

Lesson 3
Amos: Prophet of Justice
July 18, 2021

Background Scripture: Amos 1-9

Lesson Passage: Amos 2:6, 7a-11; 5:10-12, 14, 15, 21-24; 9:11, 12 (NASB)

Introduction: The prophet Amos lived among a group of shepherds in Tekoa, a small town approximately ten miles south of Jerusalem. Amos did not consider himself a prophet, rather, he was “a grower of sycamore figs” as well as a shepherd (Amos 7:14–15). With the people of Israel in the north enjoying an almost unparalleled time of success, God decided to call a quiet shepherd and farmer to travel from his home, in the less sinful south, and carry a message of judgment to the Israelites. The people in the north used Amos’s status as a foreigner as an excuse to ignore his message of judgment for a multiplicity of sins. However, while their outer lives gleamed with the rays of success, their inner lives sank into a pit of moral decay. Rather than seeking out opportunities to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly, they embraced their arrogance, idolatry, self-righteousness, and materialism. Amos communicated God’s utter disdain for the hypocritical lives of His people (Amos 5:21–24). Amos’ name means “to carry” or “born (carried) by God.” He primarily prophesied to the Northern Kingdom who had become comfortably wealthy and began to have a false sense of security. Amos focused on two areas of sin in both the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Two of the greatest sins that were occurring in the Northern Kingdom are also prevalent today, such as social injustice and idolatry. The idolatry of pleasure and prosperity takes the place of God because money can sometimes take the place of God and provide; security, food, and pleasures...but it is a false sense of security and that is what Amos tries to warn these nations about.

Scripture References: Amos 2:6, 7a-11 (NASB)

6 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals. **7a** “These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless. Also turn aside the way of the humble; **8** “On garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar, And in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. **9** Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Though his height was like the height of cedars. And he was strong as the oaks; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below. **10** “It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, And I led you in the wilderness forty years. That you might take possession of the land of the Amorite. **11** “Then I raised up some of your sons to be prophets And some of your young men to be Nazirites. Is this not so, O sons of Israel?” declares the Lord.

Amos 5:10-12, 14-15, 21-24 (NASB)

10 They hate him who reproves in the gate, And they abhor him who speaks with integrity. **11** Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. **12** For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes, And turn aside the poor in the gate. **14** Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said! **15** Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. **21** “I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. **22** “Even though you

offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. 23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. 24 "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 9:11-12 (NASB)

11 "In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this.

Memory Verse: *"But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).*

Topic Explored: *"Amos: Prophet of Justice"* ~ Amos's connection to the simple life of the people made its way into the center of his prophecies, as he showed a heart for the oppressed, while most of the prophets spoke of redemption and restoration in their prophecies against Israel and Judah, Amos devoted only the final five verses of his prophecy for such consolation. More than almost any other book of Scripture, the book of Amos holds God's people accountable for their ill-treatment of others. It repeatedly points out the failure of the people to fully embrace God's idea of justice. They were selling off needy people for goods, taking advantage of the helpless, oppressing the poor, and the men were using women immorally. Drunk on their own economic success and intent on strengthening their financial position, the people had lost the concept of caring for one another. Amos rebuked them because he saw in that lifestyle evidence that Israel had forgotten God.

Lesson Focus: Amos 2:6, 7a-11 (NASB)

Verses 6, 7a-11 ~ Unlike the crimes of the nations detailed in this section, which are wrongs against other nations, those of Judah and Israel named here are violations of the Lord's demands. He condemned Israel for specific sins. One of which was exploiting the poor (Amos 8:6). Amos was speaking to the upper class. The rich observed religious rituals. They gave extra tithes, went to places of worship and offered sacrifices; but they were greedy and unjust, and they took advantage of the helpless. When we read the list of Israel's sins, we are amazed; but what would the prophets say about us? God's past faithfulness should have reminded the Israelites to obey Him; likewise, what He has done for us should remind us to live for Him.

Lesson Focus: Amos 5:10-12, 14-15, 21-24 (NASB)

Verses 10-12, 14-15 ~ The people suffered exile and captivity because they turned from God. God says that they built fine houses but would not enjoy them, and they planted lovely vineyards, but would not be able to eat the fruit of them. When we have turned away from the Lord and are not doing His will, it often seems that we work, and work and all our work is in vain. But when we are right with God, at peace with Him by His forgiveness and our desire to do His will, then we find our work is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). The rich people were unfair in their treatment of the common people. The rich took the poor people to court trials in order to take their money away. The rich gave bribes to the judges so that the judges would make decisions that favored the rich and hurt the poor. By doing this they were able to steal from the poor with the approval of the government and the power of the courts. The government leaders abused the poor and demanded heavy taxes from them. Politicians and judges were supposed to protect and defend the poor, and make sure that they were treated fairly in court trials. But Israel's leaders

were evil. They taxed wealthy people less and taxed poor people more. They were cruel to the poor. They used their power and authority to harm them. They had expensive houses and many beautiful vineyards. They could have used their wealth to help the poor and needy. Instead, they used their money to live lavish, luxurious lives and oppress and abuse the needy.

Verses 21-24 They continued worshiping God without turning away from their sins. They were very religious, but their religious beliefs did not change their behavior. God told them He hates religion that is insincere. God rejects worship from people who do not love others or help the poor. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expected faithful action from the church on the issues of injustice facing the world, and he lovingly criticized the church when it failed to fulfill this obligation. In his book, *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the following: *"The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."* Dr. King challenged people of faith to hold unjust systems accountable and not to be seduced into complacency or collusion. His challenge is grounded clearly in prophetic truth telling found in the Hebrew Bible.

Lesson Focus: Amos 9:11-12 (NASB)

Verses 11-12 ~ speak of the royal house of David as a tent or 'booth' such as the people constructed at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (or the 'Feast of Booths' as it was also called). These were simple shelters made of boughs of trees and branches of palm trees to remind them of the way that they lived in the wilderness (see Leviticus 23:34, 39-43). God intended great things for the house of David (see 2 Samuel 7:12-15), but it just became like a 'booth' that had been broken down. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom had been divided into two parts and only two of the twelve tribes continued to be ruled by a king of the family of David. Later that southern kingdom of the two tribes fell too. All of this happened because the people turned from God. They could not meet their powerful enemies in their own strength; and so, without God to help them, they were defeated. But God's promise was that He would 'raise up the booth of David' and 'repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old'. After learning the lessons of defeat, they would be restored. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah this happened. In a more wonderful way, it happened in the coming of Jesus, as Mary His mother was told, 'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:32-33). After the fiercest storm, the sky becomes clear, the sun shines and the birds begin to sing again. The book of Amos has been full of the denunciations of the people's sin and has had many messages of judgment. But now in the end there is a message of hope. On the other side of judgment is the restoring of the people of God - to God's blessing and to the outworking of God's purpose. In these last five verses of the book there are five great blessings that God promises to His people.

Let's Talk About it/Applications:

1. How had Israel responded to all God had done for them? What did their actions reflect?
 2. What serious accusations are leveled by Amos in Amos 5:10-13?
 3. What is the message to each nation in Damascus (1:3-5); Gaza (6-8); Tyre (9-10); Edom (11-12); Ammon (13-15); Moab (2:1-5) and Juda (2:4-5)?
- Injustice permeates our world, yet as Christians we often turn a blind eye to the suffering of others for “more important” work like praying, preaching, and teaching. But the book of Amos reminds us that those works, while unquestionably central to a believer’s life, ring hollow when we don’t love and serve others in our own lives. Do you find yourself falling into that trap at times—prioritizing prayer over service? The prophecy of Amos should simplify the choices in our lives. Instead of choosing between prayer and service, the book of Amos teaches us that both are essential. God has called Christians not only to be in relationship with Him but also to be in relationships with others (Matthew 22:37-40).

Closing Prayer: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading' (1 Peter 1:3-4). Thank you for your unfailing mercy and grace. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.'*

Notes
