

Amos — Does God Care About Injustice?

December 8, 2024

Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I usually teach on the Spirit Lake campus, but I have the privilege of being on the Spencer campus today.

All you need to do is look at the news on your phone or television. Everywhere we look, there is suffering. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. No matter how hard the average person works, the system is rigged against them. They can't get ahead. The poor work long hours but live in poverty, while many of the rich work short hours but live in luxury. We see that kind of economic oppression in the United States, but economic oppression like that is far worse in other countries. Does God care about those who are economic oppression? What do you think?

Consider the war between Russia and Ukraine. The people who started the war will never suffer in the war, while hundreds of thousands of poor who didn't want the war will suffer and die in it. The elite rich who wanted war are untouched. The poor, who didn't want it, suffer and die from it. That isn't fair. Does God care about this?

If we look at the government and the court system, it is filled with corruption. The rich take the poor to court, but the poor, who can not afford the legal fees, end up impoverished while trying to defend themselves. The judges are biased. They take bribes. They are politically motivated. This isn't fair. It is corrupt. Does God care? Will God do something about it?

We can talk about the corruption around us, but what about the corruption inside us? Does God care what we look at on the Internet? Does he care who we date and marry? Does God care if I prayed this morning? Does God care how I spend my money? If I work on the assembly line at Polaris, does God care about the quality of my work, my attitude, and how I treat my co-workers?

This morning, we are in the Old Testament book of Amos. It is a book that answers the question, “Does God care about injustice, especially when injustice means taking advantage of poor and vulnerable people?”

As a church, we are in a series on the minor prophets. In this series, we are studying the minor prophets in the Old Testament, which are the last 12 book of the Old Testament. We are looking at one minor prophet a week, no matter the length of their book.

For those of you who are new, the term minor prophets is not in the Bible. It probably originated in the fourth century with St. Augustine. The difference between the minor and major prophets is that the major prophetic books are much larger, while what the minor prophets wrote is significantly shorter. The books written by the major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. Some of those books are over 60 chapters. The books of the minor prophets are significantly shorter.

Background

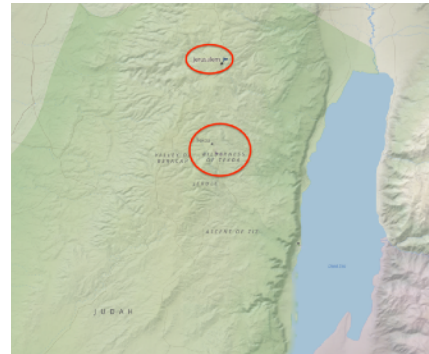
If you were with us for earlier messages in the series, you know the minor prophets wrote between 800 and 400 B.C. Under King David and his son Solomon, Israel was a united kingdom. When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam took over. The people asked for the heavy load of the building projects and taxes

Let's begin.

The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. Amos 1:1 (ESV)

Who was Amos?

Amos was from among the shepherds of Tekoa. Tekoa is 11 miles south of Jerusalem and 6 miles south of Bethlehem. It is known as the wilderness of Tekoa. There were no major cities in that area. It was a rough terrain. The people who lived there farmed. Later in the book, we learn that Amos was a farmer who didn't restrict himself to crops, but he was diversified. He worked in agriculture as well as livestock.



Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. Amos 7:14 (ESV)

At first, we might think of Amos as a wealthy farmer. If we read the text carefully, we see that was not the case. He was a herdsman. He worked with the sheep. He didn't own the sheep. Shepherds were at the bottom of the social scale. That was Amos. He was also a dresser of fig trees. He didn't own the trees. He worked as a laborer on trees in the vineyards. Today, we would call him a farm hand. His job was tasseling corn. His work was manual labor, which was low in pay.

Amos also didn't come from a prestigious family line. Later in the book, he says, "I was not a prophet nor the son of a prophet." The good news is for a period of time, God used this ordinary man to speak His word.

If you were on the church search committee looking for a pastor, Amos would not be your leading candidate. His resume didn't fit, but God chose him anyway. This is a great reminder that God often chooses people we wouldn't expect to do important work in his kingdom.

Where did God send Amos?

...which he saw concerning Israel... Amos 1:1b

Amos was given a message from God concerning Israel. Remember, at this time, the nation was divided by civil war. Israel was the name of the northern kingdom. Judah was the name of the southern kingdom. Amos was from the southern kingdom, but God sent him to the northern kingdom with a message calling them to serious repentance. As we will see, they did not like his god-given message of calling them to repentance. They also didn't like him because he was an outsider.

Most minor prophets were sent to the southern kingdom of Judah, but two, Amos and Hosea, were sent to the northern kingdom of Israel.

When did Amos write?

...in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. Amos 1:1 (ESV)

This is helpful. Uzziah, King of Judah, reigned from 792 to 740 B.C. Jeroboam II ruled the northern kingdom of Israel from 793 to 753 B.C. This gives us a 40-year window for when he wrote. In addition, he tells us he wrote two years before the earthquake. We don't know much about this earthquake other than it was significant enough to be a mile marker in history.

There is a fault line that runs from Africa through the Dead Sea, which resulted in some horrific earthquakes in this area. Josephus, an ancient Jewish historian, tells of one which happened in 31 B.C.. It killed 30,000 people. No, it wasn't from climate change.

I don't know how bad the earthquake was in Amos' day, but it was memorable enough that 250 years later, when Uzziah was king, we find Zechariah writing about it. It must have been bad if people were still talking about it 250 years after it happened.

[...And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah... Zechariah 14:5 \(ESV\)](#)

What was life like in Israel?

Something else important to know is that when Amos gave this prophecy to Israel, it was during one of the most prosperous times in their history. The only time they were more prosperous was under King Solomon. The northern kingdom of Israel was rolling in money. The rich were filthy rich from commerce.

It was also a time when everybody went to church. The houses of worship were packed. On the surface, things looked great. There was lots of money and great church attendance, but just below the surface were serious problems.

There was corruption, greed, taking advantage of the poor, and sexual immorality. God knew it. It made Him sick. It made God so angry that less than 40 years after Amos prophesied to them, God sent the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom and take them from riches and luxury into captivity and slavery.

One of the big reasons why God destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel was because of the excessive amount of injustice and oppression in society,

especially the way the rich took advantage of the poor. As we will see, this kind of economic oppression makes God furious.

The book of Amos is God's final call for the Northern Kingdom to repent of the economic oppression and their empty worship. If they don't repent, God will destroy them. As you know, they didn't listen. Less than 40 years later, God sent the Assyrians to conquer them and take them into exile.

The book is divided into four parts:

1. 1:1-2:3 — God will judge the nations.
2. 2:4-6:14 — God will judge Israel.
3. 7-9:11 — What will be the character of God's judgment?
4. 9:11-15 — Where can we find mercy in God's judgment?

God will judge the nations.

He said: "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers." Amos 1:2 (NIV)

This is not a gentle introduction. Amos comes out punching. The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem. Notice that Amos is not the central character of this book. Amos is only God's mouthpiece. God is the central character. He is angry. God is roaring like a lion. We miss the significance of those words. In college, I went on a mission trip to Africa. On that trip, we went into the game preserve. We were in the back of a pickup truck in a cage. We saw lions up close and personal. When a lion roars, it makes the hair stand up on your head. It is terrifying. Lions don't roar because they are bored. They roar when they are upset; they are angry. That is God at this moment. God is roaring. That should get our attention, and it should be a terrifying thought.

He thunders from Jerusalem. We can relate to a thunderclap or a lightning strike hitting next to us. That is a terrifying feeling. You are helpless against it. That is God. He is upset. This is not a small thing. Notice where he is coming from. It is from Mt. Zion, the hill upon which Jerusalem was built. At one time, everyone worshipped in Jerusalem. That is where God commanded that he be worshipped. When the civil war happened in Israel, to keep the northern tribes from reuniting with the southern ones, Jeroboam, the leader of the northern kingdom, set up two golden calves, one in the city of Gilgal, the other in the city of Bethel. Those cities were imitations of Jerusalem. People in the northern kingdom to Gilgal and Bethel to worship God in the northern kingdom instead of traveling south across the divide between them to Jerusalem.

That didn't sit well with God. God never established Gilgal and Bethel as places of worship, only Jerusalem. This is why God is roaring from Jerusalem in Mt. Zion. To give us a greater sense of God's anger, we see that his anger dries up the pastures and makes the top of Mt. Carmel wither. That is serious.

After this one-verse introduction, God starts firing off his judgments. At first, he did not judge the northern kingdom of Israel but the nations around Israel. Let me show you.

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron." Amos 1:3 (ESV)

Damascus was the capital of Syria. God says, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four, I will not revoke punishment." The phrase "for three transgressions and for four" is



used in every condemnation of the nations in the first three chapters. It is a Hebrew idiom that means God was not just judging them for three or four offenses but for many sins committed over a long period of time.

With each kingdom God judges, he gives a sample of their sins. That was just a sample; it was not all of their sins. Look what the Syrians did that angered God. They threshed Gilead with threshing sleds of iron. A threshing sledge is an iron implement for crushing plants and grinding grain. These guys didn't grind grain; they ground up people. They ground the bodies of their defeated enemies into dust. They didn't even give them a decent burial. This is sickening brutality. Did this take place? Look in our Bibles.

For there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing. 2 Kings 13:7 (ESV)

God says you don't treat people that way, even if they are your enemies. That kind of disrespect for human life and human bodies makes God furious. For that, and many more sins, he will send them into exile.

The story continues.

Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. Amos 1:6 (ESV)

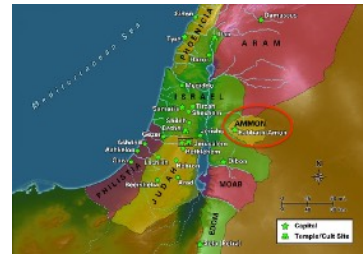
Now, God turns to Gaza. This is another of Israel's neighbors. It was the Philistines. What did they do? There are many sins, but the sample sin given to us is selling an entire nation into slavery to the Edomites. No mercy at all. Instead of just conquering a nation in war, they



sold every man, woman, and child to be slaves. That is terrible! No respect for human life, for families. As a result, God will unleash his judgment on them.

Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. Amos 1:13 (ESV)

The sample sin of the Ammonites is they ripped open pregnant Jewish women, killing their children. God was especially upset over that one because it involved killing women and the unborn.



In verse 14, God promises to burn them to the ground. We should notice this. God didn't take violence toward children in the womb lightly. Children in the womb are not a clump of cells. They are defenseless people. For what the Ammonites did to these children and their mothers, God promised to burn them to the ground.

God also levels destruction against the Moabites and other nations around Israel.

There are a few things to notice.

1. The reason God was angry and promised to destroy these pagan nations was not because of their false worship. It was for how they treated defenseless people. God is furious when vulnerable people are abused or destroyed. God is furious when he sees people being sold into slavery, genocide, abortion, abuse, and grinding people to dust. God will judge these nations for the way they took advantage of weak, poor, and vulnerable people.
2. Many people think God has one standard for his people and another for those who are not. That is not true. The nations around Israel who did not know God

didn't get a free pass. The whole world is accountable to God and will be justly judged by God. Everyone has a conscience. They innately know the difference between right and wrong. Built into our psyches, we know how to live life, care for our families, and live in an orderly society. Amos promises that even the nations who have not received the Ten Commandments will still be judged by them. Every man and woman has a conscience, and it instructs them in the basics of right and wrong. It also leaves everyone accountable before God, especially when it comes to the basics of showing compassion to people instead of brutality.

At first, when the nation of Israel heard Amos' words about God's judgment of the nations around them, I am sure some of them were cheering when they heard God would judge their godless neighbors. But Amos started meddling. Instead of talking about God's enemies around them, he talked about them. He began by talking about the southern kingdom of Judah.

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked." Amos 2:4 (ESV)

The southern kingdom of Judah was not called to the carpet for their sins against the poor but for rejecting the law of God. The kingdoms around Israel would be judged even if they didn't have God's law. It would be far worse for God's people, who had God's laws, who knew the truth, then rejected God's Word and did their own thing. In verse 5, God promised to send fire upon the southern kingdom of Judah and devour it for its rejection of God's laws. The problem is that the northern kingdom did the same thing. They rejected God's

law. They no longer worshipped in Jerusalem. They rejected God's Word about how to worship and worshipped a golden bull in Gilgal and in Bethel.

Worshipping a golden calf got Aaron in serious trouble when Moses was on Mt. Sinai. This was the same thing. If Judah was in trouble for rejecting God's law, the northern kingdom of Israel would be in greater trouble.

God will judge His people.

Amos finally turned to the northern kingdom of Israel and announced their sins and the judgment of God that was about to fall on them. Let me give you a sample.

Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned;... Amos 2:6–7 (ESV)

The rich were taking advantage of the poor. They worked them to death and paid them nothing. When they saw people in need, they ignore them. They lived sexually immoral lives. It all made God angry. God cares about the poor who are oppressed by the rich. God has a severe response for them.

"Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain." Amos 2:13 (NIV)

I am going to crush you. That sounds like it came from fat-talking fighters before a boxing match. It wasn't. Those were God's words to his people because they knew the truth, yet they turned away from the truth. They were rich, but they used their wealth to oppress the poor, not to care for them. They used their wealth to pursue sexual sin. It made God angry.

We can apply this to our nation today. We like to talk about the sins of other nations around us. It is true God will judge all nations of the world by His holy standards, but He will also judge us! There was a time in our nation when we knew more about God's word than many other nations, but like Israel of old, we walked away from God's word. We are accountable for that. God cares about sins like racism, ignoring the poor, the rich taking advantage of the poor, and businesses making lots of money but not paying the workers who made them a success a fair wage because of their success. God cares about stealing, political dishonesty, corruption in the courts, abortion, and homosexuality. God's standards have not changed. He is patient. He calls nations to repent. If they don't repent, he eventually crushes nations for the systemic sins of their culture. Like the wheel of a cart loaded with grain crushes everything.

After God talks about judging the nations around Israel, Amos sharpens the focus on Israel and why God was judging them. This section is five times longer than God's judgment on the nations. Why? All nations will be held to God's standard, but God's people are more accountable to live by those standards. Since we have more access to the truth, we are more accountable to live by the truth. This section starts in 2:4 and continues until the end of chapter 6. I will pull out a few of the key themes.

Oppressing the poor

God reserves some of His strongest language for those who take advantage of the poor and who cheat the poor.

["Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring that](#)

we may drink!' The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks." Amos 4:1-2 (ESV)

Amos starts talking about the wealthy Israelite women. He calls them cows. Instead of the rich women using their wealth and status to help the poor, what were they doing? They were getting drunk. They told their husbands to buy more expensive wine so they could drink more. They were oppressing the poor and crushing the needy. When they went out to eat, they gave the waitress who served them a tiny tip when they were filthy, stinking rich, and could give a big tip. They had plenty of money. They made their waitress work hard but weren't generous with their money.

Ladies, if your family is well off, God didn't give you money and status in life, so you can throw drunken, self-indulgent parties. God wants you to use your resources and your abilities to do good for the poor around you and to do good for the community where you live, not to live a self-indulgent life. Since the wealthy women were like a bunch of self-absorbed cows, God was going to take them into exile. One of the ways people were brought into exile was with hooks, hooks through their noses or lips. They would be

taken into exile with fishhooks. This is literal.

Archaeological excavations gave us pictures of the Assyrian king who conquered Israel. Guess how he led the people into exile? By putting hooks into their lip or their nose.



As we saw earlier in this series, when we find a prophecy that later proves true in history, that is a reminder that the Bible is trustworthy.

God also condemned the rich men.

O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? “Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.” Amos 6:3–7 (ESV)

What were the rich men doing? They were spending their time in bed, eating expensive food, singing songs — going to parties, and drinking wine by the bowlful. They also did not care about the poor around them or do anything to help them. They kept on oppressing them and becoming filthy, stinking rich off of them. They didn’t grieve over the ruined poor of the nation around them. They used the success of their business to give themselves a big paycheck while their employees were barely getting by. God cared about that kind of economic oppression. It made God furious when the rich could live in luxury because they exploited the poor and kept them in poverty. God was running out of patience. Because of the way they treated the poor, these rich dudes would be the first to go into exile.

In the Bible, there is nothing wrong with owning a business and being successful at it. There is nothing wrong with wealth. Abraham was wealthy. Job was wealthy. David was wealthy. The problem is when business owners get greedy. They keep all the profit and never pay the dividends to the employees. That makes God angry. That is what the rich in Israel were doing.

While I am not for or against unions, unions were born out of business owners who kept all the profit and refused to redistribute it to their employees. In

Israel, there were no unions. So, the business owners hoarded wealth and let others starve. It made God angry. The rich even sold the poor into slavery and traded the poor as if they were worth nothing.

Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— Amos 2:6 (ESV)

Where does this economic oppression come from? It comes from the rich being prideful. The rich's greed and lack of compassion for others stem from deep-seated pride.

The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts: “I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.” Amos 6:8 (ESV)

If you are in a position of leadership over others, know your position of leadership is a gift from God. It is an opportunity not just to make a profit but to bless your employees. By God’s grace, good leaders will bless others, not use their leadership to oppress others. If you are in a leadership position, you must ask yourselves, “What does God think of the way I am leading? What does he think about how I am treating others under me? Am I building them up or just using them?” God will call leaders to account for their leadership, as he called the rich to account for how they handled the poor who worked for them in Israel.

Government Corruption

This could be put under the oppression of the poor. It is one of the ways they oppressed the poor.

They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins— you who

afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate...
Amos 5:10–13 (ESV)

When someone offered correction and truth at the city gates where legal matters were decided, they hated it. They were not interested in the truth, just in getting their way. They afflicted the righteous. They took bribes. All of this was to stay on top and deny justice to the poor. They got away with it, but they didn't get away with it in God's eyes. God calls them to repent.

Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Amos 5:15 (ESV)

When the legal system is corrupt, the rich are given favors, and the poor have no place to turn because bribes run the day. God is upset. God cares about judicial and government corruption.

Heartless Worship

While the rich lived in lavish luxury, the houses of worship were packed. Lots of people attended. Things looked good on the outside. The problem is that God knew the corruption that was going on behind the scenes.

“Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!” declares the Lord GOD. Amos 4:4–5 (ESV)

Bethel and Gilgal were the substitute places of worship erected by Jeroboam after he broke away from the southern kingdom for worship. The people brought sacrifices every morning: tithes, thank offerings, and free will offerings. They had all kinds of religious stuff and meetings taking place. The

place was hopping. God didn't like any of it. In God's opinion, all their worship did was multiply their sin.

When they gathered, they went through the motions of worship, but their greediness, lack of compassion for the poor, and corrupt business dealings revealed that their time in church was a show. They sang the songs and listened to the sermons, maybe even took notes during the sermon, but their hearts were not repentant and engaged. Their church life was separate from their real life. God lays his feelings about this on the table.

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen." Amos 5:21–23 (ESV)

God hated their worship. He despised their church meals. He had no delight in their gatherings. It was all offensive to God. Their weekly life didn't reflect that they knew God and were following Him. This is why God hated their worship.

The church in America can be the same way. There are churches where many people attend; they look great, but the lives of those who gather are disconnected from the God they worship. They are playing games with God. Let me show you.

1. We avoid financial worship. — For example, when it comes to our giving, are we robbing God? Do we attend church to get from church, but we never worship God by worshipping God with our finances? Do we fail to worship God with our wallets? Do we give God a tithe of our income? Do we give

anything? If not, are we robbing God? A good question to ask ourselves is, “If everybody here gave like I give, how would the church do?”

It is easy to say, “I don’t give to God because I can’t afford it.” Last week in Malachi, we learned that giving to God is not about money. It is about learning that God can be trusted to meet our needs. I have yet to meet someone impoverished because they worship God with their wallet. The Bible is clear in many places: when we worship him with our wealth, he promises to provide for our needs. Christians who don’t worship God with their wealth will be in need.

2. We refuse to forgive, and we hold a grudge. — Do we come to God seeking forgiveness through Jesus but hold on to grudges and past hurts, so we refuse to offer forgiveness to others? It is amazing how many Christians I have met who are still holding on to bitterness against another Christian. That is mocking God. It is disobeying God.

3. We neglect church attendance. — Are we playing games with God when it comes to our attendance in worship? Sunday is no longer a protected day in our society. There are children’s sporting events on Sundays and school events on Sundays, so we skip church. Other people don’t attend church because they are so busy every other day of the week that on Sundays, they are too exhausted to come to church. It is easy to either skip church or stay home and watch church online so you get pastor and pajamas.

Let me be clear. Online church is better than not going to church, but it isn’t a substitute for church. We come to church not just to sing and study the Word of God, but the church is a family gathering where we build relationships

with brothers and sisters in Jesus; we serve and encourage one another in the faith. As I pointed out last week, if we don't take the time to attend church and talk to people long enough to build a relationship with them, we can not serve them or encourage them.

We are given spiritual gifts to serve one another in the church. We can't do that if we always watch from home. When we sacrifice to be at church because Jesus is important to us, and our brothers and sisters in Christ are important to us, that is genuine worship. It says God is a higher priority in my life than my schedule.

4. We don't pursue sexual purity. — Another example is sexual purity. So many young people and even older retired people follow the culture around us. They live together before marriage. God's standard is sexual purity before marriage. Are we sleeping with our boyfriend or girlfriend, and we come to church thinking everything is ok between us and God? In reality, that is playing games with God. Sexual impurity is one of the reasons God judged the northern kingdom of Israel. It is disconnecting our Sunday worship from our Monday life, the very thing the people of Israel were doing that eventually brought God's judgment on the nation.

God calls people to repentance through trials.

Despite the oppression of the poor, corruption in government, and empty fake worship, God was so gracious to them. He didn't judge them right away. He called them to repentance. He begged them to repent. One of the ways God tried

to get them to repent was by bringing hard times into their lives to break them and lead them to repentance.

“I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. “I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither; . . . I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. “I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD.” Amos 4:6–11 (ESV)

Again and again, God brought disaster into their lives. He gave them hunger, but they wouldn't turn to God and change their ways. He withheld rain. He destroyed their crops. He eventually killed some of their young men. He even overthrew some of them, like He did Sodom and Gomorrah. That is violent. God kept making their lives harder. That was not because he hated them but because he loved them. He wanted them to change. He used hard times to get them to see their sin, repent, and turn back to him. The problem is their stubborn hearts refused to listen. Their stubborn hearts refused to change. Ouch!

Folks, God still works the same way. Sometimes, He brings hard times into the lives of people who are playing games with Him, who are prideful, dishonest, and uncaring toward others. He has them hit rock bottom again and again hoping to lead them to repentance.

Folks, it is God's grace when He brings trials into our lives to lead us to repentance. Yet, many times, in our stupidity and selfishness, we refuse to learn. God brings more trials. Let us not be like the Israelites. If you are going through a

hard time today, quickly get on your knees and ask God, “What are you trying to teach me? What are you trying to show me?”

Visions of Judgment

In chapters 7 to 9, Amos gives us five visions of judgment.

Vision one and two — God’s judgment is merciful. He often doesn’t give us what we deserve.

Here is the first vision.

This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings. When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said, “O Lord God, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!” The Lord relented concerning this: “It shall not be,” said the Lord. Amos 7:1–3 (ESV)

God’s first judgment on Israel was going to be locusts who would eat their crops and leave the nation devastated. But Amos prayed, and God relented. The second vision was a judgment of fire God planned to use to devour the land. God planned to burn their houses and crops to the ground. God is angry. He is a roaring lion. Again, Amos pleaded with the Lord, and again, God relented.

There is a great application for us in this. These visions show us what the Israelites deserved for their sins. They lived in such a way that their land should be devoured by locusts and their cities burned to ashes. But God, in response to the prayers of Amos, didn’t give the nation what they deserved.

We see the same thing in Exodus 32 after the people of Israel made a golden calf. God planned to destroy them, but Moses pleaded with God to relent, and He did.

The first thing to notice is that praying to God for mercy makes a difference. Twice, Amos's prayers held back God's judgment. God was gracious

enough to extend his mercy when Amos asked for it. Prayer for mercy and forgiveness, especially from a godly person like Amos, makes a difference.

The second thing to notice is God's patience. While the nation deserved to be devastated, God was quick to give people more time to repent. Isn't God's patience with us when we sin an amazing part of God's character? God is far more patient with sinful people than we are. God gives lots of opportunities to repent. We need it!

Vision three — When God's judgment comes, it is just.

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." Amos 7:7–9 (NIV)

The third vision is of a plumb line. A plumb line is a weight hung on a string so you know what is vertically true. God was done sparing his people. He would judge them, but it would be just and fair, not overdone. God's justice would be in comparison to what is right, not an overdone emotional reaction.

Vision Four — A Basket of Ripe Fruit

This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the Lord said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," declares the Lord God. "So many dead bodies!" "They are thrown everywhere!" "Silence!" Amos 8:1–3 (ESV)

The fourth vision is simple. Time is up. Ripe fruit looks great on the kitchen counter when we bring it home, but leave it for a week, it will be rotten, useless fruit. That was the northern kingdom. They were at the peak of power. They looked great. Overnight, they would move from delightful to disgusting. In less

than 40 years, the nation would be destroyed and taken into exile. God is graphic. It would be terrible; the nation would be filled with dead bodies. This is exactly what happened when the Assyrians invaded and destroyed the northern kingdom.

Vision Five — A Famine of God's Word

The fifth vision is the most terrifying of all.

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.” Amos 8:11–12 (ESV)

In judgment on them, God was going to go silent on them. He was done talking to them through His prophets. He was done reaching out to them. As judgment on them, there would be a famine of God's Word.

What a reminder, ladies and gentlemen, that it is a privilege for us to have access to God's Word. Yes, we will be held more accountable for the truth because we have the truth, but that is far better than having no access to the truth. Do you realize what a privilege it is to come on Sundays and study God's Word together? Do you know how many people don't have a Bible and don't have a church?

Many people wander through life filled with guilt and do not know about God's offer of complete and unconditional forgiveness through Jesus. They have no idea how they got here or where they are going. Even worse, there are many people being led astray by counterfeit religions. God withdrawing the light of His word is the worst judgment of all.

As I said earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel did not listen to God's call of repentance through Amos and the judgment of exile that was right around the corner. God's word came true in less than 40 years when the Assyrians took them into exile.

As we were reminded last week, prophecy that came true in history is one way we know our Bible is trustworthy.

The final verses of Amos are different. There is a sudden change. There is hope.

Hope for Tomorrow

God will restore his people and bring in the Gentiles through Jesus.

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name." declares the LORD who does this. Amos 9:11-12 (ESV)

While God was sending His people into exile, He was not going to give up on them. He would raise up the kingly line of David and restore it. If we turn to the book of Acts, the apostles quote these verses from Amos. They tell us they were pointing to Jesus and the Gentiles being able to come to God through Jesus.

And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, " 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things Acts 15:15–17 (ESV)

The apostle saw Amos 9:11-12 as a prophecy about the coming of Jesus and that Jesus would bring the Gentiles who turn to Him to God.

Here is the problem. When the apostles quote Amos 9:11-12, in Acts 15, it talks about Gentiles coming to God through Jesus, but if you look at the ESV in Amos 9:12, we don't see the word Gentiles anywhere. It says the remnant of Edom and all the nations called by my name. What is going on? It seems the apostles are misquoting Amos 9:12. Let me explain why.

Our Old Testament, is translated from Hebrew into English. The language used in the day of Jesus, was Greek. There was a version of the Old Testament translated into Greek that the apostles and the Jews used. It was known as the Septuagint. If we read the Greek translation of the Hebrew text that the apostles used, it matches Amos 9:12 exactly.

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the Lord who does all these things. Amos 9:11–12 (Brenton LXX En)

Amos tells us God will restore his ruined people through Jesus. God will even bring the Gentiles to himself through Jesus.

Lessons from Amos

1. **God cares about oppression and injustice.** God will hold accountable everyone who practices injustice, especially those who use their position of leadership to take advantage of the poor. God knows.
2. **Amos warns us about playing games with God, especially in worship.** God isn't impressed with our worship on Sunday if it doesn't change how we live on Monday. He isn't impressed with worship, where we go through the motions but don't genuinely love God and care about others.

3. **God is very patient and merciful.** He gave the northern kingdom many opportunities to repent. He sent Amos and other prophets to call them. He disciplined them with famine and disasters, but they would not listen. Eventually, God's patience ran out, and they were exiled. The opportunity for repentance was removed. God went from a roaring lion to a destroying lion. God is very patient with each of us, calling us to turn back to Him, but if we don't repent and turn to Jesus, eventually, that opportunity will be gone.
4. **God never gives up on His people.** Despite all the judgment in this book, God had a plan of forgiveness and restoration for His people through Jesus.



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