

Text of messages delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 6th July 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and the need for flexibility.



Amos: A Small Book. A Big Voice. A Serious Challenge

This message explores the bold and uncomfortable words of the prophet Amos who was a humble shepherd called to confront a complacent, unjust, and spiritually shallow society. Through vivid historical context and striking parallels to modern life, we'll be challenged to evaluate our own worship, wealth, and concern for justice with a practical challenge to put in our diaries.

1. Introduction: Grant the Prophet

In our series called **Prophetic Words: Ancient Voices, Modern Hope**, we're looking at the life and words of seven of the minor prophets from the Old Testament. We're also encouraging you to perhaps try and use your own voices in our times, because if 75% of the messages the prophets spoke were directed at calling people back to God, prophecy is not so much *future-telling*, as it's *truth-calling*, and that's something all of us could be led to speak.

I've been challenged by this for a long time, but I'm just one voice among many that God calls to live prophetically. One of the ways that I try to exercise my voice is by articulating a Christian worldview in the public domain of online discussions. One of the social commentators that I follow is an Australian called **Carrick Ryan**. Recently he posted an article about how Christianity affects the politics of the United States. I'm not going to talk about the post, but I will say that most people who follow Carrick Ryan don't seem to be warm towards Christians, so I couldn't help myself when someone wrote, *'Church & State should always remain separate.'* While I think that's true

philosophically, it's impossible practically, because where there's people, there's politics. I chimed into the discussion to say that I don't agree with that statement and gave a few reasons why I thought that, including a statement that healthy Christianity is not a bad thing in politics.

Good for me, right? But let's just say, it didn't go well for me. I was waiting for some Christians to support me, but they were obviously away on holiday. Here's one comment that perhaps summarises the sentiment of the many responders: *'I totally disagree! All religion is institutionalised ignorance. Churches are cults of delusional stupidity. Theology is completely 100% baseless, with zero evidence, and faith 100% imaginary delusion. No place for Bronze Age baseless belief in this modern world. Fear, delusion, and ignorance is the boat on which religion sails. It only deserves extinction.'*

How would you respond to that?!

Why do I tell you this? Because I imagine that the prophet Amos experienced similar pushback. He spoke into comfort and power with truth, and it didn't go down well. Today we'll be looking at what the prophet Amos said and consider what he might be saying to us, as hard as it is to hear.

2. Prophetic Words: Ancient Voices, Modern Hope

Like me, Amos wasn't anyone particularly important in the grand scheme of things. We see in Chapter 1, Verse 1, that Amos was a shepherd who came from a small village called Tekoa, which was about 16k's south of Jerusalem. Perhaps it's like what Tokoroa is to the city of Hamilton in the Waikato – small and largely insignificant! In his own words in Chapter 7, Verses 14 & 15, Amos says, ***"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 ...'"***

Biblical scholar Thomas Cahill sums it up in what he wrote about Amos: *'God raised up a nobody from nowhere to tell the truth – openly, without riddles, and in everyone's hearing – a shepherd with the smell of the pasture still on him, bellowing out truth to the smug and perfumed.'*

Hold on folks, this might be uncomfortable!

3. Historical & Political Context

We can see at the beginning of Amos that he was obedient to God to speak on His behalf for about 2 years between 765-760BC, during the reigns of King Uzziah of Judah (southern kingdom), and King Jeroboam II of Israel (northern kingdom).

At that time the northern kingdom of Israel was experiencing a time of great economic prosperity. They had some strong military victories and plenty of territorial expansion. Life was good. But the prosperity was uneven - the rich got richer while the poor were oppressed; religious hypocrisy was rampant as people worshipped at shrines but ignored God's ethical demands. There was idolatry, corruption in the courts, and exploitation of the poor. Similarly, the southern kingdom of Judah was experiencing economic growth and military strength under the reign of Uzziah, but similar issues of complacency and injustice were developing.

Further afield, Assyria, to the northeast, was recovering from an economic depression but would soon rise to power again, and Amos likely prophesied before Assyria became a serious threat, although that threat was on the horizon. Egypt was weak and politically fragmented during this time and Phoenician cities, like Tyre and others, were involved in trade that was often exploitative, including the slave trade, which Amos denounces.

The big picture is that Amos speaks into a time of external peace, but also to a time of internal moral and spiritual decay. The messages he brings on behalf of God were in the form of warnings:

- 1. Don't confuse material success with God's approval, and**
- 2. God is not impressed by festivals and songs if injustice is prevalent.**

Ancient voice, modern issues, and just like Israel, we too can be lulled into thinking we're fine, we're comfortable, we're ... blessed. But how would these warning go down if they were spoken to us, today?

3. What did Amos say

At the very beginning of this minor prophet, we see an emotive God. Verse 2 says, ***The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem.*** This is a serious business that Amos is relaying, ***The Lord ROARS from Zion and THUNDERS from Jerusalem.***

The audience that are hearing these words are those in the northern kingdom of Israel (not the modern nation-state we think of today as this was 2,700 years ago, in a very different world), but Amos has a fascinating way of getting them to hear him by prophesying against everyone else *except* Israel. What a powerful literary device – making his audience think that God is angry with everyone else! How smug we feel when we look at the faults of others, right? How many times do we think of someone else when we hear God’s voice of correction – “*Yeah, that friend of mine needs to sort their life out*”; “*that’s a good word God, for [insert name].*”

It takes God speaking into the lives of eight other cities and people before the intended recipients in the northern kingdom of Israel are addressed:

1. **Chapter 1, Verse 3, “*For three sins of DAMASCUS, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**
2. **Verse 6, “*For three sins of GAZA, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**
3. **Verse 9, “*For three sins of TYRE, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**
4. **Verse 11, “*For three sins of EDOM, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**

The people in this list were being told that God’s wrath was on them for all kinds of things that God was not supportive of, like inhumane warfare and large-scale slave-trading. And then Amos starts to bring things a little closer to home as he continues:

5. **Verse 13, “*For three sins of AMMON, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**
6. **Chapter 2, Verse 1, “*For three sins of MOAB, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**
7. **Verse 4, “*For three sins of JUDAH, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.*”**

Again, the accusations revolve around inhumane practices and the breaking of cultural norms. As Amos gets closer to the nation to whom he's speaking, Judah is condemned ***Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed.***

And then all the chickens of Israel come home to roost. No more are they looking at their neighbours with disdain as Amos roars and thunders:

8. Verse 6, ***"For three sins of ISRAEL, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath."***

From then on we see the ultimate purposes of God taking a shepherd from the sticks to the streets of the city, as God, through Amos, unleashes the full weight of his message with a long list of transgressions that indicates God's wrath is directly aimed at them and that their lifestyles and their actions are what God is wanting to address. For example, in Chapter 2 alone talks about Israel:

- Oppressing the innocent and the poor (2:6b-7a).
- Engaging in pagan religious sexual practices (2:7b).
- Abusing the system of pledges and fines (2:8).
- Showing a lack of respect for God's prophets (2:12).

The other nations don't look quite so bad now, and at its very essence, they should know better, because as God says (2:10-11), ***"I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites. I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel? declares the Lord."***

After all that God has done for His people, Amos is addressing the present reality that God's people have abandoned His love and His purposes for their lives, zooming in particularly through the remaining chapters to the big topics of **justice** and **worship** and ultimately their **complacency** brought on by their wealth and apparent success. Listen to what Amos says in Chapter 6, Verse 1, ***"Woe to you who are complacent, and to you who feel secure."*** And then from Verse 4, ***"You lie on***

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beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions (I mean, hello, this doesn't sound all bad, does it?!), ***but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.***"

In Chapter 5, Verse 24, we come to a verse that is perhaps one of the most well-known verses in this book, ***"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"*** This is God's fervent desire for his comfortable complacent sons and daughters. In Hebrew, the word for 'justice' is 'mishpat'—a justice that involves fairness, protection, and restoring equity. It's not punishment; it's setting things right. This is the mission that God's people have lost and is what He is calling them back to – to be people that seek justice in their world rather than enable injustice.

Of course, Amos follows the pattern we've already identified that flows through all the prophets. God calls the people to account for their actions and to stop turning away from Him. But equally, while Chapter 5 has strong judgement associated with it, it also, together with sections of Chapters 8 & 9, increasingly show the redemptive side of God's character:

Chapter 5, Verse 4, ***This is what the Lord says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live."*** And again, in Verse 6, ***Seek the Lord and live.*** And Verse 15, ***Seek good, not evil, that you make live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.*** Chapter 9, Verse 11, ***In that day I will restore David's fallen tent, I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be.*** Hope, healing, and restoration, all the promises that God keeps to those who follow His ways. God is not just roaring **at** those he was speaking to, but He was roaring **for** them, out of love. ***"Come back, I want you to know the fulness of life!"***

So, to enable these ancient words to become modern hope, we must ask ourselves whether the issues that God was speaking into through Amos apply to our lives. We must discern whether God is seeking to hold us accountable to the same kinds of issues.

So, I wonder ...

4. How this applies to us

While we look at the wider world and wrestle with issues of **justice** in Sudan, Gaza, Ukraine - and we could expand that list to the 110 armed conflicts that the Geneva Academy of International Law and Human Rights monitors - conflicts that don't make our headlines even though some of them have lasted more than 50 years, the question Amos would be asking us is: *Do we look at issues of justice in our own backyard?* What about the injustices of our history here in Aotearoa; what about the injustices that occur in the workplaces we are involved in due to the greed of a few; what about the injustices that people endure due to the colour of their skin, or the denial of religious freedom?

And what would God say to us about our **worship**? God says to Israel in Chapter 5, Verses 21-23, *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps."*

I mean, it's confronting, right?! Do we ever mistake great worship for a great spiritual life? God doesn't want just noise and lights and offerings on a Sunday, he wants ... relationship and He wants faith into action. Maybe we feel we're 'blessed' because of our home-ownership rates, our full calendars, or a growing church ... but are we overlooking the brokenness just beyond our gates?

5. ACTION: Thursday @ 4pm

It's one thing for us to read Amos on a Sunday, or in our Life Groups, or to undertake the exegesis of words and phrases, but we can clearly see that the issues that Amos addressed weren't just for his time, they are issues that we still wrestle with, today.

I want to leave you with a challenge, and it's not a challenge for today. After reading Amos and hearing its message, what does godly justice and worship look like in your life this coming **Thursday @ 4pm**. You might be at work, you might be at home, you might be on holiday, you might be out for

a run – but the prophets always ask: what does faith in action *look* like in the ordinariness of our everyday lives?

So, I'd like you to turn on an alarm for this coming **Thursday @ 4pm** (and perhaps every Thursday @ 4pm) and spend as long as you feel you can thinking about what justice, worship, and complacency look like for you. I roughly know where I'll be, so I'll take up that challenge as much as you.

- With the challenge to consider **justice**, perhaps you can think about how to work out ethical purchasing decisions so that you're not complicit in the exploitation of offshore workers, or
 - Maybe we could think about how we stand up for the marginalised and oppressed in our workplaces, or in our streets, or
 - Perhaps we could think about our participation in a justice-based ministry, or our willingness to support God's mission in our world through our time, our skills, our money.
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- With the challenge to consider **worship**, maybe we could reflect on how we worship on a Monday, a Tuesday, or a Thursday, or
 - We could consider how the lyrics that we sing on a Sunday translate into the words that we speak on ... Thursday, or
 - We could ask God to help us use the unique design he's planted in us to help others worship, through poetry, art, physical enablement, or through songwriting.

Amos. A small book. A big voice. A serious challenge. God can rebuild what is broken—in Israel, in the church, and in you. This ancient voice still carries modern hope, because the God who roared in Amos' day still whispers to us: ***"Seek me and live."***

Amen.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

Reflecting on Sunday 29th June 2025: Last Sunday Pastor Grant gave us homework – firstly, to ask those around us what they thought prophecy was and who prophets are, and secondly, to read through the book of Amos three times. How did you go with both of those things and what did you sense God saying to you?

Questions from this week's teaching:

1. **When have you mistaken comfort or success for God's blessing?** How can we discern the difference between being "blessed" and being complacent?
2. **What forms of injustice are easiest to ignore in your everyday life - at work, in your community, or in your spending?** What might it look like to "let justice roll on like a river" in those places?
3. **How would you describe the difference between 'worship on Sunday' and 'worship on Thursday'?** In what ways could you express worship more fully throughout your week?
4. **What will you do this Thursday at 4pm to live out Amos' challenge?** Set an alarm and share one small, practical step you will take toward justice or worship in action.

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The Bible Project has an excellent video called, **Book of Amos Summary: A Complete Animated Overview**. See it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>
2. Systemic injustice, poverty and oppression were things that Amos deeply cared about. The **International Justice Mission (IJM)** is a global organisation that protects people in poverty from violence. They partner with local authorities in 33 programme offices in 19 countries to combat trafficking and slavery, violence against women and children and police abuse of power. Check out the IJM website to understand more of their mission and consider joining as a prayer partner: <https://www.ijm.org/>
3. The **YouVersion Bible App** is the worlds leading app to not only read the Bible on, but to see a suite of other useful resources. Download the app and create your own account and then set Windsor Park Baptist Church as 'My Church'. Each week we recommend a short devotional plan (you'll get a notification about a new plan each week). This week we'll recommend **7 Days in Amos**, which is a short devotional series that walks through key themes in Amos; it contains easy to follow daily reflections with Scripture and prayer prompts.