

The Movement - A Righteous Revolution

(Amos Five / Joel Two)

Introduction

First, let's start with an inductive premise followed by a deductive conclusion. *The world is positioned for what we call a "perfect storm."* By "perfect storm," I mean that the global climates for civil, social, cultural, political, religious, and economic platforms are unstable and unsustainable across the board. Civil and social unrest and divide are presently unsustainable. Cultural and political corruption, greed, and immorality are also unsustainable, leaving global economic viability on the brink of failure or if you prefer - collapse. We are in the early stages of either "**the**" Biblical end-times or the greatest global re-set in the history of mankind.

On the surface, that seems a bit gloomy for a Sunday morning, but then again, this is 2023. We have just lived through the greatest global power shift that any of us have ever seen in our lifetime. For example, control what the people know and what is known about them (information and narrative), control where the people can go (fuel and energy), and finally, control what the people can own and access (property, food, and healthcare). These control mechanisms, if not fully implemented, are already in place. Do not think conspiracy or politics - think Biblical reality and mankind's rebellion. So, in Biblical context, what seems to be the end of all things is, in fact, the beginning of all things - God of the paradox. With God, what was thought to be a gloomy and hopeless premise and conclusion can, in reality, be all joy and hope - good news. If you are struggling, let me help you get there with this...

2 Timothy 3:1-5

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable,

slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

Matthew 24:4-14

And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Having made the relevant connection or crossable bridge between these three Biblical texts and our current reality, we need to remember two critical truths. One, God's Word does not change—and two, God's world changes in every generation. Amos and Joel are two ancient prophets whose voices and message has not changed and yet, remain purposeful and appropriate for our ever-changing times. Their writing is relative and should resonate within the lives of followers of Christ and believers everywhere. Nothing in the past 2,500 years has made their messages obsolete.

Amos and Joel represent a movement toward God, a righteous revolution against evil and godlessness if you will. Not even the present-day practice of re-defining and re-writing Biblical context and Scriptural narrative can change the eternal truth of these two ancient voices. Both can be interpreted seamlessly into present-day reality without ignoring the original context or disrupting the intended meaning. So yes, Amos and Joel can and must still be heard. We must hear and then listen to their un-compromised message of right and righteous covenant relationship with God, their urgent call of fidelity to the order and authority of God's eternal and sovereign Word, and their intense appeal to establish and maintain a genuine habitation for the presence of Holy Spirit within us.

Amos

Israel had existed for nearly two hundred years as a separate kingdom (Northern and Southern) when Amos emerged with a strong message of condemnation and correction from God. The prophet addressed that society's political, social, religious, moral, and ethical problems. Amos called for repentance, justice, righteousness, and moral purity. And, twenty-six hundred years later, as we look around... well, here we are. Sound relevant enough?

Amos chapter five calls the spiritually compromised and sterile leaders and congregations to turn their self-awareness and appropriation into a genuine love for the righteousness of Christ Jesus and to return to a principled and knowledgable practice of Biblical fidelity. Amos beckons the capable and influential to do right by the wounded

and disadvantaged and, more importantly, to do right by God, who in His mercy called us His very own. He says, *“Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you. Seek Him and live.”*

Joel

In three short chapters (four in Hebrew), Joel gives a contextual (specific) word picture of how the prophets understood and implemented God's judgment, apocalyptic events, and the future of His people. Even for its brevity, more than any other book of the Bible, Joel is the book of the Day of the LORD.

So, regardless of the obstacles of time, passage, and language, Joel chapter two calls those who are overwhelmed by the great human struggle and the tragic events and circumstances of life to seek remedy and hope through the regenerative love and power of Creator God. Joel's words remain a profound “go-to” perspective on the presence of God and the downloading of the Holy Spirit into the lives of those who sincerely and humbly seek Him. He says, *“And it will come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. And, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

My prayer is this. Regardless of your age or status in life, you will join us to seek understanding and full engagement in what God is saying and doing in our day. Whether this is the ending or the beginning of what God is doing, **“We seek we find, we pray, we hear, we study we learn.”** Our families and those we love will depend on this. There is indeed an urgent and intense movement toward God and His Word, a righteous revolution that is now happening around the world. From the beginning to the end to the new beginning of a world without end - a movement of God has always been toward Him, His Word, and the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Dr. Stephen Isaac - The Reunion Church

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Amos Five - Seek Him and Live

Context: Historical and Biblical

Historical

Chapter one, verse one of Amos, contains one of the most significant clues as to the date of Amos's ministry and prophetic messages. Uzziah was king of Judah, and Jeroboam was king of Israel. Uzziah's reign in Judah was from 783 to 742 B.C., and Jeroboam's reign in Israel was from 786 B.C. to 746 B.C. With a strong historical degree of certainty, the time of Amos preaching to Israel was from 760 to 770 B.C.

The Assyrian Empire provided contract or paid protection from more minor aggressions against both Judah and Israel during this time. This kind of "big brother" protection did not come without paying a steep price. Without the concern of enemy aggression or the continual use of resources and manpower, both kingdoms (northern and southern) expanded and flourished economically. The economic boom was accompanied by an increase in a more liberal and self-aware approach to religious activities and sacramental worship. The de-centralized shrines at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba had constant streams of worshipers bringing growing numbers of non-approved sacrificial animals and pagan offerings. Amos showed God's disapproval of such religious activities by announcing God's judgment upon the non-sanctioned religious sites, by giving counsel to stay away from them and thereby declaring God's rejection of their religious activities (Chapter 5:4–5; 5:22–24). Increased religious activity, increased crowds, increased prosperity, and a decisive decline in godliness and honor to the covenant and moral laws of God.

Amos was a sheep breeder and sycamore grower from the region of Tekoa in Judah. He sold lamb to butcher's markets, lambs' wool to clothing merchants, and trees to carpenters. His name literally means "load-bearer." Amos came to Bethel to deliver to

the religious leaders at the top of the heap the message of God's displeasure and disgust with where they had led and allowed their faith and worship to go. Amos also refused the term "prophet" (nābî) as an appropriate description of his role. He claimed no special authority associated with traditional titles when *Amaziah* ordered him out of Bethel (7:12–13). Instead, he testified of vocational heritage as "a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees" when the Lord ordered him to prophesy to Israel. He came to Bethel not as a representative of one of the prophetic communities but as an "everyman" under the order of God to deliver the message of a godly prophet.

Amos knew the history of Israel and the history of the nations around Israel. He knew Israelite politics, society, and religion. He had enough courage to confront those who oppressed the poor, religious leaders such as *Amaziah*, and greedy land-grabbers and merchants. His strong sense of the Lord's call to prophesy was the enabling force of his ministry (7:15). To Amos (the load-bearer), the message was more important than the messenger, which is why God sent him. Such a sense of calling has continued to be the authority and motivation for service to the Lord's calling to this day.

Biblical

Abuse of power in the social structure and compromise with paganism in the religious were the two targeted sins that Amos would denounce. Paradoxically, despite record numbers worshipping at the temple in Samaria. At the de-centralized shrine sites, the period of preaching to Israel by Amos was characterized and necessitated by moral and spiritual decline, godless living, civil unrest, and social upheaval. Israel's frequent attendance at the shrines to make religious sacrifices did not result in moral, spiritual, or social uprightness. Religious leaders were greedy and self-serving; the rich oppressed the poor, indulged in extravagant and decadent lifestyles, denied justice to the oppressed and weak, and engaged in immoral sexual activities (2:6–8; 4:1; 5:11–13). The breaking point in all of this was that they no longer lived as they believed, and who they were (God's chosen people) was grossly contradicted by their accelerated and self-entertaining religious activities. Everything not palatable or that they did not want from

the authority and order of the Laws of God, they deconstructed and reconstructed under a new narrative. All style - no substance, all ritual - no righteousness.

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

These were the biblical and historical times when Amos's arrived in Israel to preach and proclaim a bold, unbiased, and hard message of judgment from God. Israel's outward show of devotion to God was complete hypocrisy and, unfortunately, nothing new or uncommon to the spiritual shepherds of the household of faith - it had been nearly 200 years of bad leadership and breeding bad sheep, and they fed off one another. Bad shepherds breed bad sheep - bad sheep enable bad shepherds. Enter Amos, the "Load-bearer." Message delivered. The prophet's words were heard throughout Israel's entire landscape, leaving no part nor person unscathed. God's response to the leaders and the people - NO MORE.

As you can see, the Biblical context for the book of Amos is simple, yet in the head and hearts of the religious leaders and the people of God, it became so difficult and complex. However, it was made complex because of their constant pushback against the authority and order of the very God who had continually delivered and provided for them. We see the same contrast represented in our present day. We, too, have made God's faith process very difficult and complex in how we self-focus in worship, within our daily approach to the righteousness of God, and our minimalistic adherence to the authority and order of the Word of God.

In the Amos' message, God's actions, sovereign judgment, and great compassion are present though not always distributed in equal portion. More importantly, Amos' understanding and his un-compromised command for the leaders and people to humbly

return to God and His greatness frames the backdrop of relevance for Biblical discipleship in every era and all times, not the least, which is our own. It is as if the ancient Amos is a 2023 Amos. In 2023, Amos is telling the world what God has told Him to say is just as He said twenty-six hundred years ago - NO MORE.

No to any Worship void of the true presence of God.

No to the huge disconnect between our Worship and our personal conduct.

No to our passive-aggressive rejection of Biblical authority and the order and priority of God.

No to our rewritten narrative on the righteousness of God.

No to our politically driven evangelical piety.

No to our lack of responsible care and righteous protection of our children and elderly.

No to our progressive minimalist approach to God's Word.

Our spiritual freedom and grace are not entitlements, and our covenant relationship with God has righteous expectations and must be enjoyed with humility and fidelity. It is God and God alone who cares for and commands the destinies of all people, even our enemies. Our sense of security must always be anchored in God alone since our days of prosperity and plenty are the direct result of His blessing. Our times of gravity may actually be His love and discipline at work to save us from ourselves. Our worship must motivate and inform our own acts of righteousness, compassion, and justice towards all humanity - the wounded, afflicted, and oppressed. Our righteousness must have a singular intent and possess one crucial evidence of its validity - that we believe and practice the priorities and values of the One whom we acknowledge as Lord. Israel lost it - what about us? Let's find out.

Amos Five - The Text

Amos 5:5-7

Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing." Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!

This is God to Amos - Amos to the House of Israel (all leaders) - the People of Israel (Jewish people).

He says, *Seek me and live - come to me, and you will live.* Most often, the verb (*seek*) gives the image of a quest for something unknown or a search for someone lost or inaccessible, which we know, of course, is not the circumstance here. The best translation of the Hebraic literary context here is "***come to me***" or, even more clearly, "***come back to me and worship me,***" "***come to me for help,***" or "***come to me for counsel.***"

Of these, "***come/turn back to worship me***" may be the translation most accurately reflecting the author's original intent and context because of the obvious unrecognized worship going on in the remote shrines in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. However, a term for "worship" is not enough if it simply means a ritual or tradition. Some possibilities of interpretation rest on: "***Come and let me be your Lord; come back to being my people.***"

The ancient Hebrew has *two commands* that present themselves in verses 5, 6, and 14 of Amos five.

Command One - *Seek* (this describes the condition - needing guidance and truth) and "live" the consequence:*

Command Two - *Come To Me* (this describes the options - if you want to live)

5.7.23

Let's move to Amos verses 14-15. Verses 4-5 exhorted leaders and people to **seek God and live**. Hopefully, history finally stops repeating itself because, as you can see here - at this point, there was no willingness on God's part to compromise. In its continued rebellion against the authority and order of God, Israel's circumstances had shifted from being the central benefactor of the covering and covenant promise of God, which included a robust perk package complete with mercy, favor, blessing, and a retirement surety plan. Despite all those proven assets they had for three centuries ran hard into the culture and ways of man. They had moved from God's justice and mercy to God's just judgment. Listen to Amos.

Amos 5:14-15

Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. (ESV)

Amos has delivered a no-compromise message to all of Israel. Listen to his words one more time from The Complete Jewish Bible.

Amos 5:14-14

*Seek good and not evil, **so that you will survive**. Then Adonai ELOHEI-Tzva'ot will be with you, as you say he is. Hate evil, love good, and uphold justice at the gate. Maybe Adonai ELOHEI-Tzva'ot (Lord God of Hosts) will take pity on the survivors of Yosef. (TCJB)*

Just judgment is here - postponement petitions, pretentious pleas, and religious platitudes are no longer options. This is happening. Amos offers midnight-hour advice to those who would sincerely repent, fully knowing they had already been judged.

*Seek good and not evil - so that **you will survive**. (not avoiding judgment, here is your only chance to survive it)*

*Hate evil, love good, and uphold justice **at the gate**. (do the right and righteous thing before you go in - not after you have already gone in to do the wrong and unrighteous thing)*

Amos 5:14-15 Contextualized

Was this message preached to us? No. Was the ancient text of Amos written to us? No. As present-day followers of Jesus Christ and people of God, is this message and the ancient text for us? Yes. Compare Amos' words to God's people in 670 BC to the apostle Paul's words to the Church in Rome, and to Christians of all times and all places written to Rome 55 AD.

Romans 12:9-18, 21

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Our message from the Word of God through Amos - *Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Make it your aim to do what is right, not what is evil, so that you may live.* The meaning of "seek" in its ancient Hebraic form and context is "to be concerned about," "to devote oneself to," "be concerned about what is good," "devote yourself to what is

good,” “strive after what is good,” to contextualize the text of Amos without compromising the intended meaning - we can rightfully say...

Make it your aim to do what is right, don't compromise what is good and right for what is evil and wrong.

Do not compromise the honor and glory of God for the dishonor and shame of the evil ways and rebellious will of men. Do what is right and righteous before God and before men.

Do it for the love of God; do it so that you might survive and live.

The Lord God of hosts - the Lord and God of His people, will really be with you.

The significant and relative message here for us today is simply this: WE can, and WE will survive any and all difficult obstacles and tragic circumstances of this life if, while we are living, we have chosen good and not evil; if we have loved God and not the ways and will of evil men and women. The image we need to embrace is that of the true and eternal meaning of God's power and help. The Lord, your God, will help you.

5.14.23

Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.