



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 1:1-2

“The Shepherd and the Lion”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for today is the first two verses from the Book of Amos which forms something of an introduction and in one sense a summary of the teaching of this book as well. I'd like to give you a little challenge. I've always been convinced that - and I've said this, I know, a number of times that the reading of the word of God is one of the greatest spiritual exercises that you could ever engage in. And so I'd like to challenge you if you read the book of Amos every two weeks.

Now, you could sit down and read the book of Amos in about thirty or forty minutes if you are an average reader, but if you will read the book of Amos once every couple of weeks, I'll read it in the original text at the same time, and we'll check on you from time to time to be sure that you're keeping up with your reading of Amos because I'm sure that if you do read this book and read it regularly you will profit a great deal more from the things that I have to say by way of explanation of it. So we'll check you up a couple of weeks from now and ask you to let us know whether you have read the book of Amos.

I am going to be expounding the word of God from the New American Standard Bible edition. I know that requires a little bit of explanation. You will be able to tell that I'm expounding it from the New American Standard Bible version because of the using

the glasses more. [Laughter] I don’t have the big print that I have in my Authorized Version. A lot of people come up and say to me, as old as you are, you are not wearing your glasses. Well, as a matter of fact, I wore glasses from the time I was twenty-five years of age in the insurance business when I was studying insurance theory and practice, but I am able to read fairly well without using the glasses providing I’m at a certain distance from the page and providing the print is large enough and providing we have sufficient light that is Christian light, bright light. But if not as the word of God says, the eyes are becoming dim with age.

I’m going to be using the New American Standard Bible, and the reason for it is not simply that. The reason for it is the translation of the text of Amos is a bit more accurate in the New American Standard Bible edition. It’s not as stylistically pure English as the Authorized Version, which is a beautiful version, but it’s more accurate. We’ll be following that. I’ll be referring to both of these versions. So that will explain why in some points if you have the Authorized Version you will see that I’m saying something slightly different and I hope that that will enable me to say less about the changes that one must make in the text in order to get at the precise point that Amos is seeking to say or make. So we’re reading now the first two verses of the book of Amos, and I’m reading from the New American Standard Bible edition.

“The words of Amos who was among the sheep herders from Tekoa which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah King of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son Joash King of Israel two years before the earthquake.”

Let me just say this about the earthquake because that will not come up in the message this morning. We do not know anything about this earthquake of which Amos prophesied here or of which he mentions here. And unfortunately, therefore, we cannot

say anything in explanation of this earthquake. We just know there was an earthquake and Amos refers to it. Verse 2,

"He said, "The LORD roars from Zion And from Jerusalem He utters His voice; And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn, And the summit of Carmel dries up."

You recognize this is Mount Carmel at one of the heads of one of the promontories in northwestern part of the land. May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee and thankful for the prophecy of Amos because the principles that are found within it are principles that are relevant to our society and our lives today. We thank Thee for the faithfulness of the prophet who in the ordinary life of a businessman found himself taken up with the word of God and with the ministry of the truths of Holy Scripture. And we thank Thee for the faithfulness with which he carried out his tasks and for the marvelous way in which Thou hast preserve these prophetic messages down through the centuries.

And we thank Thee for the privilege of reading them and pondering them and, Lord, we pray that Thou wilt give us the motivation and the enablement to live in the light of the things of which Amos speaks. May Amos be a prophet not simply to northern Israel in the days of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century but a prophet for us today in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We give Thee thanks for the whole church of Jesus Christ today, and pray Thy blessing upon the whole body wherever they may be. We pray that the ministry of the word may be rich and profitable and building, edifying to all of the saints of God today.

And we pray, too, that a church of Jesus Christ may be used as a testimony to Thy grace and in an evangelistic way may the gospel go forth and may there be response to it. For those, Lord, who are troubled and who are weak and feeble and sick and perplexed,

we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon them and especially for those who we know and whose names are in our calendar of concern. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them. May those needs represented there find a welcome ear in heaven.

And, Father, we pray for our country. We ask that in these very difficult days that there may be a return to the principles that are set forth in holy Scripture, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. May there be responsiveness to the truth of God in our society. We recognize how chaotic things seem to be becoming, and we ask that there may be responsiveness to the word of God that the law of God may be recognized as significant in our day and useful in the everyday affairs of life.

We give Thee thanks for Believers Chapel and for the ministry for the word of God here. And we ask for our elders and for our deacons and for our members and our friends that there may be responsiveness on our part and effective service of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Bless the ministry that goes forth by the radio, by the printed page, and we pray Thy blessing upon the staff of the chapel and ask especially for them. We commit this service to Thee. We pray thy blessing upon the hymn that we sing. May we sing it truly from the heart in appreciation in all that Thou hast done for us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today as we begin our series of studies in the Book of Amos is the Shepherd and the Lion. Amos lived in an age of some of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. In fact, his age has been called the golden age of Hebrew prophecy. In Israel in the north, there was Amos and Josea ministering there; and then in Judah, Isaiah, perhaps the greatest of the prophets, and Micah as well. That would be enough to justify the study of Amos but there are other reasons as well. An important one is the fact that Amos’s society was characterized by -- I’d like for you to notice these words, affluence, exploitation, and religion.

Now, if you would just take those words out of Amos’s day and say them in our day, I’m sure that everyone in this auditorium would recognize the relevance of Amos’s prophecy if those are characteristics of it to our society today: affluence, exploitation, and religion. I’d like to look at just a few of the verses of the Book of Amos in a rather unsystematized fashion in order to illustrate some of these things. For example, it was a day of affluence.

Turn to chapter 3 in verse 15. In chapter 3 in verse 15, the prophet says,

“I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; The houses of ivory will also perish And the great houses will come to an end, “Declares the LORD.”

Chapter 6 in verse 4, the prophet writes,

“Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall,”

Chapter 4, verse 1, the prophet writes,

“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, Who say to your husbands, ‘Bring now, that we may drink!’”

And chapter 6 in verse 6 the prophet writes,

“Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.”

One can see the great stress of those verses on the riches and affluence that characterized Amos’s day. In chapter 2 in verse 6 and verse 7, one notices some of the rackets that characterized his day as well.

“Thus says the LORD,” [Amos writes in chapter 2 verse 6] “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals. These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless Also turn aside the way of the humble; And a man and his father resort to the same girl In order to profane My holy name.”

Characteristic of the day was not only the immorality depicted here but also the rackets that had to do with property. Slavery was characteristic of that time, and Amos refers to it there. In chapter 8 in verse 5, the apostle or the prophet speaks of business rackets. He says,

“saying, “When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with dishonest scales,”

Why that’s almost twentieth century language. That’s the kind of thing that was happening in the northern kingdom in the day of Amos. Chapter 5, verse 10 and verse 12 speak of things that are characteristic of our day as well,

“They hate him who reproves in the gate, And they abhor him who speaks with integrity.” [Verse 12] “For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.”

Legal rackets characterized that day as well as they characterized ours. In chapter 8 in verse 5, the prophet writes, “saying, “when will the” -- we read this a moment ago but I want to make another point about it.

“When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with dishonest scales”

and of course, the racket that is characterized there is the kind of racket that we have with in our society today. Chapter 4, verse 4 the prophet writes,

“Enter Bethel and transgress; In Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, Your tithes every three days.”

Then in chapter 5, verse 5 he says,

“But do not resort to Bethel And do not come to Gilgal, Nor cross over to Beersheba; For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity And Bethel will come to trouble.”

And he’s speaking in these verses about the sacrifices that they were carrying out and how they were carried out in a spirit contrary to the word of God. Notice chapter 5, verse 21 through 23 particularly,

“I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.”

And so in the spiritual side of the worship of the children of Israel it was so contrary to the spirit and truth of the word of God that God speaking through the prophet said, “I hate your feasts” when they observed the Passover feasts or when they observed the day of atonement or when they observed the feast of unleavened bread or the feast of trumpets. All of their festivals or their Sabbaths, they were things that God not only found difficult to put up with but he actually hated the carrying out of things that are set out in the word of God because of the disobedience and rebellion that characterized the hearts of the northern kingdom people at this time.

And even the musical side of the worship comes in for disapproval on the part of God. He says, I take away from me the noise of your songs, I will not even listen to the sound of your hearts. And so the entertainment that was characteristic of that day was the kind of entertainment that God found no entertainment in at all. Need we say more? The society of Amos’s day is a society -- was a society that is remarkably parallel with our society today.

Let me first say just a few words about the man Amos. What we know of Amos we know from his prophecy and from the descriptions that he gives of himself in his book. We read in verse 1 the words of Amos who was among the shepherders from Tekoa. And then in chapter 7 in verse 14 and verse 15 he tells us something else about himself as he’s talking to Amaziah, the ungodly priest of Bethel, Amos answers him and says to Amaziah, I’m not a prophet nor am I the son of a prophet, for I’m a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs, but the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, Go prophesize to my people Israel.

If you’re a careful reader of the word of God, you may think that Amos is contradicting himself when he says he’s not a prophet because he just goes on to say God put his hand upon me, took hold upon me, and caused me to prophesize, but what he means most likely that he was not a member of the prophetic guild. That is, he was not



trained. He did not company with those that were called the prophets or call themselves prophets, but he’s a prophet outside the circle of the prophetic guild. Just as today there may be a man upon whom God puts his hand who ministers the word of God with power and authority who’s never been to our theological seminaries.

Amos was that kind of individual. He was not a prophet in one sensed, a trained prophet, but he was a prophet of God in the most significance sense. He was undoubtedly one of the most wonderful men and one of the most wonderful appearances in history of the human spirit. His name means burden or burden bearer. He was not the father of Isaiah whose father’s name was Amoz. Amos is different. He was a contemporary of Isaiah; however, his home was Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem in an area that was known for sheep herding, and so he was a southerner who ministered to the north. And, as far as I’m concerned those Yankees, evidently needed it then as they need it today. [Laughter] That’s another application of the prophecy of Amos, which is never received its proper emphasis in our day.

But at any rate Amos was from Judah, and he ministered to the northern kingdom. I presume, as you read through this prophecy, since he mentions Judah once that probably he did that for that reason. He wanted them to be sure to realize that while he was prophesizing against the Northern Kingdom it was not for political reasons but he was including the same kind of life and activity in the Southern Kingdom as well, but he was called to minister to the ten tribes to the north.

Now, we read chapter 7 in verse 14 and verse 15 where he describes himself as not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He was a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. Evidently, he was a shepherd of the small-sized sheep that characterized that particular area. The total picture of Amos suggests not simply that he was a shepherd who worked for somebody else but a shepherd who was himself in business for himself. He was a shepherder in the full sense. In other words, he was a kind of individual who had his own business.

And God called him out of his own business. He was not an individual who made his living by prophesying. He made his living by working, but God put his hand upon him and caused him to be the kind of prophet that he became. He says that he was a puncturer, a nipper of sycamore figs. That’s the meaning of that expression. There were sycamore trees in that part of the land that bore a small kind of fruit, and if you punctured the skin of the fruit at a certain time the insects that were in those pieces of fruit could come out and, therefore, we are told the fruit was much sweeter, and so he did that. Therefore, the picture that Amos gives of himself is of a person who was acquainted with agriculture and horticulture, made his living that way, but at a particular time God called him.

Now, let’s look at the prophet Amos and analyze just a little bit more verses 14 and 15. Two things are known about his spiritual status. First, God called him to the task. He did not decide, I think I’ll go to theological seminary and see if God would have me proclaim the word. God called him. The Lord took him. The expression that is used in verse 15, the Hebrew verb *laqach*, which means something like “take hold of” or “to seize to apprehend,” reminds one of the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road. It’s the same kind of thing.

“But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, ‘Go prophesy to My people Israel.’” .

And the very fact that Amos says the Lord took me indicates that he was a Calvinist.

[Laughter]

Now, let me go back. I’m kidding you. Some Arminians in the audience are very mad at me for saying that, but we’re glad you’re here too. What he’s trying to say is simply this that the Lord takes the initiative in ministry. The Lord took me, and that’s what we mean when we say anachronistically that Amos, if he had been here, would be

called a Calvinist, because he thinks of God’s ministry through him as beginning with the Lord God. The Lord took me.

A second thing that we need to remember about the prophet Amos is that he was a rustic in a particular sense. He was a rustic in the sense that he was uneducated. That is he did not go, so far as we know, to anything that could be called parallel to one of our universities. He had no academic credentials that he mentions at all, but he was no untutored rustic. He knows history. He knows the contemporary problems of his day and above all he has a deep knowledge of the word of God.

And you remember the psalmist says, the fact that he knows God’s word makes him wiser than all his teachers. And anyone who knows the word of God you can be sure that they are not untutored rustics. They have the essential and the most significant knowledge of truth that an individual could possibly have, and Amos had that. I won’t bother to look at the passages because we’ll be looking at them as we go through. But when you think of Amos, you think of an individual who spent his time making a living as a shepherd and a sheepherder and then the other sides of his business that he was involved in, a man who traveled about and making money over the land to go to the markets in the various places. He will refer to them in his prophecy. A man of unusual mind but above all a man of God, a man prepared, a man equipped, a man disciplined, a man enabled by God to be his shepherd just as the great men of the Old Testament such as Abraham and Isaac and all the others down through the years.

We have the strange idea today that a man must go to theological seminary or some particular place of learning in order to be prepared to minister the word of God. That’s one of the great errors of our day. Education is very useful and many men would be helped considerably by it, but in the ministry in the truth of God ultimately everything depends upon the Lord laying his hand upon the individual and equipping and preparing him for the ministry of the word of God. And without that, all of the training that we may have is really fruitless for carrying on the work of God.

Now, a few words about the message of Amos in general. Amos has been called the prophet of justice. So far as the doctrinal content of Amos’s concern, everything that he says is grounded in the covenant that God made with Abraham and confirmed to the fathers and expanded in the words that he spoke to David later on. In chapter 9 in verse 7 through the end of the chapter, Amos ultimately relates everything to the great promises of the Old Testament that had to do with the Davidic dynasty. So at the heart of Amos’s truth is the truth of the covenant that God had made with the nation. What he conceived to be truth was covenantal truth in that sense. And what we find in the New Testament is simply further expansion of that same essential truth which God unfolded to Abraham and to the patriarchs. So far as his individual beliefs were concerned, they’re what you might expect. His views run the gamut of the doctrine of God. He believes that God is the creator. He writes in chapter 5 in verse 8 in words that are truly significant,

“He who made the Pleiades and Orion  
And changes deep darkness into morning,  
Who also darkens day into night,  
Who calls for the waters of the sea  
And pours them out on the surface of the earth,  
The LORD is His name.”

In other words, for Amos the Lord God is the creator. He’s sovereign. I won’t read passages that have to do with that such as chapter 9, verse 1 through verse 4. That should be obvious to you if you read the Book of Amos. Furthermore, he is the lord of history, as we shall see in the very next message because Amos begins to talk about the nations around him, and he will lay out God’s divine program for them suggestive of the Lord God’s control of history itself. So far as the doctrine of sin is concerned, he has a deep sense of the truth of human sin. He writes in chapter 2, verse 4,

“Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; Their lies also have led them astray, Those after which their fathers walked.”

Chapter 4 in verse 11 he writes also,

“I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the LORD.”

In chapter 5 in verse 12,

“For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.”

Amos had a deep sense of the sin of the chosen of Israel and the sins of the nations about him. He was as you might expect a believer in the divine sovereign choice of the Lord God. In Amos chapter 3 in verse 2 he writes,

“You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth;” translated in the Authorized version, “You only have I (chosen among) all the families of the earth.”

Now, that’s a remarkable statement of the sovereign unconditional election of Israel by the Lord God. “You only have I (chosen) of all the families of the earth.” You can see from that that this is unconditional election by divine grace. “You only have me among all the families of the earth.” Did not God know all the families of the earth? Why of course he did but he says, “You only have I (chosen among) all the families of the earth.” So divine sovereign election undergirds all that God writes through Amos to the

children of Israel in his day and he believed that salvation rested in a right relation to Yahweh.

Chapter 5 in verse 4 Amos writes,

“For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, Seek Me that you may live.”

In that is all of the special teaching concerning the Lord God as the only Savior on the face of this earth. The same things that the Lord Jesus said when he was here, “I am the way the truth and the life no man cometh unto the Father but by me. I am the good Shepherd. I give my life for the sheep. I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and join in our -- have pasture.” I’m speaking of those special statements of the word of God which have to do with the sole source of salvation in the God of Scripture.

We’ll see that particularly as we look at the oracles that Amos writes with reference to the nations about him.

As far as the ethical concerns of Amos are concerned, essentially he speaks against the injustice of his day as the protesting voice of an offended god. In Amos’s day, the standards have gone to pot. Do you think that has anything to do with our society today? This past week I read a chapter in a book that I’ve been reading, Why the Churches have Gone Wrong, a very well-written book. And in the course of it, John Howard for the Institute of Religion and Democracy has an article entitled something like, “Betrayal the Trust.” And in it he says that the thesis of his particular article, which is about twenty pages long, is that for several decades the youth of America have been short-changed in the spiritual dimensions of their lives.

He called my attention to a poll, which I don’t remember having seen; in 1952, a nationwide poll was taken of people ages 18 through 24. Sixty-four percent of those young people said that religion was important in their lives. Twenty-five years later in 1978 another poll was taken with the same questions. This time only thirty-seven percent

of the young people between those ages said that religion had an important part of their lives.

Now, we’re not talking about Christianity specifically, just religion as an important part in their lives -- forty percent reduction in the young people’s viewpoint with reference to religion. Now, what is striking about this is that concurrent with these twenty-five years, there was a marked increase in the activities of a self-destructive or anti-social nature in our society. Suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, emotional disorder, street gangs, assaults on teachers, muggings, et cetera, have been growing, along side of lack of interest in spiritual things. It’s not surprising.

And then when you turn to the pulpit where men stand with an open Bible before them in so many of our churches over this land, what do they say? Well, at the same time that this was going on, there was a burgeoning involvement in a host of secular causes and less stress and continued less stress on the biblical formulas for leading one’s life. I find I have to change my terms biblical formulas for leading one’s life. That means Bible doctrine but biblical formulas for leading one’s life. Those people who say I don’t -- I’m not interested in biblical doctrine. I’m going to have to disguise my terms. But at any rate what do we find in the pulpit? We find people standing in the pulpit talking about economic issues and almost always from the standpoint of socialism and a failure to understand the simple characteristics of capitalism. Capitalism is not a philosophy that governs all of our life. It’s just a system for producing and dispensing goods. That’s all it is, but, nevertheless, from our pulpits there pours forth opinions and viewpoints of a socialistic character.

In political matters, they are interested in things like poverty, racism, South Africa to the neglect, of course, of Afghanistan, but these are the characteristics of our preachers today and other leftist’s ideas proclaim from the pulpit with euphemistic terminology to disguise the meaning that they really have in their minds and social issues. These have become the gruel of the saints who are setting in the pulpit. It’s no wonder that our

society is collapsing and that we are finding results in just that which I was speaking about above in suicide.

Suicide among young people is astonishing. Astonishing that a society could have so many young people, high school and college kids, taking their lives. And one of the fundamental reasons for this is that they’re in families in which there is no understanding of the word of God and no understanding of the consequences of an act such as the taking of one’s life according to the law of God as set forth in his word. One important result of this is that our society has become oblivious to the ideal of law and of lawfulness in our society. Law is the cohesion of society. If we do not keep the law, we have chaotic society.

And consequently in our society we are characterized by lawlessness, by improper regard for the law and so not only in the ordinary affairs of life like dropping your automobile down Hillcrest Road. If you were to stand at the corner of Hillcrest and Alpha -- I know because I go by there almost every day and sometimes four or five times a day - - listen if I was a policeman, I would want to be on commission. And if I were on commission, I would station myself right at that street corner. I wouldn’t dare enter that intersection without looking two times after the green light has already come on. Why people go through that red light as if it was not there. It’s dangerous to your ultimate well being to enter from the green light from the Alpha side without a careful look both ways. Let me assure you. There is no trust in our society whatsoever. If you look at the people who drive around you, you will see contempt for the law, small matter but contempt for the law.

Now, of course, we look at things like the traffic because we can see that, but what we see in society is the same thing except it’s hidden. In white-collar crime today, our newspapers -- read *The Wall Street Journal*. If you don’t think men are sinners, read *The Wall Street Journal*. Our society is filled with men who are cutting corners. You find there is hardly an issue of that paper that does not speak of someone who has disclosed



information or taken advantage of some law by which he make himself an extra hundred thousand or maybe an extra ten or fifteen million. That’s characteristic of our society. And characteristic also of it is that we do not punish such individuals as they should be punished. Men commit great crimes. And if they are caught they enter prison for a few months and they are let go to go out and do the same things that they possibly can.

Lawfulness is the cohesion of our society. And as far as blame is concerns, of course it stands with the family, first of all, and it stands with the church as well because we have not taught the word of God as we should have. And also coming in for some of the blame is higher education because higher education has taken a journey into secular city and, consequently, in our higher education, there is no real teaching of the fundamental principles and the philosophical reasons and the religious reasons for law in our society.

Amos would have been stirred to the deepest part of his spirit if he lived in our day. Amos is a word for our society. I hope you read this particular prophet. I hope you profit from it. The land of Amos was a land that was ruled by two able men, Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom, Uzziah in the Southern Kingdom, both extremely able rulers. In fact, Jeroboam the II may have been speaking humanly the most able or the ablest of the rulers of northern Israel since the days of Solomon. Israel had grown, one of the commentators said, prosperous, pious, and pitiless. And Amos with the eye of a prophet saw that while everything looked marvelous -- inflation was low, interest rates were low, goods were plentiful, crisis were nice, everybody was making money. They had summer homes and winter homes. And they were able to furnish their pieces of furniture with ivory -- inlaid ivory to make them really nice. The markets were great -- but Amos with the eye of God saw that it was corrupt within and the time was coming when Israel would be destroyed as it existed in Amos’s day. Captivity was not far away.

Arnold Toynbee has described in his most remarkable work twenty-one successive human civilizations. He said seven were still present in his day. As he analyzed them, he

saw that in each case there was a breakdown by internal decay. The downfall of Rome of course has been well-publicized as having had that downfall for that very reason. Anyone with a spiritual understanding with a word of God looking at the society of which we are a part cannot help but see that we are a nation sick and corrupt in the inmost spirit of our being.

We are not the United States of America that we once used to be. A remarkable thing about Amos is that scholars have said with reference to Amos that he is the author of the purist and most classical Hebrew in the entire Old Testament. Think of that coming from a shepherd. There was a man who spoke his language in the tongues of someone who came from Cambridge, Oxford, or Charleston. [Laughter] Is that striking? I consider that really striking that from this shepherd should come language that is the purist and most classical Hebrew in the entire Old Testament.

Jerome in the fifth century noticed it. He said he was rude in speech but not in knowledge. He was an orator. His style is grave and impressive and remarkably excellent. If this is the first prophet who speaks -- and it’s possible Amos is the first of the prophets to speak for us then it’s the oldest volume of sermons extant. And analyzing Amos just for your reading there are three divisions in this book. He, first of all, speaks of eight judgments in chapter one and two. Then there are three discourses of doom in chapters three, four, five, and six. And he concludes five visions. So as you’re reading along, if you want some help, eight judgments chapter one and two, three discourses of doom in chapter three through six, and five visions in chapter seven through nine. In the midst of those visions, he’s interrupted by the priests of Bethel by the name of Amaziah, and he has a nice little conversation with him and gets thoroughly the best of Amaziah in it. I’m sure you will find it interesting and profitable.

Now, what can we say about the value of this book? Great fundamental truths stand out. First of all, the vindication of the justice of God. Let me read again a few of

these passages. One of them or two of them I’ve read previously, but I want to read them as indicating vindication of the justice of God. Chapter 4 in verse 13 we read,

“For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind And declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness And treads on the high places of the earth, The LORD God of hosts is His name.”

In chapter 5, verse 8, one that I’ve read previously notice the same pattern they are what may be called apostrophes in which he turns to talk about the Lord,

“He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The LORD is His name.”

And then in chapter 9, verse 5 and verse 6 he writes,

“The Lord GOD of hosts, The One who touches the land so that it melts, And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt; The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth, He who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the face of the earth, The LORD is His name.”

Vindication of the justice of God.

And then the second thing that is, I think of extreme value in this book, is his attack on elaborate insincere worship. He says that’s an offense to God. In chapter 5 in verse 21 we referred to this,

“I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.” [Verse 23,] ““Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.”

That’s a word for us today. That’s a word for us in Believer’s Chapel. Have you ever thought, I’d better go to church because it’s the right thing to do? There are a lot of people who go to church for that reason. They go to church purely for that reason. In fact, while they’re in the meetings of the church, they’re not thinking about worshipping the Lord God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ at all. They’re just patting themselves on the back that they are there. And they’re looking around often to see who else is there and who is not there. And they’re thinking about other things too like what they’re going to do tomorrow morning in their offices or perhaps cutting out a new dress or shopping at the mall or all of the other things that characterize the thoughts of individuals whose faces Sunday look exceedingly pious and nice.

I know. I do that, too. I find myself coming to the things that meetings such as this and sitting at the Lord’s Table and thinking about mundane things. Amos has a word for me. Amos has a word for all of us if we’re characterized by that, elaborate insincere worship is an offense to the Lord God. It’s bad enough to have no contact with the Lord God but to have contact with him and to reject it practically is even worse. And so he says I hate your festivals. I reject them. I do not delight in your solemn assemblies. And you can put church attendance, sitting at the Lord’s table, observing the ordinances of baptism or whatever if it’s not done in the spirit of the truth of the word of God, it’s something that offends God in heaven.

The final thing that I think makes Amos a book of tremendous significance is his stress upon human responsibility. Listen to him when he talks about divine election. He says in chapter 3, verse 2,

“You only have me among all the families of the earth,” [or you only have I chosen among all the families of the earth] “Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

In other words, the greater the privilege, the greater the understanding, the greater the insight into spiritual truth, the greater the responsibility. The Apostle Peter sets that forth in his first letter in the fourth chapter. Judgment begins at the house of God. It doesn’t begin with the world. It begins with the house of God. The world’s not accepted but God’s judgment begins with those who know truth and who do not respond to the truth.

Now, we did read a passage from Scripture. I want to say a few words about the first two verses before we go. Just a few comments. You’ll notice that these verses are an introduction to the book. The prophet, after describing himself, says in the second verse and he said the Lord roars from Zion.

Now, notice the word for Lord. This is Yahweh. This is the covenant-keeping God. This is the holy God. This is self-existent God. The God who derives his being from himself, not from anyone else, such as you and I do. We are dependant creatures always. He is an independent being dependent only upon himself. No one give him life. He’s holy and righteous and just as well as merciful and gracious to his people. The Lord. The Lord, Yahweh roars from Zion.

Now, one of the students of Amos has said something like this: the human spine has endless capacity for being chilled. That’s evident by the movies that appear on the screen this week. See some of them and get chilled. We like to do that, don’t we. Go to see movies like *The Fly*. I went to that when I was a kid, *The Fly*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and so on all down the line. They all knew we love to get there and we love to be chilled by them. Why is it?

This man asks that when we go to the zoo we always have the best visit to the zoo if we can arrive at the lion’s cage when the food is given to the lions. And to hear a lion roar and pounce upon the meat and tear it apart, my, that is really up picture, isn’t it? But now strip away the bars and strip away the cage and then meet a lion out in the deserts of Africa or someplace like that, it’s entirely different.

Samson had that experience. He’s an expert on that. He’s the best commentator on the difficulties of dealing with the lion. And as a matter of fact, the lions learned a lot from Samson because that was the worst mistake that a lion ever made was roaring and pouncing on Sampson because the spirit of God came upon Samson, we read, as he was wandering near Timnah, and he took that lion and he tore it to pieces.

Now, I know that people from the SPCA may not like that, but let me assure you it was either Samson or the lion, and in this case it was Samson. And I’m happy that he tore the lion to pieces, but listen, Can God be like that? Can God really be like a lion, a pouncing ferocious lion desirous to destroy its prey? That’s what Amos says. He says, “the Lord roars from Zion and from Jerusalem he utters his voice.” He’s not the only prophet who speaks that way. Just look up on the next page at verse 16 of chapter 3 of Joel and you read,

“The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, And the heavens and the earth tremble But the LORD is a refuge for His people And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.”

So God can be like this. We say God is a God of love. True. God is also like a lion pouncing upon his prey. He’s the righteous holy God. And when we break and violate the law of God we suffer for it. And our society is suffering today and individuals as will suffer when they violate the law of God. Notice he speaks from Zion and from Jerusalem. You might think he would speak from Rome or from Tarsus or someplace like

that, but it’s from Zion and it’s from Jerusalem. He speaks from the place of wrath and mercy the altar chosen by him. There was only one place where sacrifice could be offer in Amos’s day. That one place was Jerusalem. They offered sacrifices in the northern kingdom, but they were all rejected by the Lord God. In fact, the elaborate religion of northern Israel was all rejected by the Lord God because it was false.

Religion must be carried out according to the word of God. But even in Jerusalem where a sacrifice could find acceptance, it’s there that God speaks, because the altar, while it’s the place of mercy when we think of the Lord Jesus dying for saints, it’s also the place of judgment, for our Lord dies because of human sin. And thus Calvary, the altar is reminiscent of the love and mercy of God and reminiscent also of the judgment and wrath of a holy God as well. And so the Lord God speaks from Zion and from Jerusalem. It’s from there that he utters his voice. And while there is still marvelous gentle tones of the Holy Spirit who brings men an effectual grace to the Lord Jesus Christ because of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross, there is also the roar of the divine sovereign Lord who punishes human sinners. We are responsible. We are blessed, too, by this one Lord God. He speaks from Zion and from Jerusalem and Amos says the shepherds pasture grounds mourned and the summit of Carmel dries up.

What that essentially means is that no matter where you are, God’s hand touches you. The whole world is under the observation of the God of Amos, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the God and Father of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense, this verse is a summary of the total message of the prophet Amos.

If you’re here this morning and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the mercy that comes from the altars in Jerusalem, the place where sacrifice should be offered or the mercy that comes from Calvary, the fulfillment all of those offerings of the Old Testament that mercy is available for men and women who acknowledge their sin and who flee from their certain condemnation to the Lord Jesus Christ. May God and his marvelous grace and mercy move in your heart to bring you to the knowledge of yourself.

May you confess your sin. May you flee to Christ and receive him as your own personal Savior, the burden of your sins will roll off for you of your back. You will know what it is to be forgiven and justified before the Lord God. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust only in him for life and salvation. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the preservation of the words of Amos which Thou dost give him so many centuries ago for they minister to us, convicting us. And, Lord, we pray that by the grace we may respond, confessing our sin, confessing our failures, confessing our rebellion. And may by Thy grace we be enabled to serve Thee and worship Thee in our day in a way that will please thee like Amos.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.