

Like Israel before us, we have been singled out. As such, we are scrutinized by the multitudes. We have to be extra vigilant to show them God's love the way he showed us. If not, we will lose the authority God bestowed upon us. It's a sacred covenant that should never be squandered or taken for granted. The stakes are far too great to fail.

Nor are we ignorant. We not only have the Bible to help us understand, but God also wrote his word on our heart (see Hebrews 8:10). Like the Israelites before us, we can't claim ignorance when we do wrong. Even today, there are prophets among us who let us know when we have strayed or are about to stumble.

God will always warn us beforehand of the consequences of our sins. The question is, how often do we listen? I admit, I don't listen as much as I should, and I always pay the price for my rebellion. Not once, however, could I claim, "But I didn't know it was wrong." If I tried, God would only laugh at me and point out that I indeed knew better.

Andra Marquardt



JOEL & AMOS

Day 11: Joel 2

“The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” Joel 2:11b (NIV)

There are surely dreadful things coming. Despite awful wars, natural disasters, ravages of illness, and other personal suffering we endure, there is a day to be feared more than any of those—the Day of the Lord. For who can kill both body and soul? Only the one and only God (Matthew 10:28).

The words God spoke through the prophet Joel some 2,000 years ago are still relevant today.

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” Joel 2: 12-13.

I cannot help but want to see the Lord come. I pray we all would rend our hearts and prepare His way, so that when He judges to make all things right, He will be gracious and compassionate as we call on His name. Perhaps we will even experience the pouring out of the Spirit Joel talked about in verses 28-29:

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

Day 12: Joel 3

“In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Wadi Shittim.” Joel 3:18 (NRSV)

I listened today to a podcast episode about the need for more water to supply the growing community of St. George, Utah. The river that supplies water cannot reliably meet the demands for more and more water from new subdivisions and bringing in water from further afield will cost one billion dollars.

While our mighty Missouri is more likely to overflow than to run dry, we in the Dakotas know what it means to see the landscape waste away under the effects of heat, wind, drought, and pest. That despair shared across an ecosystem is the image the book of Joel relies upon.

The book does not end with this despair, however. As we see in the above verse, Joel’s message is that God will restore the people of Judah and bless them. It is important to note that this restoration is not just expressed through the declaration that God and the people are reconciled but that the people will again live in a restored land that readily provides water.

Reading this text caused me to reflect on the promise of salvation we in the church have from God. This promise also includes a new Heaven and a new Earth. How might our dreams for the future be different if we remember that, however much we toil to make the land fit our needs, God has something better planned?

Tanner Carlson

Day 13: Amos 1-2:3

I recently drove through an area that had been sectioned off and signed as a construction zone. By all appearances, the area looked as though it had been affected by recent storms. Massive trees had been uprooted with roots exposed and rocks and debris were scattered along a waterway. The further I drove into the area, the more I could see that this destruction allowed for the new construction. The rebuilding and strengthening of a bridge, waterway and road necessitated serious destruction.

Similarly, shepherd and prophet, Amos, boldly spoke to the Israelites and neighboring nations with a customized message appealing to their

sense of right and wrong, as well as to their knowledge of (or lack thereof) the Scriptures. Using devastating word pictures, this harsh reality check was the message needed to call them all to repentance and into a right relationship with God.

God's messages to us are not always pretty, calming or comfortable, but they are always tailor made, timely, and necessary. This week, let's practice listening to God, whether we particularly like what is said or not.

Amanda Rue

Day 14: Amos 2:4-16

After addressing six nations who did not claim to follow God or know the Scriptures in Amos 1-2:3, the prophet turns to Judah and Israel. These two nations stand in judgement. They have rejected God’s Law, refused to follow his commands and betrayed him by worshiping false religions. This message works for God’s people because they have heard the Scriptures and know better. The author understood his audience and adjusted the message accordingly.

We should follow his example when speaking into the lives of those around us. Amos knew his audience and so should we. It is important to take the time to get to know the people God places in our lives. And as we do that, simple conversation, advice and truth will simply sound different depending on if our neighbors, family and coworkers know God or his Word. May we courageously customize a message of truth and encouragement that will meet people right where they are.

Amanda Rue

Day 15: Amos 3

“You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth -- That is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities...Indeed, my Lord God does nothing without having revealed His purpose to His servants the prophets.” Amos 3:2 & 7 (HEB)

I like to grind my teeth when people go after Christians to show our hypocrisies, weaknesses, and how oh-so-human we are. Most of it seems unfair. Why don’t they point out those same weaknesses and hypocrisies of people of other religions (or no religion)? Why are we Christians held to a higher standard?