgotten what God has done for you? Remembering His faithfulness produces gratitude, not entitlement.
3. Look outward. How are you treating the people around you? As David prayed: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." - Psalm 139:23-24

What Does God Want from Us?

The answer is not more religious activity. It is genuine surrender. It is coming to God and saying, "I cannot fix this on my own. Change me."

"These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in your courts. Do not plot evil against each other and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares the Lord." - Zechariah 8:16-17

Only Jesus can save us from sin. Only He can change our hearts. The invitation is to stop making excuses, stop pointing at others, and come to Him with an open and honest heart.

Life Application

This week, choose one relationship or one area of your daily life where you know God has been nudging you. Maybe it is how you speak to a coworker, how you treat someone who frustrates you, or a habit you have been quietly excusing. Bring it to God honestly, confess it, and ask Him to change you from the inside out. Do not wait for a dramatic moment. Start with one honest conversation with God today.

Ask yourself:

- Is there a sin I have been pointing out in others that I have been ignoring in myself?
- When I think about what God has done for me, does my life reflect gratitude or entitlement?
- How am I treating the people closest to me, and would I be comfortable if God put a spotlight on those moments?

God's goal is never to shame you. It is to free you. He sees everything, and He still invites you to come near to Him.