

Amos Nations

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You do not have to scratch far beneath the surface of any nation to find some awful things that have been done and hushed up. Sometimes atrocities were done in war. War crimes were highlighted during the second half of the twentieth century. We had the holocaust in Europe, Japanese atrocities, the former Yugoslavia, Hutus vs Tutsis in Rwanda, to name some of the major ones. Yet Uganda under Idi Amin, Pol Pot in Cambodia, the Sudan, the USSR, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, and many South American countries, have had atrocities.

We recoiled from scene to scene as the media sniffed out the bodies and exposed situation after situation with horror. We were reassured when those deemed unfriendly to Australian interests were the culprits.

But then our allies were accused of atrocities. And finally people whispered about the atrocities that we were supposed to have committed in our wars, in peace with aborigines, and in the way we handle the truth.

It has not stopped with exposure, nor time. In this century there have been more uncoverings with Al Qaeda, Iraq, Bali and terrorists, let alone Abu Grav, David Hicks, Aust Wheat Board.

As we hear more stories of atrocities, apart from a growing cynicism about leadership, and a growing mistrust of any authority, we may also begin to wonder why God lets it occur.

Some point to atrocities to justify a lack of trust in the goodness or existence of God. Some point to them and give up hope, so their prayer life is as dry as the dams of Goulburn.

Some point and get overly excited about the second coming of Jesus, craving to see horror to justify predictions.

But hidden in the pages of the Old Testament is a book written by a tree-pruning shepherd called Amos. Amos did not get cynical or give up on God when he saw atrocities. He knew God saw, and he knew the patience of God. Sometimes we want God to zap into a situation straight away, as soon as any awful things begin. But Amos said God waited patiently. When they did not repent, when they progressed to the third and fourth atrocity, the time for action had come. The Lord was now roaring from Jerusalem. Tremble before him, all the world, for He knows our secrets and each of our atrocities.

The time for judgment had come.

Amos declared it with a vivid pattern. "Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of (*fill in this blank with a local nation*), and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they (*fill this blank with an atrocity*). So I will send a fire on (*fill in this third blank with the name of the city or royal house*), and it shall devour its strongholds."

And as the people of the northern state of Israel, (during a time of peace, prosperity and growth) heard this shepherd of Tekoa (which meant he was a Southerner come from Jerusalem in the nation of Judah), they may have cheered.

Damascus to the north-east, the capital of the Syria, was first on the hit list. It was accused of threshing the people of Gilead. Whether the threshing was literal or not, they had stepped across a line of how even enemies should treat each other. God had seen. He roared.

Then he named **Gaza**, to the southwest, typified the Philistines, who sold whole communities into slavery. God had seen. He roared.

The third nation was **Tyre** to the northwest. Their atrocity was similar to but worse than Gaza's. They broke their word. They had made peace agreements with the people they then sold to Edom. God had seen. He roared.

The fourth nation was **Edom**, to the southeast, who had bought the slaves. Their already mentioned slave trading was not mentioned. Their atrocity was that they destroyed their brothers, and never let up their fierce anger against them. God had seen. He roared.

Fifth were the **Ammonites**, to the east. Their atrocity was against the defenceless unborn children. To gain land they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead. God had seen. He roared.

The sixth nation was **Moab**, to the southeast. They defiled the dead, by burning the bones of a dead king. God had seen. He roared.

None of these nations had been given God's guidelines. Yet each one stepped over the line in areas which are common to all people, and God was calling them to account. God had seen. He roared.

It's easy to point the finger at traditional enemies and accuse them of atrocities, but surely the two nations

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of Israel in the north and Judah in the south were not pure. What of their atrocities? Would the Lord roar against his own?

Amos had been describing nations which surrounded Israel and Judah. Geographically, his list of nations was spiralling in. God then roared at the people of Judah, based around Jerusalem, the southern kingdom of God's people.

But what were Judah's atrocities? The one described is surprising. They had not kept God's Law. They had rejected God, and his way. God had seen. He roared. Punishment would now come, just as much as on the other nations.

Some might scratch their head and say that that atrocity is nowhere near as bad as the others. Yet God holds those who reject his word as being more culpable than those who cross over lines which are common for all people. Those who have heard and know God are held more accountable than those who are in the dark. God holds the nations accountable for abusing the bit that they do know. The apostle Paul says a similar thing in Romans 1 and 2. Amos says it is how they treat people, and in Romans 2 Paul says that it is how they treat God.

The people of Israel would have now been cheering as they heard this, for like rival supporters of Rugby League teams, it was like going to the heart of Canterbury Bankstown from Manly and saying God was about to punish Manly. They would cheer heartily.

Then Amos gives the sting in the tail of his spiral. He focused on Israel. They mistreated the poor, profaned the Lord's name with their sexual activity, broke other commandments, and mistreated those who were validly close to God. Yet God had shown them his power, wisdom and strength. God had seen. He roared.

Amos spoke in a time when Israel was prospering. Enemies were few, and weak. The economy was bubbling, and many were doing very well. People saw all the positive economic factors as being a blessing from God. and when not much is coming up the road against you, it seems so easy to cut a few corners to get your achievements faster.

Amos was like a speed camera along the way. His snapshots were not appreciated and drew a lot of hostility because he showed that instead of reflecting

God's commands and holiness code by being different to the nations around, Israel reflected the nations by rejecting God's commands and holiness code.

Simply because things are going well, does not mean that everything is good. God says faithfulness counts, not the weight of blessings.

We live in a society where weight of blessings counts, not faithfulness. Yet we have seen God's love for us so tremendously in sending his Son to live the perfectly faithful life then die for us. We have seen His grace and mercy freely extended to anyone who wants to accept it, by faith in Jesus. He calls on all who believe to live faithfully to His way as described in his teachings which he gave the apostles.

If knowledge of God's way brought greater responsibility back then, how much more now? Atrocities are awful and deserve judgment. So does living unloving, uncaring, unfaithful lives. How would God assess us now? We need to repent and ask for forgiveness, and for the strength and courage to live His way.