Amos

Hosea was a marriage. Joel was locust. Amos is a plumb line. Amos 1:1 introduces Amos as a shepherd. See Amos 7:14 for further clarification. There is a message for all of us. Amos was not an important man but God called to be His servant. The words he used to describe himself present him simply as a shepherd caring for someone else's sheep. Only the poor who could not find work elsewhere were shepherds. In addition he described himself as one who took care of sycamore trees. The fruit of the sycamore tree was very similar to a fig. To ripen it one had to literally pinch the fruit. Amos said he was not a prophet, that is, he never attended the schools set up to train prophets. Bottom line, he was simply a regular man God sent to do a huge job. That is an immediate lesson since most of us would fall into a similar category. We are not among the greats of this world but when God calls He equips. If an Amos can go where God sent him and preach God's message, so can all of us. Every one can be used of God if we are available and willing to let Him work through us.

Amos introduced his ministry by saying the "Lord was roaring from Zion." Zion was Jerusalem. Amos had left his home in Tekoa, just south of Jerusalem on the edge of the wilderness, and traveled about 20 miles north to Bethel, which was on the northern side of the border between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. His message was directed to the Northern Kingdom which means that Amos was an outsider. His announcement that God was roaring from Jerusalem was an immediate challenge to Israel in the north because they wanted their people to believe that Bethel, not Jerusalem was where they should go to meet with God. The picture of God roaring like a lion is an important one. The roar of a lion is awesome. A lion only roars when it is hunting and preparing to pounce. It roars so as to frighten that animal into a panic that will literally stop it in its tracks. Amos was telling the inhabitants of Israel that God was about to pounce in judgment. God was warning them via His roar that He was coming.

Then Amos did a tricky thing. He began with a series of pronouncements of impending judgments on the enemies of Israel. To put the approach of Amos into perspective it would be as if someone went to Washington DC and began preaching by declaring that God has determined to judge Russia and ISIS and maybe al Qaeda.

The formula God used is interesting. Before each judgment we read "For three sins, even for four." This was God's way of saying that He has been aware of their sins and patiently and even mercifully has allowed it to go on but the limit has been exceeded. If three was the limit then each nation has gone to the fourth. God would now judge.

After hitting all of the immediate enemies of Israel Amos added Judah. See Amos 2:4, As far as most in Israel were concerned their worst enemy was Judah. Judah are going to get it also. Israel could not have been happier with the message Amos was declaring to them.

The various denouncements against the nations involve the sins they had committed against Israel and other nations. They would be judged because they had sinned against other people,
which of course is in the end a sin against God. Notice that it was not until Amos got to Judah that he said they would be judged, "Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees." One of the questions often asked is how God can judge those who have never heard the Word. Amos provided an answer. None of the surrounding nations were judged for ignoring or rejecting God's Word which they did not have but for sins against others that the Spirit of God within all men made clear was wrong. They sinned against the light they had and for that they would be judged. Judah, on the other hand, had Scripture and the truth. Their rejection of the Word and the worship of false gods was the basis of their judgment.

Amos' pronouncement is found in Amos 2:6. In the minds of the people Amos moved from preaching to meddling. Amos got too close to home. It's OK to preach against sins we don't commit like murder and stealing but don't go near gossip, anger, etc. Israel wanted Amos to stop. Amos said Israel had set false and meaningless worship. They had their own worship and mingled it with pagan practices. Amos had a lot more to say. Read Amos 3:3 that sums up their problem. God had expectations for Israel and Israel was not willing to live appropriately. Israel was better off materially than they had been since Solomon. Amos declared that in the midst of prosperity the rich were mis-treating the poor. That serves as a reminder of the responsibility we have as a richly blessed people to care for those who are less fortunate. God cares deeply for those who are hurting and in want.

Amos began in chapter 7 to share pictures related to God’s interaction with Israel. As soon as Amos began to meddle he got into trouble. The high priest, who was not a priest of God, sent a letter to the king. Read Amos 7:10-11. If you read the verses between Amos 2:6 and note that Amaziah's letter contained a lie and a half truth. Satan is the father of all lies and he loves to spread lies or half truths about what a church teaches. If a pastor speaks against the practice of homosexuality the way it is told in the community he hates homosexuals. Call sin a sin and he is accused of being against those who have a right to choose. That is exactly what Amos faced.

In chapter 7 and following Amos presented 5 powerful pictures of how God said He was going to deal with Israel. In Amos 7:1-3 God said He was going to send locusts to destroy Israel. Amos pleaded with God to relent. God did. See Amos 7:3. In Amos 7:4-6 God said He was going to send fire that would destroy Israel. The fire pictured here is that of a drought aggravated by searing heat. Again Amos prayed and God relented. That gives a strong testimony to the power of intercessory prayer. We can and must pray for our children and grandchildren. God listens to the prayers of His people.

Amos 7:7-9 presented another picture. God declared that He had a plumb line. When He measured the conduct of Israel against His standard Israel fell far short. Amos 8:1-10 pictures Israel as a basket of overripe fruit. The imagery was that of sin that had gotten to the point that it had not only ripened but was beginning to spoil. When fruit gets to that point all that can be done with it is throw it out. Amos 9:1-10 shows God at the altar ready to judge. The verses show people trying to escape that judgment, all to no avail. Every single sin ever committed by anyone is going to be punished. The punishment is either taken on by Jesus or the individual will pay for it.
Back to the picture of the plumb line. Amos said that God has a plumb line that He uses to judge behavior by. Everyone knows how it works. It is simply a weight on a line that tells the builder what is straight and what is not. God's standard is revealed in Scripture and was lived out perfectly by Jesus.

God told Amos in 7:7 that a wall had been built that was true. The beginning was perfect. Man built a crooked wall in the Garden. Many Christians who have been re-created are living crooked lives.

God has a standard. Israel decided they could write their own rules. God said “Sorry, I set the rules. I set the standards. I have determined what is right and what is wrong and I will judge by that.”

Amos has many challenges for us. We should be challenged by Amos to be conscious of those in our midst as well as those elsewhere who are less fortunate. God cares deeply for the poor and disenfranchised.

A second challenge is for those who want to ignore God's standards and think they can compare their lives to others or those who think public opinion determines morality. It is too easy for us to compare our lives to others and decide that, compared to so and so, I am doing pretty well. Read Luke 18:10-11. Our standard is not how we compare to others but how we compare to God's plumb line.

We live in a time when society thinks it can vote on standards. The voters believe they can decide if it is legal for same sex couple to be married and that makes it right. God does not suddenly bend His plumb line to fit society's vote. Society can decide that a woman’s body belongs to her so she has the right to abort a living child if she does not want it but God does not bend His plumb line to allow for it. God does not bend His plumb line to fit the latest theory of science or psychology. God says, "I have a plumb line and what does not measure up is always wrong. End of story!"

Read Psalm 139:23-24 Amos would ask us to pray that prayer at least daily if not more often because in the end what God determines is straight is all that is genuinely straight.