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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages: Amos - Don't Be a Hypocrite

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the Tanakh—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

Today, we are looking at the Book of Amos. Let’s dive in.

Amos: An Overview

According to the Book of Amos, which is likely the earliest of the prophetic books in the Old Testament (J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 163), Amos was a sheep-breeder, herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore figs (Amos 1:1; 7:14). Even though he did not come from a lineage of prophets and never viewed himself as a prophet before (Amos 7:14), God nevertheless called Amos to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II in the eighth century BC (2 Kings 14:23-29). He was tasked with warning the people of God’s coming judgment.

The Book of Amos begins with an announcement that judgment will come upon the nations (Amos 1:2-15; 2:1-3). However, Amos follows this up with a pronouncement of judgment upon Israel as well (Amos 2:4-16). Amos rebukes Israel for their idolatry and oppressive treatment of the people in their communities. He condemns the religious leaders of Israel for putting on a hypocritical religious performance—they offer sacrifices, observe the festivals, and sing songs to YHWH while, at the same time, neglecting justice and righteousness (Amos 5:18-27). Therefore, because of their sin, Amos warns of a coming “Day of YHWH,” where Israel will face judgment. However, just like in Joel, the last chapter of Amos declares that this Day of YHWH will change from a time of judgment to a time of salvation and restoration (Amos 9:11-15).

Amos's Major Message

God's justice requires that he deal with sin and evil among his people and the nations. However, there is hope of salvation for all who repent of their hypocrisy and pursue justice and righteousness. And that is the major message of Amos: don't be a hypocrite, or you will face judgment on the Day of YHWH. A hypocrite is someone who claims to be something he is not. In the context of Amos, there were Israelites who were claiming to be worshipers of the God of Israel, and even putting on a show by observing times of worship to YHWH, but were disobeying YHWH by mistreating their neighbor. God says that he "hates" it when his people hypocritically worship him while mistreating their neighbor:

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

According to Amos, your relationship with the God of Israel is not meant to be just some religious show. Again, God says he hates a shallow religious performance, especially when it is used as a mask to hide unrighteousness and injustice.

From God's perspective, true religion involves caring for those in need. That is what is most important. Outward religious observances are important too and should not be neglected (Matt. 23:23), but if we are proclaiming that we are religious without pursuing justice and righteousness, then our religion is a false religion. As James writes:

James 1:27

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 2:14-16

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

It is time to drop the act. The Day of YHWH is at hand. If you claim to be religious, then actually *be* religious—and that includes loving your neighbor. Repent of your hypocrisy, and God will be gracious to forgive and restore. As Amos writes:

Amos 5:14-15

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD [YHWH], the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD [YHWH], the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Interesting Connections

Amos's focus on loving your neighbor and seeking justice is not new. The Torah pronounces a curse upon all those who mistreat others, particularly the vulnerable in society:

Deuteronomy 27:19 (not sure what version this is)

“Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”
And all the people shall say, “Amen.”

It is not surprising, then, that the people of Israel were coming under God’s judgment in the Book of Amos. They were warned. Moses declared that God himself executes justice on behalf of the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner, and provides for them (Deuteronomy 10:18). Executing justice for them often involves bringing judgment upon those who oppress them, hence the warnings of coming judgment in Amos. If the people mistreat the weak and vulnerable in their communities, God promises to intervene:

Exodus 22:21-24

You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

As we can see, God cares a lot about justice. This is great news for those who are oppressed! God hates it when the weak and needy are mistreated and abused, and he does something about it. God’s kingdom has no place for injustice and oppression. In fact, the prophet Isaiah associates God’s execution of justice with the Messiah:

Isaiah 42:1-4

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

Part of the Messiah’s mission is to bring forth justice. And that is what we find in Yeshua’s ministry.

How Amos Points to the Messiah

Similar to how Amos criticized the religious leaders of his day, throughout the gospels, Yeshua criticized the religious leaders as well. Like Amos, Yeshua condemned hypocrites; that is, those who enjoyed putting on a fake religious performance while disregarding justice and righteousness:

Matthew 23:23

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

Yeshua echoed Amos’s call to repent of hypocrisy and to embrace authentic worship of God, which includes love for one’s neighbor. Yeshua also directly brought justice to the needy. Much to the Pharisees’ frustration, Yeshua healed people on the Sabbath (e.g., Matthew 12:9-14). The Pharisees prohibited healing and helping people on the Sabbath unless the illness was life-threatening (m.*Yoma* 8.6; m.*Shabbat* 14.3; 22:6). But the Torah itself has no such restriction; this rule was entirely man-made. As Yeshua said, “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12).

The Pharisees' version of Sabbath observance was really no Sabbath observance at all. Their traditions were a religious show that led to the neglect of those in need. Yeshua called out their unjust treatment of the hurting and vulnerable. He brought out the true purpose of the Sabbath, which is to symbolize the ultimate rest and healing that we will enjoy in the world to come, when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death and pain will be no more (Revelation 21:4).

Matthew says that Yeshua's healing ministry fulfilled Isaiah's Messianic prophecy that we read earlier. Yeshua did bring forth justice:

Matthew 12:15-21

And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Yeshua cared for those who were being mistreated and brought them justice. When he returns, he will bring about ultimate justice. He will grant relief to the oppressed and punish the oppressors (2 Thessalonians 1:5-12).

And that is Amos's major message. The Day of YHWH draws near. It is time to drop the act and practice true religion. It is time to care for those in need and pursue justice and righteousness. This message is rooted in the Torah, reiterated by the Prophets, and fulfilled in the Messiah. No religious hypocrites will be making it into the kingdom. So, "[Seek good, and not evil, that you may live.](#)"

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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