

## Week 9 – Amos

**Connect:** choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- Describe where you have seen justice and righteousness prevail—where what is wrong is made right.
- Name one person you would like to have dinner with, past or present, real or fiction, and why.

**Read these passages aloud:**

**Amos 2:6-3:15-** God’s Judgment on Israel

**Amos 5:21-24** - The Day of the LORD, a dark day

**Amos 6:11-14** – God’s punishment of Israel

**Amos 7:14-17-** Amos’ call.

**Amos 9:11-12** – Restoration of David’s kingdom

**Engage the text as a group:**

1. What do you **observe**?
  - God has strong words for Israel’s religious practices: “I hate, I despise your festivals...”
2. What **questions** do you have of these texts?
  - E.g.) Why would Israel equate economic prosperity with God’s favor?
  - Why weren’t keeping the religious practices themselves enough?

**Why does Amos matter?**

Amos matters because it shows us how deeply God cares for the lowly, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the marginalized. The book of Amos shows us that Israel taking material prosperity or economic security to equal God’s favor and approval was wrong. In Amos, God condemns the practices of Israel that built up wealth for itself and the 1% that hoarded it at the expense of the poor, while God shows compassion for the poor who are being oppressed because of the practices of the wealthy.

If you live in the United States, you live in right now the most militarily powerful country in the world and the richest nation on earth. The U.S. experiences great material prosperity and immense comfort and luxuries—yet, there are still those caught in systemic poverty, who by no action, decision, or lack of action or decision of their own suffer the oppression and marginalization that comes from not being among the socially and economically privileged.

To be clear: the United States is not Israel. But, it is easy to confuse the United States’ material prosperity with God’s favor and blessing, as the nation of Israel did. Amos shows us, that is not necessarily the case. God had some strong words of condemnation for the practices of Israel toward its poor.

God has some strong words for us in powerful modern countries today, including the United States, for our practices toward the poor and the way we became rich. The United States build its economy through the enslavement of African peoples and the genocide of native peoples; that allowed for the U.S. to achieve its superpower status today. We must not ignore or forget that. We need to be honest about that history and its persistent effects to

today, and to take seriously God's command to let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. God required of those listening in the book of Amos to do right socially as an expression of their faith. God requires the same of us today. Israel didn't understand that rotely doing rituals God required while going about their economics, customs, and politics in ways that further oppressed the marginalized was breaking the very law they were claiming to follow by their rituals.

The same goes for us—in what ways are we paying lip service in our churches to God's command to love our neighbor as ourselves, yet in our social and economic practices we dehumanize, ostracize, and oppress our neighbors, and further oppress the already marginalized?

### **HOW DOES AMOS POINT US TO JESUS?**

Amos proclaims God's judgment on Israel for its sin in the way it treats the poor and privileges the rich, and God's judgment comes upon Israel for this sin. But the prophecy at the end of the chapter tells of God re-establishing the house of David and when God will restore the fortunes of God's people.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is the king who would reestablish the line of David, the king of Israel who would restore the fortunes of God's people, the true king who rules with righteousness and peace.

When Jesus begins his ministry, in the synagogue he announces that, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."<sup>2</sup> Jesus came to set the oppressed free, to heal the broken, to restore the poor. Jesus came to be the king who establishes justice and righteousness, especially for the marginalized.

Also in Jesus, we see God's interaction with the poor—he honored them, loved them, welcomed them, claimed them as God's own<sup>3</sup>; Jesus' interaction with the poor was never oppression, never rejection, never taking advantage of them or keeping them downtrodden. Jesus is the king who stoops down to lift the chin of his most downtrodden people.

In Jesus, we have a God of hope, a God who came down to inhabit the situation of the oppressed – Jesus was a Jew in Roman-occupied Palestine (a minority living in an occupied state); he was killed at the hands of the religious leaders and the Roman state. Jesus was among the poor and oppressed. God does not stay far from the poor, but comes down, lowers himself to being like one of them to so identify with them and take on their suffering, and to set them free from it.<sup>4</sup> God's heart is with the poor, and God requires that God's people (the church) seek justice and righteousness with and for them.

#### 3. What **applications** arise for you?

- Where do you see Israel's behavior exhibited today in your own country?
- How do you see the poor being kept poor and the rich being kept rich?
- What are just economic practices you've observed in your own context?

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 9:11-15.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 14:21-24 - parable of the Great Dinner; Matthew 5:1-5; Matthew 25:31-46.

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:5-8.

**6 Tools for Interpretation:** read through the 6 Tools (if time allows) or take home and read.

**Literary:** genre = prophetic literature; Amos' prophecies were pointedly to Israel<sup>5</sup> and God's impending judgment for their disobedience and injustice.<sup>6</sup> Pay attention to the pairing of justice & righteousness = what God's people are called to.<sup>7</sup>

**Historical:** Amos = shepherd-farmer turned prophet. Kingdom of Israel = extraordinary military, political, and economic success AND "spiritually smug." Culture of excess and great inequality; oppressed the poor, much corruption and immorality. Israel taking economic, political, military success to equal God's favor. Amos comes along, tells them how far they have strayed from God, and God's anger at their economic, military, political sin.<sup>8</sup> Amos' ministry spanned from 792B.C.-740B.C.<sup>9</sup>

**Theological:** God telling Israel: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."<sup>10</sup> God is condemning Israel for the way it has accumulated wealth at the expense of the poor, judgment coming in invasion. True worship = just living.<sup>11</sup> There's a promise of restoration beyond destruction—God will reestablish the house of David.<sup>12</sup>

**Cultural:** Amos ≠ part of the royal court of Israel; from small town in Judah (the southern kingdom); goes to Bethel to preach to Israel. Economic practices of 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Israel = stripped poor of their land, creates generational poverty, poor enslave themselves for debt repayment, corrupt courts favor the wealthy and trap the poor. Amos communicates that God has had enough.

**The bigger story:** Amos shows God's heart for the poor and oppressed, and God's anger at injustice and systems of oppression by the very people God rescued from oppression and injustice in Egypt. A call to the people to right and just living. This book communicates how God is LORD over all the nations and will use the nations to accomplish God's purposes. The LORD is God over all, not just Israel.

**Holy Spirit:** the Spirit stirred Amos to proclaim hard but vital truth: God cares for the poor and the least, and God despises the oppression of the poor to build wealth and greed.

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<sup>5</sup> Israel split into Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom), 930B.C.

<sup>6</sup> "Amos," *The International Bible Society*, <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-amos/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Read Scripture: Amos," *The Bible Project*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Amos," *The International Bible Society*.

<sup>10</sup> Amos 5:24

<sup>11</sup> "Read Scripture: Amos," *The Bible Project*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>.

<sup>12</sup> Amos 9:11-15

**Video:**

For context of Amos, watch: “Read Scripture: Amos”,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4>

**Close in prayer:**

*God, we confess the ways we have participated in, benefited from, or remained silent about oppressive systems, unethical practices, and ungodly ways of being that have further harmed those whose lives are already difficult. Forgive us, Father. Teach us to address our lives—how we live, spend money, accumulate money, and relate to neighbors—so that we learn to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, O God. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*