

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

SERIES INTRODUCTION

As a shepherd and farmer from Tekoa, located 12 miles south of Jerusalem, Amos was not a prophet by profession. His southern accent would also have posed a barrier to the acceptance of his ministry among the northern Israelites to whom he was sent. Even so, the authenticity of Amos' calling and the weightiness of his prophetic pronouncement are not diminished. Through Amos, God "roars" from His Holy dwelling, revealing His displeasure against sins. This speaking God has decreed His sovereign will through His spoken word which will overthrow and put right any human's disobedience and rebellion. The final word in history belongs to Yahweh (Amos 9:15).

Timeline

Amos ministered in the reign of Jeroboam II (782-753 BC) and would be a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, and Jonah. The earthquake mentioned in 1:1 probably happened during the reign of Uzziah (767-740 BC), as mentioned in Zechariah 14:5. The date of his ministry is commonly accepted as 760 BC.

Geopolitical Situation

Assyria and Egypt were in decline during this period, thus posing no threat to Israel. Jeroboam, therefore, exploited the regional power vacuum and pursued an expansionist military strategy that extended Israel's border back to its peak which existed during the golden era of Solomon's reign. The control of trade routes helped to bring in unprecedented wealth in Israel since Solomon's days. It bred a class of wealthy aristocrats living in great luxury, lured into a false sense of security by their sustained prosperity. They dismissed all warnings of any impending judgment and were impervious to the danger ahead.

The Theology of Amos

Amos reveals God as the creator, ruler, and judge of all nations. All sins committed by individuals and societies against humanity are considered trespasses against God's holiness and are liable to His judgment. This is in spite of the nations' ignorance of God's written law. Furthermore, Judah and Israel, who possessed God's special revelation, were doubly guilty for their sins.

However, Amos also reveals God's mercy in His judgment. He does not judge to exterminate His people completely. In his compassion, He relented from the locust and fire that Israel deserved for their sins (7:1-6). Yet God would punish them severely. Despite the punishment He would send, God would eventually restore His people, putting right in His creation what sin has marred.

TOPICS

5 Nov	The First Charge: Aimlessness	Amos 1-3
12 Nov	The Second Charge: Affluence	Amos 4
19 Nov	The Third Charge: Apathy	Amos 5-6
26 Nov	The Sentence	Amos 7-9

First Charge: Aimlessness

AMOS 1-3

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

This section is framed by the lion's roar in 1:2 and 3:8. God raised up Amos, a nobody, to "roar" His pronouncement on the nations as He was about to "pounce" on them with His judgment. Amos began his condemnation from the heathen nations' capital cities, to the "cousin" nations of Israel, to Israel's brother nation Judah, before finally singling out the guilt of Israel. While the heathen nations broke God's moral laws, Judah and Israel sinned against the revelation of God's Holy Name. Their redemption from Egypt, which defined them as God's people, gave them an even greater responsibility to obey God. Instead, they twisted their privilege into a license to sin. Their departure from God's way caused the separation between them and God. This brought on them the certainty of divine judgment which God has announced through his prophet Amos. The lion has roared. God has spoken. It shall come to pass.

For Study and Discussion

1. The Servant of God
 - a. Who was Amos? What can we know about his background, occupation, and lifestyle from 1:1-2, 7:14-15?

 - b. Why should it not be surprising to us that God chose someone like Amos to be His prophet? As a group, cite as many Biblical examples as you can of God choosing common working men to accomplish great things for His divine purposes.

 - c. Amos made it very clear who called him to speak and who gave him the words to speak. How would you describe the way Amos went about doing the things God called him to do? What does Amos' example tell us about the key characteristics that a servant of God exhibits?

 - d. We may hesitate to serve God in certain areas even though He may have called, and is still calling, us to serve in those areas. What are some common factors that hold us back from being obedient to God's call to serve? What encouragement can we gain from Amos' example to trust God and step out in faith to do His work with boldness?

2. The Judgment of God

- a. Read 1:2-2:16. Which were the nations against which God speaks words of impending judgment? For what specific sins were they being judged?

Nations	Sins	Judgment

- b. What do these judgement oracles tell you about God’s character and His view of sin? In what ways are these sins prevalent today in the world and locally?

3. The People of God

- a. Apart from the pagan nations, Israel and Judah were also liable for judgment. For what did God hold them accountable? (2:4-5, 6-16; 3:1-2, 3-8, 9-10, 11-15)

- b. It may be surprising to some that God’s people (Israel and Judah) would also be judged. Why doesn’t God’s covenant with them guarantee them special protection and exemption from liability? How will you explain this to those who think lightly about judgment, simply because they call Jesus “Lord, Lord”?

- c. Many people profess to know God and count themselves as belonging to the people of God. What chilling warnings of impending judgment are there for those who profess to be Christians but do not bear fruit in keeping with repentance?

- d. As Christians, we recognize that our God is a God who judges sin relentlessly and a God who is boundlessly merciful. After studying passages like this, we may tend towards fearing God's judgment and thus try to "change our lives" by our own effort to avoid punishment. Yet others may also tend to take God's mercy for granted and have a careless view of sinful practices in their lives. How does the hope that we have in Christ point us toward the right response that we should have in light of all that we know about God's character?
- e. How can we, as fellow believers, help each other to examine our lives in the light of God's sure judgment and mercy, so that we may encourage each other to walk rightly with God?

Discipleship Pointers

Just as this section of Amos is framed by the "roars", history is not aimless but marching towards a designated end, framed by God's spoken word. As sin is universal, so is God's coming judgment. It means all of us are accountable to God. Therefore, we are to live in the light of God's Holy Presence.

Amos warns us against spiritual dullness and awakens us to the omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent power of God to execute His divine wrath against sins.

God's response to human rebellion and depravity puts into proper light His Holiness, His patience, and His awesome power to establish His sovereign reign of righteousness. It points forward to the Day when His mercy and judgment was satisfied in the cross of Christ, and the Day when sin and its consequences will be dealt with, removed, and forever wiped away from His people so that they can enjoy the liberty and blessings of the new creation.

Family/Group Moments

- Amos was not an exceptional person, nor was he trained to be a preacher. Yet he was mightily used by God. Reflect on how you might be likewise used by God. Pray that God will show you the ways that you may serve him as a faithful and obedient servant.
- In what ways have you been accountable to God in your daily living? Do you have healthy accountability relationships with other believers, especially within your small group?

Second Charge: Affluence

AMOS 4

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

A life that is materially rich but not rich towards God is abominable to Him. Israel was self-gratifying while hiding behind her religiosity. A religion that does not lead to repentance is futile. So God sent Israel chastisements of famine, drought, mildew, locust, diseases, war, earthquake and finally the confrontation with His final judgment. All these were to bring them to repentance. For God will not hold back His judgment forever. Since the people do not repent, the past judgments will pale in comparison to the judgment that is to come, the final meeting of all sinners with the Holy God. No place is beyond His access. No event is outside of His control. There will be no escape from this judgment because God is the Lord of the universe. Selfish consumption of God's blessings primes one for future judgment.

For Study and Discussion

1. Read verses 1-5. God's desire for His people.
 - a. Who are the people addressed in this passage (v1, 5)? How are they described here?

 - b. God promised that "they" (the Assyrians) shall come and take the people of Israel captive, bring them out of the city and into exile (v2-3). Indeed, this promise was fulfilled within 20 to 40 years (I Chronicles 5:26; 2 Kings 15:29, 17:5-6). What did Israel do (and not do) to deserve this judgment from God if they kept the law by offering sacrifices and giving tithes (v4)? Consider the manner in which they observed the law (v5, Ex 23:18) and also what they did to those around them (v1).

 - c. What can we learn about what God desires from His people from these verses? Consider Proverbs 21:3 and Hebrews 13:15-16.

2. Read verses 6-11. God's discipline on His people.
 - a. The crises and afflictions that God brought upon Israel were compared with the plagues that He brought upon Egypt (v10) and also His punishment on Sodom and Gomorrah (v11). What picture does this paint of the physical state of people's lives in Israel?

- b. How might a “counter-culture” of reflecting God’s love and concern for the poor and needy in those days of calamity help turn the people of Israel back to God? How might the same concern for social justice in the church today help in our outreach to non-Christians?

- c. What does it say about the people’s hearts that they continued to sin against God despite these calamities that God brought upon them? Consider 2 Kings 17:13-14.

- d. What do these verses teach us about God’s intolerance of sin and His mercy in dealing with His people who have sinned against Him?

- 3. Read verses 12-13. God’s declaration to His people.
 - a. Who does God declare Himself to be in these verses? Based on the context of this and previous passages, what is implied would happen when Israel meets their God?

 - b. What does it mean that God “declares to man what is His thought” (v13)? What did God reveal to Israel through His Word?

 - c. What has God declared to us through His Word? In particular, what has God revealed to us regarding the hope that gives us confidence that we can turn away from sin and do what God desires of us?

Discipleship Pointers

Israel believed that they were guaranteed a right relationship with God if they religiously kept the law by bringing their offerings and tithes. But God declares that He is dissatisfied with the religion of Israel. This religion of celebrating their “righteousness” was disconnected with the harsh realities that Israel was enduring as a result of God’s judgment upon them for their transgressions. Some of them were affluent and lived lavishly, yet instead of helping those who were around them who were poor and needy, they oppressed them. Though the disasters were designed to bring Israel to true repentance, the people did not respond for they preferred a religion suited to their own tastes. Finally, God tells Israel to prepare to meet Him, but because of their transgressions, it will not be an encounter that they will look forward to. What does this lesson from Israel’s history teach us about God and His desire for us, His people?

1. God's desire is for us to be righteous and to act justly. We must not be hypocrites who are zealous in our religious acts and service but reflect none of God's love for the poor and needy.
2. God's discipline is designed to turn us to Him in true repentance. We must cultivate a humble and prayerful heart that is open to God's instruction through His Word.
3. God's declaration of His name, His deeds, and His thoughts is for us to know Him and to do what He desires of us by relying on His power. We must continually rely on God's grace given to us through Jesus Christ to do what no man can do by their own effort.

Family/Group Moments

God's warning to Israel is also a warning to us today. Has our worship, service, or daily living become disconnected from what God desires from us? When God gives us His word, to reveal to us His thoughts, as He had invited Israel, is He not inviting us to choose between life and death? Is He not calling us to repentance before His judgment comes upon us?

Pray for humility and discernment to identify areas where we have strayed, and for wisdom to correct what is not aligned with His desires. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work in us to do this as we seek to know Christ and follow Him each day. Pray that we will live in the light of His Holy Presence.

Third Charge: Apathy

Amos 5-6

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Amos 5 is written like a dirge (song of mourning), looking back to Israel's rejection of God's invitation to repentance as the reason for her demise. Her sickness was caused by her sins. Hence God called Israel to a spiritual, moral, and religious reformation in order to put things right. God was looking not only at her sacrifices but her obedience to the Law. But her apathy to God's call would lead to her doom. Israel would be carried into Assyria. Israel prided herself as the superior one among nations. But just as Judah would not escape God's judgment, Israel would not too. Her pride would be her downfall. They had been wasting their lives on futile pursuits. They gloried in Jeroboam's military accomplishment which would be short-lived while despising moral uprightness which God values. The false gods they trusted in would not save them. The true God himself will show up.

For Study and Discussion

1. Amos 5:1-17. The certainty of judgment and the reasons behind
 - a. What is predicted in this dirge (v1-3, also 5:16-17)? How does this lamentation convey the certainty of judgment on the hearers of Amos?
 - b. Despite the certainty of judgment on the nation, there's hope for the individual. What is Amos asking his hearers to do and not to do? (See Amos 5:4-6 and 5:14-15)
 - c. What activities do the people seem to be busily engaged in, rather than listening to those who bring God's truth? In what ways does this mirror the world today?
 - d. What characteristics of God are emphasized in this passage? How is this directly relevant to what the people were trying to achieve and what God is denying them?

- e. What does this section teach us about protecting ourselves from the deceitfulness of wealth and prosperity in the times we are living in?
2. Amos 5:18-27. Israel's perverted religion
- a. What kind of Judgment Day were the people of Israel anticipating and how will that Day be contrary to their expectations?

 - b. Why did God seem to reject the sacrificial system He Himself prescribed to them at Mt. Sinai? What was wrong with Israel's religiosity?

 - c. What does God desire if not Israel's songs, offerings, and feasts? What would this look like in practice for his people?

 - d. What does this section teach us about the symptoms of idolatry and outward religiosity in our lives, its effects on us, and the end to which it will lead us?
3. Amos 6:1-7. Israel's complacent pride
- a. Who are the ones who are addressed in this section and what were they guilty of? How would you describe their lifestyle? Who are those who may be similarly described today?

 - b. God's judgment will come upon the entire nation, but this section pronounces particular judgment on the leaders of the nation. How may the sins of national or religious leaders have devastating effects on their followers?
4. Amos 6:8-14. God's judgment
- a. What does this section demonstrate about how fiercely God hates sin and will bring judgment against those who sin against him?

- b. It is clear that God is the one who is sovereign over all things. He is the one who judges and he is the only one who can withhold judgment if His people repent. What has this passage taught you about God and how you may align your life with what is pleasing to Him?

Discipleship Pointers

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). While they were almost faultless in their religious ceremonies and performances, they obscured the truth of who God is by ignoring the ethical implications of what it means to be God's covenant people. This is a guaranteed formula for bringing God's wrath onto themselves.

Yet we see God's grace in His relentless call to Israel for their repentance, and ultimately the promised of a complete restoration in Amos 9:11-15 that points forward to the cross. Trials are God's means to turn us back to Himself. Apathy towards God's disciplining acts lead to our own downfall.

Amos 5-6 teach us that the confession of our faith must lead us to reflect on what truth of who God is and what He has done for our redemption. Our confessions must lead us to ask what God requires of us. A church devoid of theology or a theology devoid of God leads to apathy. It leads to a faith without works. And faith without works is dead. It is an illusion that God will eventually expose by judgment.

The way to protect ourselves from the idolatry of self-serving concerns, pride, complacency, and apathy with their accompanying judgment is to (1) examine our true motivation in all our religious involvement, (2) to keep the message of the gospel central to our realisation of who God is, and (3) to love our brothers and care for them by sharing our resources with those in need.

Family/Group Moments

Injustice permeates our world, yet as Christians, we often turn a blind eye to the suffering of others while serving within the four walls of our church. 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. Is your inner devotional life accompanied by outward service to others? The imbalance is often reflective of an underlying misapprehension of who God truly is.

God has called Christians not only to be in a relationship with Him but also to be in relationships with others. 1 John 4:20 tells us that our love for God is expressed by our love for our brothers. "For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

Do we have a form of godliness that is devoid of power, the power to love God and others? It calls us to a humble repentance, to return to the true knowledge of God, the God of kindness and severity, the God of Holiness, the God of love and justice, and the God who crucified His Son on the cross to save us from the ugliness of our sins. It calls us to live out His commandments. "And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also." (1 Jn. 4:21 RSV) May the glaring deficiency in our love for our brothers expose our need of Him, and drive us to humbly and earnestly seek the God of our sanctification and redemption.

The Sentence

Amos 7-9

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

This final section shows us that God's judgment is certain and yet not divorced from His mercy. The two visions from 7:1-6 reveal the aversion of two judgments that Israel deserved for her sins. However, in the next vision, God still came to judge Israel according to the plumb line of His Laws. Amaziah became an example of religiosity without repentance. Unlike Amaziah, Amos prophesied not for money or position. His life reflects a true calling based on God's choice and God's empowerment. On the other hand, Amaziah's end spelt the same ending for Israel. The Day of the Lord would bring the good life Israel enjoyed to its end. The destruction would be ordered by the Lord Himself. No refuge would be found.

However, this judgment would also lead to Israel's restoration. For this to happen, the effects of sin have to be purged. As certain as the judgment would come, so would the restoration. The promise is sealed at the end of the book of Amos with these words that the God of Israel has spoken.

This promise came to pass through the judgment that fell on Christ at the cross. The judgment He received on our behalf purges us from sin and its effects. His resurrection guarantees our restoration. This is confirmed by Acts 15:16 which declares Christ's saving work for the church as the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy of Israel's final restoration.

For Study and Discussion

1. Amos 7. Divine retribution
 - a. God showed Amos three visions: the first two revealed judgments from which he relented after Amos pleaded for his people. But the third revealed God's judgment that followed His setting of a plumb line among His people. A plumb line is used in construction to check that vertical surfaces are truly vertical. What may the image of a plumb line signify here? Consider Isaiah 28:16-17.

 - b. If the wall in the vision was built with a plumb line, it is strange that a plumb line would still be needed. How would you interpret this vision as relating to God and His people, Israel?

 - c. What was the reaction to Amos' prophecy? How did Amaziah try to prevent Amos from bringing God's word to the people? Why did Amos continue to prophesy in spite of resistance from religious and political leaders?

2. Amos 8. The culminating fruit.
Among the judgments that God will bring upon Israel, there will be a famine on His people that is greater than the famine of bread and water. What is lacking in such a famine? What is the effect of such a famine upon the people and the society? How should we who have been given God's word treasure it lest we suffer a similar famine?

3. Amos 9:1-10. Final and utter destruction.
 - i. Here, the various ways in which Israel may try to avoid judgment are described. What do these verses tell us about the certainty and completeness of God's judgment? Yet what was the attitude of those on whom judgment was pronounced?

 - ii. What would you say to those who today deny the truth that God will certainly bring judgment upon sinners and are confident that no judgment would come upon them despite their sinfulness?

4. Amos 9:11-15. Israel restored and blessed.
 - a. "In that day" references Micah 4:6. Early usage of "in that day" was towards destruction, but now that sin is dealt with, it is time for renewal.
 - i. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness and its coming judgment, how does this passage point to the faithfulness of God to His covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7:8-17?

 - ii. Look for descriptions of how the following attributes will be restored in these verses:

Attribute restored	Verses	Key imagery
Prosperity		
Peace		
Permanence	Verse 15	Israel as a plant which will never be uprooted.

- b. According to Acts 15:16-18, how is Amos' prophecy of the restoration of David's tent in Amos 9:11-15 fulfilled in the church through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

- c. Although Amos' prophecy is filled with visions of judgment upon God's people, it ends with a vision of hope. We must heed the warnings, but must also never miss the hope to whom Amos points to. How does this passage give us encouragement to be faithful and obedient to God in these "evil times"?

Discipleship Pointers

In churches in our nation has many parallels to the Israel in the times of Amos. The financial prosperity and state of development compared to its neighbor resulted in Israel being complacent and even hypocrisy when practicing its religion. She lost the intent while keeping to the form and practices. We need to examine ourselves, while we spend time on our knees, are we also equally practicing our service. Once our sin is dealt with, our behavior, our service must fall in line. Our external actions must demonstrate our changed hearts.

Most importantly, our reflection on the book of Amos must lead us to the cross. The unwillingness of God to punish Israel in Amos 7:1-6, and the determination of God to punish Israel in Amos 7:7-9 points us to the love and justice of God. They foreshadow the magnificent promises of God in Amos 9:11-15 to completely restore Israel, as He had promised to David in 2 Sam 7, to established for David an everlasting kingdom.

This Davidic covenant finds its complete fulfillment and satisfaction in Christ. When God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heaven, He declared Him Lord of all nations. As Lord, Christ is both the Saviour and the Judge. He is the God Amos revealed Him to be. As demonstrated in these studies, while the nation of Israel had gone astray, God continued to pursue them. Once He has dealt with their sin with the punishment it deserves, He would restore them. This is exactly what He did for us in Christ, who is now the guarantee of our future and final restoration. Just as Amos ends his last words with the words of Yahweh, history will end with the return and the everlasting exaltation of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as His final word.

Family/Group Moments

- What are the injustices that we need to speak up against today?
- What kind of God are we serving? How do we reflect through our lives, our virtues, and our treatment of others the truth about God— who He is, what He has done for us, and what He is about to do in this world as revealed to us by Amos, and confirmed to us by the Gospel of the risen, reigning, and returning Christ of the New Testament.