

# A New Day

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     We have been doing a sermon series on Amos and you actually reached the tail end of it. This is today, we're in the last chapter of Amos and I trust that it's been quite a ride where we've seen a side of God that perhaps we're not so used to. And even though Amos has made us uncomfortable at times, but I trust he's also enlarged our vision of God. In your bulletin, there's also a sermon outline and that will help you to follow along as well. Let's pray. Father, I ask again that you be at work through the book of Amos as you have been over the past two months or so. I pray that you would use your word to convict us and also to encourage us to see indeed you are the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the one who creates heaven and earth and who rescues us for the new creation.
- [ 1 : 1 4 ]     All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder if you've ever heard of futurists or futurologists. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies the earliest use of the term in 1842, but it only really became more common in the 20th century. These are people who study social, political and technological developments in our world to try to understand and predict the future. They try to work out how it might affect society and so advise organisations like governments and businesses accordingly. Now, sometimes they are way off the mark. For instance, Paul Ehrlich, who wrote a book half a century ago called *The Population Bomb*, predicted that hundreds of millions of people would die of starvation in the 1970s. Well, we can confidently say that that didn't happen. But sometimes they can get it pretty spot on. Back in 1964, the novelist Isaac Asimov, he's the guy who wrote the book *I, Robot*, which eventually became the Will Smith movie a few years ago. Well, he was asked to predict life in 2014 and remember his writing in 1964. So here's what he wrote in a New York Times article. Communications will become sight, sound, and you will see as well as hear the person you telephone.
- [ 2 : 4 7 ]     The screen can be used not only to see the people you call, but also for studying documents and photographs and reading passages from books. Now, that's pretty good, isn't it? He predicted Skype and Kindles. And that's why governments and businesses still pay good money to consult futurologists. They want to be prepared and to be in the best position possible to take advantage when the future becomes reality. Indeed, that's why we like to read all those lists of predictions of what life would be like in 2030, and why so many TED Talks major on visions of what is to come. We want to get a glimpse of the future so that we can know better how to approach the future. Well, the prophet Amos has a clear glimpse of the future.

Or perhaps more accurately, here at the end of the book, he has a clear glimpse of the person who holds the future. Now, two weeks ago, we said that chapters 7 to 9 consisted of five visions.

[ 4 : 02 ] And in chapter 9, the final vision of this book, Amos begins by simply telling us, I saw the Lord.

He simply watches as the ultimate futurologist moves into action. And that's different from the previous four visions. Previously, we saw plenty of communication between God and Amos.

We find Amos pleading and God relenting. And even in chapter 8, God was still asking Amos questions.

But the time for dialogue is over. Amos now falls silent. He becomes a passive bystander, watching this vision unfold before his very eyes.

Only God speaks. In verse 1, it is the Lord who is speaking directly. In verses 7, 9, 12, 13, and 15, we discover it is only he who is doing the declaring.

[ 5 : 15 ] And the Lord is speaking about the future. Oh, he's not speaking about advances in robotics, or whether there's going to be a man on Mars, or things like that.

But he's speaking about the future of his people. And he's saying, the day of reckoning is here.

You see, if a bank never caught in a mortgage defaulter, but simply keep extending the deadline indefinitely, well, it would make a whole mockery of the whole process, wouldn't it?

There has to be a day of reckoning. And so God's day of reckoning must come. He has been very patient, but he cannot extend his patience indefinitely.

Over and over again, he's been calling his people back to himself. Remember chapter 3? The lion has roared, he tells Israel.

[ 6 : 20 ] And he's really implying there, so let this lion carry you instead of devouring you. Or remember chapter 5?

Seek me and live, he says. Seek me and get your spiritual heart pumping again. God isn't indifferent.

He knows his people are spiritually empty and dead and lifeless. And so he's been speaking and communicating and interacting with them.

Because he wants his people to be full of life, to be satisfied in the fountain of delights, to be made whole and upright. He's not a tame lion, but he is good.

But because he's not a tame lion, he now has to tear down the whole building of Israel. How do you know when a building has to be demolished?

[ 7 : 24 ] When its foundations are faulty and beyond repair? When it's so infested with pests that it's uncontrollable? And when the authorities declare it unsafe, the official term is condemned.

And that's Israel. Resting on a faulty foundation, for as we've seen in the past few weeks, although their sanctuaries were crowded with worshippers bringing sacrifices, the word of God was very much ignored.

And as we've seen over the whole book of Amos, they're infested with those who exploit the poor, who oppress the innocent, who spread and encourage corruption.

And so God declares them unsafe. They are not a light to the world, but a hazard to the rest of humankind. They are now a condemned building.

And so God has to become the demolition contractor. But because he's not just a tame lion, but a good lion, God doesn't stop there.

[ 8 : 44 ] Amos has hardly been a feel-good book, but in an astonishing twist of events, it has a feel-good ending. For amazingly, seemingly out of nowhere, in the last five verses of this book, the future becomes bright again for the people of God.

The Lord paints a picture of such life, such hope, such newness, that some university professors are convinced that the last five verses could not possibly have come from Amos himself.

They think it was added centuries later by people who could not bear the bad news. These people needed to give it a Disney-like ending, they argue.

But there's no need to come to such a conclusion. For why is a building torn down? So that a new building can go up in its place.

Why is God the demolition contractor? So that he can become the great restorer. Why do we need to hear the bad news first? So that we can value more the good news.

[ 10 : 00 ] And how is all this relevant for us today? After all, the future being painted here for Israel is in the past for us. Judgment has already come upon them.

But Amos 9 remains relevant for us today because it shows us how we, as God's people, are to approach our future. For just like Israel, there is a judgment to come.

But just like Israel, there is also a great hope to come. We know our future. And more importantly, we know the one who holds our future.

And knowing God as that great demolition contractor and the great restorer should shape the way we approach life today.

And so this morning, let's make our way through Amos' final vision and under these two headings, the great demolition and the great restoration.

[ 11 : 07 ] Do keep your Bibles open in front of you. So firstly, the great demolition. If the visions of chapter 7 to 9 were episodes of a Netflix TV show, then vision or episode 4 has just finished, but vision 5 begins on autoplay.

Chapter 9 begins with Amos being immediately plunged into the final vision of the book. Verse 1, I saw the Lord standing by the altar.

We appear to be back in the temple with the Lord standing by or possibly above the altar. The Hebrew could be translated either way. He is seen in the position of authority, most likely in Bethel, the cathedral of the kingdom.

Now, normally that would be a good thing. After all, you go to the temple to meet with the Lord, and so if you have a vision of the Lord himself in there, normally you'll be very happy.

But Amos is hardly comforted, for he hears what God says. Verse 1 again, Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake.

[ 12 : 32 ] The Lord is not standing at the altar to receive worship or to bless. He is there to destroy. He summons the forces of nature to destroy this idolatrous shrine.

It is like an earthquake, although an unusual one, not caused by the shifting of tectonic plates from below, but from the shaking of God's hands from above.

Indeed, some commentators have noted that the shaking sounds just like Samson when he brought the temple of the Philistines down. But this is not the temple of the Philistines.

This is the temple of Israel. Yet God does not hesitate to begin his judgment in the sanctuary.

And the Lord doesn't just summon the forces of nature, but the human forces of a foreign land. Bring them down on the heads of all the people, those who are left, I will kill with the sword, he says.

[ 13 : 41 ] And this prophecy, of course, came literally true within decades. Israel suffered an actual earthquake and then was invaded by Assyria.

The Lord is beginning his demolition job. Sure, there was a temple, but its foundations are so compromised, God cannot bear to live in there.

The building has to be torn down. And the Lord makes clear that when the great demolition comes, we cannot escape.

There is no one who can hide from God the judge, not Israel in the past and not us in the future. End of verse 1. Not one will get away, none will escape.

Though they dig to the depths below, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens above, from there I will bring them down. Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them.

[ 14 : 50 ] Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them.

Go ahead and dig to the very bottoms of the earth, even the realms of the dead, the Lord says. I know your exact location. Climb up to the skies, to space, to the heavens itself, and even the realm of the supernatural will offer no protection for you.

You can make your way to Mount Carmel, historically a place of blessing and victory. After all, it's where Elijah had his showdown with the prophets of Baal and Wan.

But if God is after you, even the holy places cannot protect you. And you can even try to escape to another country and claim political asylum.

Be like Joe Lo, sleeping in and out of Hong Kong. But God is not just a territorial God who can only control what's within the borders of Israel.

[ 16 : 03 ] No, he can even use the enemies of God's people as his instruments to execute judgment against them. We cannot escape.

And that's always been true. Remember Adam and Eve back in the garden, trying to hide from their creator? But of course, God found them.

He knows every inch of his creation. God's eye is all-seeing and all-knowing. Now, let me just read to you some verses from Psalm 139.

They're quite famous. I'm sure you're familiar with them. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there.

If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there, your hand will guide me.

[ 17 : 08 ] Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me and the light becomes night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you.

The night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. I'm sure this is a favorite psalm for many, and these are verses that we traditionally read for comfort.

And that's right. God's omnipresence is a good thing. Whatever circumstances we're in, God is with us. But, we must also remember, this is also true when we are doing what is not right.

God is there with us. And of verse 4, back in Amos time, God says, I will keep my eye on them for harm and not for good.

God is right there when we are alone in our room looking at images on the computer or anonymously posting unpleasant comments on internet forums.

[ 18 : 23 ] God is right there even where no other Christian is present when we are treating our employees without dignity and ignoring the person who needs a human touch.

God is right there, not just in our difficult circumstances but also our sinful circumstances. And even when we wish God was not there, we cannot escape.

He sees everything. And that leads Amos to pause and bring before us a hymn of praise, verses 5 and 6.

The Lord, the Lord Almighty, He touches the earth and it melts and all who live in it mourn. The whole land rises like the Nile then sinks like the river of Egypt.

He builds His lofty palace in the heavens and sets His foundations on the earth. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land. The Lord is His name.

[ 19 : 35 ] You see? The fact that we cannot escape God's judgment is a good thing because it means that our God is not a small God.

He's a big God. Amos recognizes that. The Israelites thought that He was only confined to the temple which means that they could get away with all sorts of things whenever they were not in the temple.

But of course that's not true. Am I only a God nearby declares the Lord and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them declares the Lord?

Do not I feel heaven and earth declares the Lord? The prophet Jeremiah agrees with Amos. It is this Lord who rules the world.

The world is not ruled by blind fate. The world is not ruled by nature. The world is not even ruled by a FIFA referee as if God only blows the whistle when he sees something wrong but otherwise is not involved with the game.

[ 20 : 45 ] he is not dependent on VAR technology having to reveal things just because he's not sure if there has been a handball or not in the penalty box.

No, he transcends time and space. He controls all of creation all the time. The earth, the land, the heavens, the seas.

and he sees you and knows you every second of every day watching your every decision while maintaining absolute control.

This is the God of the universe. The Lord is his name and don't ever forget you live in his world.

Of course, we could still try to hide and escape from him. Nowadays, we don't try to hide from him by going away to some far away mountain or cave but we have other ways of escape.

[ 21 : 56 ] Let me just briefly mention three. There's the way of dismissal. That is, we try to hide and escape from God by simply dismissing him and his word altogether.

together. We might say, some of that stuff in the Bible is old-fashioned and outdated. Or we might question just how trustworthy is the Bible anyway.

And we don't even want to consider the evidence some of us heard about last night in the movie The Case for Christ. We simply dismiss God as our way of hiding from him.

as if he would just magically disappear by our human reasoning. Or there's the way of distraction.

It's not that we don't believe in God or the Bible, but we simply don't want to think about any of this stuff. We shift our attention to what we will eat for dinner this weekend, or the latest entertainment options in town, our Facebook newsfeeds, so that we don't have to think too much about God and what he's saying, and the big things of life, like the fact judgment is coming.

[ 23 : 16 ] We think that he'll just go away if we ignore him long enough. And then there's the way of devotion, except it's devotion of the wrong kind.

It's a devotion to all sorts of religious activities, rather than to God himself. By busying ourselves in church work, we are actually trying to escape God by telling him, see, Lord, I've done A and B and C in church, so let me do things my way in areas X, Y, and Z outside of church.

are you hiding from God in any of these ways? It doesn't work. The ways of dismissal and distraction and wrong devotion are ultimately ways of self-deception.

We convince ourselves God doesn't mind. that's what Israel thought. Look at verse 10. After countless warnings from Amos, they were still saying, disaster will not overtake or meet us.

Why were they still so confident? Because they thought of themselves as Exodus people. They were so certain that because God has rescued them in the past, during the Exodus, and had made promises to their ancestors, therefore, they had special privileges which guaranteed them special immunity.

[ 24 : 58 ] They were like the ambassador in a foreign land, who thinks he can make unwanted advances on the ladies, and behave drunkenly and disorderly in the public square, simply because he has diplomatic immunity.

He can't be prosecuted by the host country. But they were really deceiving themselves. Because God says, you cannot escape, because you cannot presume, we cannot presume.

Verse 7, Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites, declares the Lord? Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Kaptor, and the Arameans from Kier?

To Israel's big shock, God tells them, you're not as great as you think. God doesn't deny that he brought them out of Egypt. He doesn't deny that he made a covenant with them.

But he reminds them that he too oversaw the migration of their enemies, the Philistines and the Arameans. He cared even for the Cushites, whom everybody, Israel, Philistia, and so on, saw as nobodies.

[ 26 : 25 ] Yes, the Israelites were indeed chosen by God. They were treasured as a special position. But like the other people, they remain responsible for their behavior.

Yes, the exodus was hugely important, but to remember it without allowing their history to transform them, to identify as redeemed people ready to serve the Lord, would be like remembering baby Jesus every Christmas without letting that same Jesus be the Lord of your life all year round.

God is saying, blessings are not a right to be claimed, but the fruitful outworking of a godly life. You cannot presume.

Indeed, in verse 9, God will actually do some sifting. For I will give the comma, he says, and I will shake the people of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground.

He's making sure that all the impurities, all the lumps, the pebbles, it won't pass through the sieve of judgment, but that the good grain will be sorted out and refined.

[ 27 : 57 ] He only wants people who rest their foundations on the Lord. God will be so it's really important to not presume.

We cannot say, Jesus died, so I'm okay, if we are not relying on his death. We cannot say, I've been baptized, so I'm okay, if that baptism is not accurately reflecting your inward relationship with God.

we cannot say, I know the Bible, so I'm okay, if the Bible is not transforming you from the inside out. We cannot presume, for if we do, we will not survive the great demolition when it comes.

We will be the pebbles thrown into the trash heap. But that's not all this vision is about. Let's consider now the great restoration.

The great restoration. That's our second heading. In verse 11, we hear God say, in that day, and we take another deep breath.

[ 29 : 16 ] After all, in Amos, whenever God says something like, in that day, or on that day, it's a signal that he's about to declare another round of judgment. we're expecting something like the statement of verse 8.

Surely the eyes of the sovereign Lord are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth. That's the kind of statement we're expecting. But instead, what we get is more like the second half of verse 8.

Yet, I will not totally destroy the descendants of Jacob. We get a ray of hope. We cannot escape, we cannot presume, but we can hope.

And actually, in verses 13 to 15, sorry, 11 to 15, God goes much further than simply saying, I will totally destroy all of you.

Have a look. There's restoration. restoration. There's repairing. There's rebuilding. There's replanting.

[ 30 : 26 ] God is not just making a concession. He's fully invested in resurrection. God is saying to his people, despite everything, I still haven't abandoned you.

I'm still faithful to you even when you broke the wedding vows. I'm still looking out for you. Even when you were busy turning your back against me.

And he's saying to you today, you know what? I know all the bad stuff about you. I know all the things about you that you'll be terrified your enemies will discover.

I know all the things that would horrify the people who think that you're a good person. I know all the secret things that you worry about that will cause your loved ones to leave you if they only knew.

I know all the things that make you guilty for hell. Yet, I still love you. God and that's why I come to restore you and I am continually restoring you to be that beautiful building, that incredible tree, that divinely crafted human being you were meant to be.

[ 31 : 49 ] Because look, God says, I've already restored you. I've done so by bringing the king from David's line. Verse 11. I will restore David's fallen shelter.

God isn't saying, oh, David's residence hasn't been well maintained, so it needs a bit of a touch-up. No, instead he's saying, the kingdom I promised King David will not come to an end.

200 years before Amos, God made promises to King David that his kingdom would be a great and everlasting one. A king from his line would sit on the throne forever.

And because of the nation's sin, the kingdom is fallen. But God says this kingdom will rise again. It would be like the good old days when the kingdom was united, not divided as in Amos' day.

It would be like the days of the festivals of booths. You see that word shelter can actually be translated booth. If you look at some of the other English translations, that's how they're translated.

[ 33 : 07 ] And it seems to have been deliberately chosen by the prophet Amos because it recalled a time when the people remembered God, celebrated his salvation and worshipped him.

Those were the days when the festival of booths were first celebrated. And that kingdom God promised David came when the son of David, King Jesus, stepped into history, stepped into this world, and came to repair the hearts of God's people.

In Amos 4 verse 3, the city wars are breached because of Israel's idolatry. But now Jesus comes to repair the wars by fixing our ultimate problem, our sin.

The restoration work has already begun. And the restoration of this kingdom is now seen in God's multi-ethnic people.

Let me keep reading verses 11 and 12. I will repair its broken wars and restore its ruins. I will rebuild it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord, who will do these things.

[ 34 : 37 ] What's going on here? Well, come with me for the next few minutes. You see, what happens after Jesus dies and rises again? He gives the command, go and make disciples of all nations.

And of course, within a short period of time, we get many non-Jews following Jesus. There were so many of them that the Jewish church leaders had to call a meeting, which we read about in Acts chapter 15.

And how should we treat these new Gentile believers? That was the agenda of the day. And then James, one of the church leaders, he gets up and he says this in Acts chapter 15.

If it's too small on the screen, just quickly scroll to your relevant page in the Bible. But he says this, brothers, he said, listen to me.

Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, and then he quotes Amos chapter 9 verse 11 to 12.

[ 35 : 52 ] James is saying, look, God is fulfilling his promises to include Gentiles amongst his people. That's what we're seeing now.

All the people are turning to him. And that was always his plan because, James says, the prophet Amos said so long ago.

he said when the king from David's line, Jesus comes, the nations will come to him.

Edom. And all that Edom represents the Gentiles. And so these new believers need to be treated as equal partners in Christ.

And so Acts chapter 15 tells us that Amos 9, is not a prophecy about the restoration of an earthly political nation-state called Israel. But it's really about God's multi-ethnic church.

[ 36 : 58 ] And God has done this restoration work. We saw it in the book of Acts, but we can see it if we just look all around us. None of us here this morning are Jews.

Unless one or two of you happen to be visiting this morning in that case. Welcome. But how do we know that God is the great restorer? Because this congregation of B-E-M-K-E-C filled with Gentiles exists.

The restoration work has already begun. But there is still restoration work to look forward to in the future.

And that is the restoration of all creation. And that's the subject of verses 13 to 15. This is not a picture of the world now, but of the world as it will be.

Look at verse 13. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.



[ 38 : 10 ] New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. The picture here is one of abundance. The crops, they are producing so much that the one plowing will overtake the reaper, who is still trying to harvest all of last year's crops.

The grapes will be so lush that wine is pictured as flowing down the hills like a river from the excess of the grapes. This is what we're looking forward to.

Abundance, not austerity. Abundance with no anxiety. Abundance without apprehension. And that means we don't have to feel like we are missing out now.

We don't have to feel like we need to take everything off our bucket list or to accumulate stuff now because we have a world of abundance to look forward to.

We can give up our lives in service to King Jesus now because there is abundance awaiting us. back in Amos chapter 5 verse 11 God told his people although you build stone mansions you wouldn't live in them.

[ 39 : 36 ] Although you planted lush vineyards you would not drink their wine because those mansions and vineyards are paid for by oppressing and exploiting people.

but now look at verse 14 and I will bring my people Israel back from exile the Lord says they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them they will plant vineyards and drink their wine they will make gardens and eat their food they will enjoy all these because these vineyards and cities have been paid for by Christ's blood.

And this future is the most secure place to be verse 15 I will plant Israel in their own land never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them says the Lord your God no more sin that will cause people to be banished as in the first Eden no more Satan the enemy of God's people who would invade and lead the people astray no more condemnation because Jesus has endured God's judgment will not fall on us and so as we end remember this on that final day everyone will have to pass through a sieve his name is Jesus and the good news is that for all those who trust in him there is nothing to fear we have a secure hope

Amos gives us a glimpse into our future and it's called the great restoration but for those who do not yet trust in him well Amos gives you a glimpse of your future too it's called the great demolition so make sure you're on the right side God wants you on his team and I hope and trust that as we finish our time in the book of Amos not just chapter 9 but the whole book we have a bigger view of God I hope if nothing else you see this God is not a tame lion he is not to be messed with but at the same time he is good so find your refuge in him so that you don't need to take refuge from him let's pray father praise you praise you so much that although you are the lord who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets his foundations on the earth though you are the lord who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of land yet we know you lord as the savior who chose to take on the very nature of humankind and came down to this earth to die on the cross for us and so we could never thank you enough lord Jesus and father please help us to look forward to our glorious future where we will be restored once again to be the image of you that you created us to be and we look forward to the restoration of all creation where we will enjoy wine and fruit and total security but until then lord please help us never to presume help us not to think that we are safe if we are not but help us to every day keep relying on you knowing that there is no escape from you all this we pray in Jesus name amen to

Thank you.

[ 44 : 59 ] Thank you.