

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 16: Listen To What God Says
(Amos 3)

In last week's lesson, we looked at God's judgment on the six Gentile nations surrounding Judah and Israel and the judgment of God's own people. The title was The Lion Roars! And God certainly did, with the "voice of a lion." God used a herdsman and a cultivator of sycamore trees, named Amos, to deliver these messages of judgment.

If chapters 1 and 2 could be outlined as "Look Around and See God's Judgment," then chapters 3 through 6 can be outlined as "Look Within and See the Corruption. Amos 3—6 cover three sermons delivered to the people of Israel.

Let's look at Amos 3, Listen To What God Says.

Message #1: Israel's judgment certain (Amos 3:1-15)

Now that Amos had the attention of the people, he proceeded to deliver three messages, each of which begins with "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). By using this phrase, he reminded them that they weren't listening to a mere man making a speech; they were listening to a prophet declaring the living word of God.

It's indeed a great privilege to have God speak to us, but it's also a great responsibility. If we don't open our hearts to hear His Word and obey Him, we're in grave danger of hardening our hearts and incurring the wrath of God. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:7-8 NKJV; see Ps. 95:7-11).

The first message (Amos 3) was one of ***explanation***, in which Amos clarified four divine calls and announced that Israel's judgment was certain. His second message (Amos 4) focused on ***accusation***, in which the prophet denounced Israel's sins. The final message (Amos 5:1-6:14) was a ***lamentation*** as the prophet felt the anguish of his nation's certain doom.

In this first message, Amos explains the significance of four divine calls.

1. God Called Israel (3:1-2)

This message was delivered to "the whole family," that is, to both Israel and Judah; for both kingdoms were guilty of disobeying God's holy law. Amos reminded them of their divine calling as the people of God, a calling that they were prone to despise and forget.

What kind of calling did God give to the Jewish nation?

- a) To begin with, it was a ***gracious*** call; for the Lord had chosen them and no other nation to be the special recipients of His bountiful gifts.
 - i. "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the people on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all

- people; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers” (Deut. 7:6-8 NKJV; see Ex. 19:1-5).
- ii. This principle of gracious election also applies to the church. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16 NIV); and Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, nor many noble, are called”; but that God chose the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:26, 29).
 - iii. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and it was purely an act of grace.
- b) God’s call was also an **effective** call (Amos 3:1b), for the Lord had demonstrated His great power in delivering Israel from the bondage of Egypt.
- i. The blood of the Passover lamb protected the Jews from death, and they were taken through the Red Sea to be separated from Egypt forever.
 - ii. Christians today have been saved by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 2:18-19; 3:24) and separated from the world because of His mighty resurrection (Eph. 1:19-23).
- c) Third, their calling was an **exclusive** call (Amos 3:2a). “You only have I chosen [known, KJV] of all the families of the earth” (NIV).
- i. The word known indicates an intimate relationship, such as that of husband and wife (Gen 4:1). “To know” means “to choose” (see 18:19; Jer.1:5), a term Paul applies to Christian believers (Rom. 8:29).
 - ii. Because they were exclusively the Lord’s, God did for Israel what He did for no other nation (9:4-5).
- d) Finally, it was a calling that involved **responsibility** (Amos 3:2b).
- i. Because He had chosen them, called them, and blessed them, the people of Israel and Judah were responsible to love God and obey Him. If they didn’t, God was responsible to chasten them in love and seek to bring them back to Himself.

The doctrine of divine election is not an excuse for sin; rather it is intended to motivate us to holy living. We should be so humbled by His grace and so amazed at His love (1 John 3:1-2) that our hearts would want to do nothing other than worship and serve Him. Privilege always brings with it responsibility (Eph. 1:3-5; John 15:16; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9).

As God’s chosen people, we’re to live worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1) and not follow the practices of the unsaved world (v. 17). This means living in love (5:2), in wisdom (v.15), and in the Spirit (v.18). To do anything less is to live beneath our high calling and the privileges we have as the children of God.

2. God Called Amos (3:3-8)

At this point, the people were probably saying, “Who is this rustic farmer that he should preach to us and claim to be God’s prophet? What kind of authority does he think he has?”

- a. Amos even dared to preach uninvited at the king’s chapel at Bethel, where King Jeroboam’s chaplain told Amos to go home and preach in Judah (Amos 7:10-16).

- b. Amos replied to their ridicule by arguing from the effect to cause. If two people want to walk together, they have to appoint a time and place to meet (Amos 3:3). If the lion roars, it's because he's caught his prey (v. 4). If a trap springs, it means the bird has been caught (v. 5); and if the people in a city are terrified, it's because the trumpet has blown, warning them of danger (v. 6). These are obvious facts of life that any thinking person would acknowledge.
- c. Now for the final thrust: If an untrained rustic farmer is preaching God's Word, it means God has called him. This isn't the vocation Amos would have chosen for himself; it was chosen for him by the Lord.
- d. When a prophet proclaims God's Word, it's because the Lord is about to do something important and wants to warn His people (3:7). Because he was walking with God, he knew God's secrets. See Ps. 25:14.
- e. Amos clearly made his point. It was no accident of vocational choice that he was proclaiming God's message, for God had called him. What caused Amos to preach God's Word? The call of God on his life.
- f. Amos serves as an encouragement to all believers who feel they are inadequate to do the work of the Lord. He was a layman, not a graduate of a prophetic school. He learned spiritual truth as he communed with God while caring for the flocks and orchards. Self-taught? Yes, but he was God-taught; and willing to share with others what God had said to him. This is not to minimize the importance of either training or education, but to remind us that neither can be a substitute for heeding God's call nor walking in communion with Him. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 NIV).

3. God Calls Witnesses (3:9-10)

- a. In his day, the prophet Isaiah called heaven and earth to witness against Judah (Isa. 1:2; see Deut. 30:19; 31:28); and Amos summoned the Gentile nations to witness against the northern kingdom of Israel, whose capital was in Samaria.
- b. Israel's sin was so great that it appalled the pagan nations. It is tragic and humiliating when the unsaved world catches professed Christians in their sins (Abraham, Samson, David).
- c. Amos called for the Philistines and the Egyptians to witness what was going on in Samaria (Amos 3:8, 9).
- d. They were exploiting the poor and needy in the land. They were addicted to affluence and had greed. And more tragic than their greed was their arrogance.

4. God Calls for Judgment (3:11-15)

- a. Amos announced that the kingdom of Israel would fall to an enemy and the great city of Samaria would be plundered. This happened in 722 BC when the Assyrians invaded Israel.
- b. To illustrate what would happen to Israel, Amos borrowed from his experience as a shepherd (Exodus 22:10-13).
- c. According to 2 Kings 17:5, the Assyrians killed some Israelites, took others captive, and then brought into the land captives from other nations, thus producing a people with a diverse racial and religious backgrounds. The surviving Jews in the ten tribes of the

northern kingdom married people who were not Jews, and this produced the people we know as the Samaritans.

- d. Amos made it clear that the invasion of the Assyrians was the work of God, for He was punishing Israel for her sins (Amos 3:14). Why? Because of their selfish luxury and their impudent idolatry.
- e. The Jewish kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon. King Jeroboam of Israel didn't want the people traveling to Jerusalem to worship, lest they go to Judah and never return to Israel. So, he established shrines with golden calves at Dan and Bethel.
- f. For two centuries, God in His longsuffering had tolerated the people of the northern kingdom as they participated in their idolatrous rival religious system, but now it would come to an end.
- g. Like Israel of old, nations today measure themselves by their wealth; and gross national product becomes the indicator of security and success. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer as people worship the golden calf of money and greedily exploit one another. It doesn't take long for God to wipe out the idols that people worship and the unnecessary luxuries that control their lives. He hears the cries of the poor and eventually judges the guilty (see Ps. 10:14; 10:14; 69:33; 82:3).

This isn't the end; Amos has two more messages to deliver.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- 1) How can we make sure we are really listening to God and not hardening our hearts?
- 2) Explain in your own words how God's call of Israel was gracious, effective and exclusive.
- 3) Why does such calling involve responsibility?
- 4) As believers, chosen people of God, how are we to live?
- 5) Why did God call a prophet at this time? Why did He call Amos?
- 6) Who else in the Bible was unexpectedly called of God for a powerful ministry?
- 7) How do education, natural talent, and personality fit into God's call?
- 8) God said of His people, "They do not know how to do right" (Amos 3:10 NIV). How is it possible not to know how to do right?
- 9) How can you and your church show more care for widows, orphans, the poor, and strangers?
- 10) In what way are you "addicted to affluence"? What influences are feeding this addiction? What can you do about this?

Homework: Read Amos Chapter 4.