

A Passion for Justice

Studies in the book of Amos at CapChurch, Fall 2008

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24

The following Bible studies are a free download from Bible.Org on the website noted above. The studies have been edited to remove parts not relevant to Canadian life. These studies are true to the Bible text and message while at the same time being straightforward and simple to use. Reading the notes gives you an overview of the book of Amos. One or two questions for group discussion are provided at the end of each week's summary.

Amos

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http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=970

We offer these studies to those CapGroups or individuals who want to study the book of Amos that we are exploring this fall of 2008 under the title *A Passion for Justice* with the key verse being ***But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;*** Amos 5:24.

Our Sunday sermons will approach Amos from a thematic angle looking at the passions for justice God reveals to Amos. The Bible studies below compliment this thematic approach by proceeding textually. Here is our Sunday morning roster:

October 12	The God Of Amos
October 19	God's Passion For Justice
October 26	God, Politics, War, And Justice
November 2	God, Leadership, Power, And Justice
November 9	God's Passion For Equitable Wealth
November 16	When God Shouts—Hearing The Prophetic Word
November 23	4 Levels Of God's Judgment On Injustice
November 30	Worship And Justice + Worship Fest

The dates listed for the Bible studies are the same as the Sunday dates. This way your group can discuss the Bible passage at your home group either before the Sunday presentation or during the week following the Sunday presentation. There are advantages to both. You will hear more when you come to Sunday worship familiar with Amos' message. On the other hand your group will have a rich discussion in the week following the presentation of the theme from Amos because of the community experience and the additional information and challenges from the presentation. You decide.

We have kept the questions to a minimum so that your group has some direction for discussion without being bound to detailed question-answer format. Also we have placed the beginning of each study on its own start page so that you can print only the pages and the weeks you use.

A Passion for Justice

Studies in the book of Amos at CapChurch

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24

#1 of 8—October 12th theme: The God of Amos

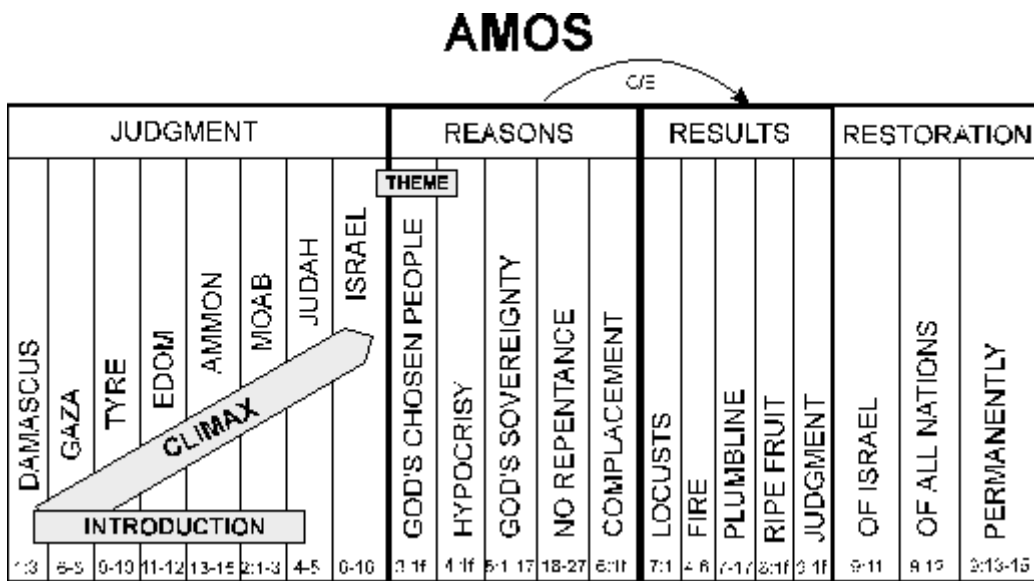
B. Introduction

The Old Testament prophets were adept at luring hostile audiences into listening to their judgment speeches. In [1 Kings 20:35-43](#) a prophet tricked Ahab into pronouncing his own guilt and punishment. And Nathan tricked David into declaring his own guilt by the artful use of a parable ([2 Sam. 12](#)).

[Amos 1-2](#) contains a great example of this entrapment technique, and recognizing what Amos is doing here really helps us to understand what is being said and what is the theme of the book.

Overview of Book:

- Seven speeches pronouncing Judgment on the nations and an eighth speech climaxing on Israel’s sins as worse than the nations around
- Five messages describing the reasons for the judgment and just how bad they were.
- Five visions to show how bad the judgment will be.
- Promise of restoration in the future.

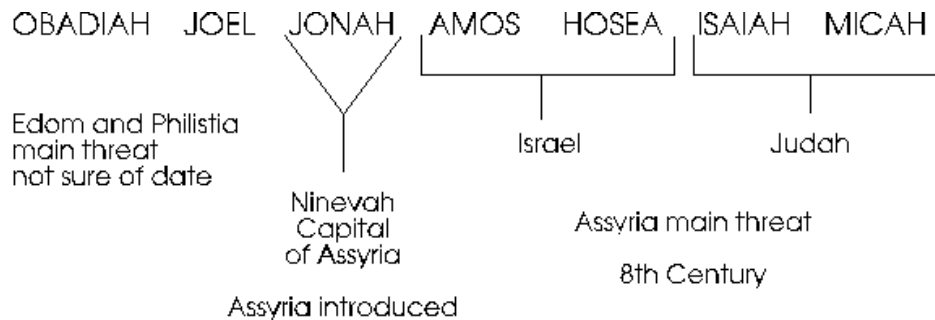


We also want to look at some of the literary devices that the prophets used. Most of what they did is lost on the modern reader, but they were skilled writers and understanding some of these literary devices really opens up the book.

So, with this in mind, let's study the book of Amos.

B. Author and Date (1:1)

Amos was a shepherd from the southern kingdom of Judah. [Amos 7:15](#) shows us that he received a direct call from God to go prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel. So Amos goes to Bethel, which was functioning as the capitol of Israel. The king, Jeroboam II, lived there. Bethel had special significance in Israel's history. In [Genesis 28](#): we see that this is where Jacob had his dream about the angels descending on the ladder and his wrestling with God. But now it had become the center for idol worship in the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan for the Israelites to worship, because he didn't want the people worshipping God in Jerusalem and reuniting the kingdom.



It says this happened in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam. So we know this to be somewhere between 790-753 BC. Israel was at the height of its power politically, but was very corrupt spiritually and morally.

We know that the Assyrians defeated Israel in 722 B.C., so this is just before that time and Amos is warning Israel so they will turn from their wicked ways before it is too late. And that brings us to the theme of the book.

B. The Theme (1:2)

One thing we need to notice is the phrase, "The Lord roars from Zion." God has been Israel's shepherd. The Israelites are familiar with the 23rd Psalm, etc. Like a shepherd, God is supposed to take care of them. But Amos, a shepherd himself, uses what would have been a very vivid word picture to that society. God is now like a Lion to Israel. The lion was probably the most feared animal of that time. It could attack and devour a flock of sheep while the shepherd watched helplessly.

So this imagery sets the stage and lets the people know that God is angry. Why is He angry? That is the theme of the book.

So, with these things in mind, we see Amos is preaching in the Northern Kingdom to the Israelites, and he begins by giving a series of speeches against Israel's surrounding enemies.

Questions for group discussion

1. What impresses you from the overview of Amos about this particular time in God's relationship with Israel?
2. Given the particularity of God dealing with Israel around their gross injustices and betrayal of covenant, what do you think we might be able to learn from this book for life today?

A Passion for Justice

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#2 of 8-- October 19th theme: God's Passion For Justice

II. The Roar of Judgment (1:3-2:16)

You can just imagine him shouting and pronouncing judgment on these surrounding nations, and his audience would be listening with delight as he listed the evil things their enemies had done and what God was going to do to them. After all, there were a number of prophecies, like the one in Jeremiah 30:7f, which had Israel anticipating a day when God would deliver them from their enemies. When we studied Obadiah and Joel, you may remember they talked about the day of the Lord when the nations would be judged.

Let's look at the speeches in Amos. Typically, people read these speeches and try to draw application from each one. They try to analyze each nation's sin, etc. But that is perhaps, not the best way to understand what Amos is doing here.

It seems that Amos is using these speeches to build to a climax. He starts with foreigners, and then denounces Israel's neighbors and then the seventh speech is against Judah. You all know that the number seven is significant in the Bible and it was to the Jew. They would have thought this was the culmination of the sermon and they certainly would have been pleased that Judah was going to get what was coming to her.

But Amos uses another literary device to build the listener's interest and make him hang around till the end. Let's look at what Amos does:

The Three/Four Formula

One of the first things you notice is this saying, "for three transgressions of _____ and for four . . ." What does that mean?

It is especially confusing when he doesn't list three or four things after he says that. We might label this device as an $x/x+1$ formula. This $x/x+1$ formula is found throughout the Bible and usually follows a set pattern.

- It is occasionally used to emphasize completeness as in [Job 40:5](#), which says, "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add no more."

- It is sometimes used to mean “a few” - one or two of something. E.g. there were a couple of people at the meeting.
- It is sometimes used to mean abundance - “7 even 8” is used more often to refer to that. [Micah 5:5](#) says,

When the Assyrian invades our land,
 When he tramples on our citadels,
 Then we will raise against him
 Seven shepherds and eight leaders of men.

This means there will be plenty of shepherds (leaders). This is also seen in Ancient Near Eastern secular literature (from Ugarit). (E.g. Baal has 7 yea 8 bolts of lightning.)

- Sometimes it is more literal. The second number is what is being emphasized and the phrase “3 even 4” is mostly used for poetic parallelism. But it usually precedes a list of some sort. In [Ps 62:11-12](#) we see the one/two formula. In [Proverbs 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31](#) we have the three/four formula and in [Job 5:19-22](#) and [Proverbs 6:16-19](#) we have a six/seven grouping. [Proverbs 6](#): 16-19 is fairly well known....

In all these sections the author gives a list corresponding to the larger number of the formula. The significance of all this is that the typical Jew would have been expecting Amos to list four transgressions for each of these nations mentioned. Does he do that? No. Why?

Amos is going to adapt this common 3-4 # formula to set up the audience and emphasize his message. Let's look at the speeches:

A. Judgment Against the Nations (1:3-2:5)

1. Damascus

1:3-5 - “Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron.”

Damascus was the capitol of the Arameans or Syrians off to the North. Hazael and Ben-hadad were previous kings of Aram. This probably refers to the constant battles between Gilead and the Arameans. The word “threshing” is probably figurative for harsh and thorough conquest with the idea of Aram's armies raking across Gilead slicing and crushing it as though it were grain on the threshing floor. This could even refer to actual methods of torture where a device like a sledge with iron prongs or

knives was used on prisoners, –it could be that the huge sledges were literally dragged over the enemies to crush them.

But notice, even though it is a gruesome thing, there is only one transgression listed. Not four as the audience would have expected.

Damascus fell to Assyrians in 732 BC.

2. Gaza

1:6-8 - Philistines in the West. The cities mentioned, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron were major cities in Philistia.

Their sin - “Because they deported an entire population to deliver it up to Edom.”

Although it might look like two crimes listed, the overall concept is that of one thing-large-scale slave trade. The Philistines were famous for capturing whole villages and selling them into slavery to Edom and from there they were sold to other parts of the world. [Joel 3:4-8](#) talks further about their slave trade, and also mentions that Tyre participated with them. Tyre is the next city mentioned.

3. Tyre

1:9-10 - This refers to the Phoenicians. Their crime against humanity was also slave trade with Edom. Strictly speaking we might see two transgressions here, but it seems that it is really one sin because the covenant of brotherhood was broken by the slave trade.

So, we have three nations condemned but only one sin listed for each. The 3/4 formula would have made the audience anticipate the fourth nation to be mentioned as the climax of the story.

4. Edomites

1:11-12 - When Amos mentioned Edom fourth, I'm sure many thought this was the conclusion because the 3/4 formula might be mirrored in the speech as a whole with Amos denouncing three nations and then concluding with a special denunciation on the fourth. And I'm sure they were pleased. Edom was Israel's bitterest enemy. That is truly a sad thing because the Edomites were the descendants of Esau - Jacob's brother. Remember Jacob's other name was Israel.

“Because he pursued his brother with the sword” certainly refers to this relationship between Israel and Edom.

With all the emphasis on three and four transgressions, these four separate statements might make it seem like this is the culmination of the speech. But these four statements really all describe one basic sin and that is the intense hostility for Israel.

So Amos continues,

5. Ammon

1:13-15 - This is certainly a gross sin. Ancient armies would sometimes do this to terrorize the enemy. And certainly committing this atrocity against defenseless women and children showed how immoral they had become. But again, I think there is just one conceptual sin listed. It says they ripped open the pregnant women *in order to* expand their borders. So it is their cruel imperialistic expansion that is in view.

6. Moabites

2:1-3 - Ammon and Moab were daughters of Lot. More relatives. The sin listed is burning the bones of the king of Edom. It seems that in ancient times, much importance was placed on a dead man's body being peacefully placed in the family burial site, so he could be, "gathered to his fathers." (BKCOT) If you remember they hauled Joseph's bones out of Egypt to bury them in the Promised Land.

So their sin was that of desecrating graves.

7. Judah

2:4-5 - Now he is getting closer to home. And he makes a couple of statements against them. These statements are really just an elaboration on one sin

- The sin is rejecting the law of the lord
- The means is by not keeping the decrees, and
- The reason is because they followed false gods instead of the one true God.

And as Judah is the seventh nation mentioned, the audience would be certain this was the point of the message. Actually, the sin listed is perhaps the worst so far and is appropriate for the seventh pronouncement.

Notice the progression. He starts off with foreign nations and gets closer to home as he lists relatives.

Notice the numbers. First we notice Amos doesn't follow the usual convention of listing four sins after he uses the 3/4 formula. And second, it appears at first that he is going to focus his attention on Edom and then he continues. Then it looks like he is culminating with Judah, which is listed, 7th. Seven is a significant number and represents fullness, etc. The number eight is also significant in that it follows seven and gives the idea of abundance or "therefore..."

So there is something wrong with the way Amos has told his story. He didn't follow the rules. That is part of understanding and appreciating the literature of the Bible. When someone doesn't follow the rules it is usually done on purpose to make you take notice. The audience would have noticed this and been expecting something more. In other words, he has set up his audience. He has told them of those that will be destroyed and seemingly ends with Judah.

But - surprise - he continues and adds an 8th item to the list -- Israel. Israel is the target of the speech and the judgment. So we really shouldn't isolate each speech and the sin and judgment of each nation and turn them into principles. These are more than likely just building to #8.

The point is: Israel is worse than all the other nations.

B. Judgment Against Israel (2:6-16)

Now he gets personal. He gives it to them. 2:6-16 is the 8th oracle. Here he lists 8 or 10 sins (depending on how you count them), which could possibly be divided into 4 categories. So, Israel appears worse than the rest.

As you read verses 6-8 you notice some parallel structure: e.g.: They sell the righteous for money and (they sell) the needy for a pair of sandals.

Parallel structure was just the Hebrew way of saying everything. They like to repeat themselves. So, in this case, although it might look like separate sins, it is really a poetic way of describing one sin. Since we divided the sins of the other nations conceptually, we will do that here to be consistent.

Here are the four conceptual categories:

(1) Oppressing the innocent and the poor (2:6b-7a)

In verse 6 we see the justice system was corrupt. The law said it was OK to sell a debtor to pay the debt, but they were abusing it. The word righteous may mean the one who is right in a lawsuit. So the rich and the powerful may have been able to bribe judges to decide in their favor in a false lawsuit and that allowed them to sell the "righteous" (the one who was innocent but declared guilty) into slavery to pay the fine.

"Selling the needy for a pair of sandals" shows that the people were being sold into slavery for small debts or pledges. The law commanded the Israelites to give to the needy without demanding repayment ([Deut. 15: 7f](#)).

Verses 9-11 recount God's provision for Israel. This reminds me of the unforgiving servant who refused to forgive his fellow slave a small debt, when he had just been forgiven a huge amount. I think God is heightening Israel's guilt by setting their rebellion against the backdrop of his own gracious acts toward them. It was He who conquered Canaan for Israel. At Jericho, Ai, etc. and later with Gideon and Samson. They took his forgiveness and salvation and provision but did not pass it on to others.

(2) Engaging in pagan religious practices (2:7b)

Verse 7 - is probably a reference to the fact that the Israelite men were going to pagan temples and participating with the temple prostitutes.

(3) Abusing the system of pledges and fines (2:8)

Verses 8 may also be referring to a different scenario - First, they weren't supposed to keep a cloak taken as a pledge overnight (Ex 22:26-27). It was assumed that only the very needy would borrow anything and so lenders were not to charge interest and profit from another person's misfortune, nor were they to keep coats that were given as collateral overnight. The poor persons would need it to stay warm. The poor person probably was required to give his coat as collateral so he couldn't go from

place to place borrowing from every merchant. If a guy came in without a coat, that meant he had already borrowed for the day and he wouldn't be able to borrow anything else. He needed his coat back so he could stay warm that night and have something to use as collateral the next day. So these merchants were keeping the coats and, to make matters worse, we see the second sin - they used them to sleep on at night as they “worshipped” at pagan altars.

(4) Showing lack of respect for God's special servants (2:12)

Verse 12 shows the corruption and rejection of the religious system and the rejection of religious leaders. The Nazarites had taken a vow not to drink any alcohol, but the Israelites were coercing them to break their vows. They had no commitment to God and had no respect for those who did.

Does anything stand out to you at first glance?

I think two things stand out:

First, Amos finally lists four sins. This is the point of his 3/4 formula. He didn't list four sins for the other nations because Israel is the target of the coming judgment.

Second, These sins don't look nearly as bad as those of the other nations. So what is the point? Why does God consider Israel to be worse than all the other nations?

I think this points us to the theme of the book.

THEME: God requires more from those to whom He has given more. [Luke 12:48](#)

God had given the Jews the law. They knew better. That was God's complaint against Judah in verse 4 – that Judah rejected the Law. And it is God's complaint against Israel, but he elaborates because Israel is the target audience and he really wants to drive the point home.

Summary

Amos wants you, the listener, to ask the question, “Why are these lists so short?” Then he gets to Israel who has many more sins listed than every other nation. Israel is really guilty - guiltier than all the rest.

What do all these sins of Israel have in common? We can see how the Israelites compromised God's laws and principles to achieve success (which they defined as wealth). Their theology said that the wealthy person was a righteous person. We see that over and over again in the parables in the NT. This further pacified their conscience as they told themselves that their prosperity was God's sign of approval.

God gave Israel and Judah “more” than the other nations—the law, a call to be His people, and from them He requires more.

Questions for group discussion

1. What can we learn from the sins of the nations about the things that God hates?
2. Judah and Israel are judged because they have failed to live up to God’s Law—a different standard of judgment from that applied to the nations. In what ways does 2:4-16 show the social, economic, and religious guilt of God’s people? In what ways does the modern church fall short of doing justice?

A Passion for Justice

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#3 of 8--October 26th theme: God, Politics, War, And Justice

III. The Reasons for Judgment ([Amos 3-6](#))

A. The First Message (3:)

1. The Unique Relationship (3:1-2)

When you get to 3:2 you see that Israel is chosen and you would normally think that means special treatment. That is what the Jews thought at that time. There was an aberrant doctrine of eternal security floating around Israel. They thought they were immune from judgment, because they were the chosen people living in the chosen city. They thought it didn't matter what they did. They took their relationship with God for granted. I think 6:8 may be a reference to this attitude.

But to God, being chosen, means having responsibility. Israel forgot the stipulations of the covenant made in Deut. They were only secure as long as they followed God. That was part of the OT law.

How does this relate to us since we are not under the covenant blessings and curses?

In the same way, we are children of God. We can't remove the relationship no matter how much we sin. What we can change is whether or not he needs to discipline us or whether He can continue with His planned blessings for us. When Israel was bad, they were still God's chosen people, they just didn't get to enjoy His blessings. Instead, God had to discipline them. And He disciplined them for transgressions that didn't seem as bad to us as the other nations. But they knew better.

We have a tendency to want to earn God's blessings and we think we deserve God's blessings. (That is one of the main lessons from Hosea) but there is a fine line here that we need to understand. We do not earn God's blessings by obedience—but there are blessings that come with honoring God.

2. The Inevitable Judgment (3:3-8)

In 3:3-8 Amos uses seven rhetorical questions to show that the judgment of God is inevitable. There is a progression here:

- 3:3 No element of force or disaster

- 3:4 One animal overpowering another
- 3:5 Man overpowering animals
- 3:6 Man overpowering other men
- 3:6b God overpowers man. Climax
- 3:7-8 God always reveals Himself and His plan to mankind. He tells us what He wants us to do, but with that information comes responsibility to do it. If we fail to do it, judgment will follow.

3. Unparalleled Oppression (3:9-10)

3:9 Ashdod (Philistines) and Egypt were former oppressors of Israel. But things were so bad in Israel now that Amos is sarcastically calling them to witness the internal oppression going on now. It is like saying, "You thought you oppressed them? You don't even know how to oppress compared to them. Watch them oppress themselves."

4. The Coming Catastrophe (3:11-15)

Because of the oppression God was going to send an enemy in to destroy them. And in case some of the listeners thought God would save them again this time, Amos compares God's saving them to a shepherd snatching a leg bone or ear from a lion's mouth. Only a few people would be spared.

The reference to the lion in 3:12 goes back to the first verse of Amos. Remember he said, "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem..." This is just another literary device Amos uses that shows his skill as a writer.

So, the point of the first message is that Israel was chosen and because of their rebellion and internal oppression, judgment was certain.

Questions for group discussion

1. What does Amos 3:3-8 teach regarding the responsibility of the people of God?

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#4 of 8--November 2nd theme: God, Leadership, Power, And Justice

III. The Reasons for Judgment (Amos 3-6)

B. The Second Message (4:)

1. Economic Exploitation

4:1 This is certainly a colorful and sarcastic section. Women are normally sensitive and compassionate, but note the contrast here. The women are compared with the fat cows living on the lush pastures of Bashan. The idea here is that these spoiled women demanded luxury from their “masters” (not the typical word for husband--more sarcasm and reversal of roles) and the only way their husbands could meet their demands was by oppressing the poor.

4:2 The cattle imagery is continued by the meat hook imagery.

So, economic exploitation was one problem, now, he describes another.

2. Religious Hypocrisy

4:4 continues the sarcasm. Bethel and Gilgal were important sites in Israel's salvation history. (Gen 28:10-22; Josh 4-5) Normally the priest would call people to come worship, but here we see Amos calling the people to come to Bethel and Gilgal to sin. The sacrifices and tithes that they were bringing to God had become a sham. They did everything to impress other people (vs. 5), not to worship God. They were actually going to church to sin. Not to mention the fact that they weren't going to Jerusalem to worship, which was the only authorized worship center for Yahweh.

4:5 Notice it says, “proclaim freewill offerings and make them known.” This shows that they were bragging about their spirituality, their giving, etc. They were doing things to be seen.

4:6-11 shows God's response to their hypocrisy and His repeated attempts to bring them back to Him. The phrase, “Yet you have not returned to me” is repeated five times.

Amos 4:6 says, "Yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. The punishments mentioned in the next few verses are an allusion to the promised curses of Deuteronomy 28.

- Famine is mentioned in Amos 4:6 and in Deuteronomy 28:17-18.
- Drought in Amos 4:7-8 and Deut 28:23-24.
- Locusts in Amos 4:9 and Deut 28:38.
- Plague in Amos 4:19 and Deut 28:60.

This shows God's patience - that He tried so many times, and it shows His mercy because we see that He started out with less severe measures and then increased the severity. (Famine, drought, crop failure, disease and war.)

Questions for group discussion

1. What does Amos 4 teach on the
 - a. The evil of luxury
 - b. Religious formalism
 - c. God's attempts to bring Israel to her senses

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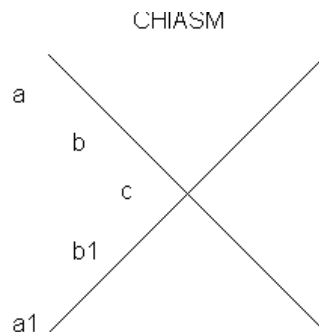
#5 of 8--November 9th theme: God's Passion For Equitable Wealth

C. The Third Message (5:1-17)

Chiastic structure

Chapter 5 is divided into two sections using a favorite literary device called a Chiasm. Explain: Draw X and show abcba...

Sometimes a Chiasm was just used as an outline and sometimes it really points us to the key idea of main point of the section. So not only is it fun to look for these, but it usually helps us understand the main idea of the author.



If we outline these two messages, it points to the overall truth that: the nation would be judged by its mighty Sovereign God, but individuals could yet repent and live.

C. The Third Message (5:1-17)

1. Description of certain judgment (5:1-3)
 2. Call for individual repentance (5:4-6)
 3. Accusation of legal injustice (5:7)
 4. Portrayal of a sovereign God (5:8-9)
 5. Accusation of legal injustice (5:10-13)
 6. Call for individual repentance (5:14-15)

7. Description of certain judgment (5:16-17)

D. The Fourth Message (5:18-27)

1. Description of certain judgment (5:18-20)

2. Accusation of religious hypocrisy (5:21-22)

3. Call for individual repentance (5:23-24)

4. Accusation of religious hypocrisy (5:25-26)

5. Description of certain judgment (5:27)

Remember Isaiah 6: When Isaiah saw the glory of God on his throne, it caused him to repent and make himself available to serve God.

That is the point of the third and fourth messages. The Chiastic structure points us to that. The sovereignty of God in message three should cause the repentance in message four.

Here are a few things to notice about these messages.

In 5:1 Amos summons the people to hear his lament over Israel.

Israel's demise was so certain that Amos lamented her fall as though it had already happened. This should have been as shocking to the Israelites as it would to one of us to read our own obituary in the newspaper.

5:2 Virgin Israel - a picture of being in the prime of life and experiencing a premature death. Israel could have and should have had a long prosperous life. Actually, God's plan was for an eternal kingdom for them.

5:10 They hate the one who points out their wickedness.

5:17 Just as God passed through Egypt (in judgment); He was going to pass through Israel. Ex 12:12

5:18-20 Pictures a man fleeing from one thing after another with no escape to be found.

5:23 Shows that their worship and singing was just noise in God's ears because their worship was merely external.

5:24 shows that God desires justice. How you treat your fellow humankind is what is important to God and that is what shows that you love God. Over and over again we see the theme repeated that we are to love God and show it by our love for our neighbor.

Questions for group discussion

1. In Amos 5:1-17 what ways does God use to draw men and women back to Him?
2. In Amos 5:18-27 what is necessary to make our worship acceptable to God?

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#6 of 8--November 16th theme: When God Shouts—Hearing The Prophetic Word

E. The Fifth Message (6:)

1. Their Boastful Complacency

6:2 This message addresses the problem in Israel in which everyone felt they were better because they were the chosen people.

2. Their Luxurious Indulgence

This section speaks for itself:

4 You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches.

You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves.

5 You strum away on your harps like David
and improvise on musical instruments.

6 You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions,
but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

7 Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile;
your feasting and lounging will end.

3. The Complete Devastation

6:8 We've already mentioned the aberrant doctrine of eternal security going around in that day. They thought they were invincible - partly because they were God's people, and because of their own strength. The rest of this chapter shows how wrong they were.

6:12 "you have turned justice into poison." The judicial system that was designed to preserve the nation's health had become a lethal poison within its body.

6:13 is translated in the NIV as "you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar." Lo Debar was a city on the East side of the Jordan, which they had conquered. rbd (d*b*r) can mean either "word" or "thing" and with the negative (loa) could mean "no thing." Therefore, Amos could be making a play on words (Lo Debar vs. Lo Dabar) saying that they rejoice in nothing.

6:14 Reference to Assyria.

Hamath was a city in the north. The Brook of Arabah marked the southern border of Israel during Jeroboam II's reign. Mentioning these two cities shows how complete will be the destruction.

Questions for group discussion

1. In Amos 6 why were the Israelites insensitive to the approaching judgment? Does this contain a warning application to modern life”?

A Passion for Justice

Studies in the book of Amos at CapChurch

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24

#7 of 8--November 23rd theme: 4 Levels Of God's Judgment On Injustice

The Results of Judgment - Five Visions

In the next three visions Amos uses the following literary technique--the first two visions are similar but the third one is different and catches the listener or reader's attention.

A. The Vision of the Locust Swarm (7:1-3)

1. The vision of destruction - 7:1-2a
2. The plea for mercy 7:2b
3. The suspension of judgment 7:3

B. The Vision of the Fire (7:4-6)

1. The vision of the all consuming fire 7:4
2. The plea for mercy 7:5
3. The suspension of judgment 7:6

C. The Vision of the Plumb Line (7:7-9)

1. The vision of the Plumb Line 7:7-8
2. The promise of Judgment

The third vision does not begin with judgment nor have a plea for mercy and the subsequent cancellation of judgment. The rhetorical purpose of this trilogy of visions is to set the audience up for the message of the third vision. The contrast of the third vision with the first two should draw attention to what is being said emphasize to the audience that Israel is "out-of-line" and doesn't measure up to God's standards. The prophet had asked for mercy in the first two visions, but when he was shown just how bad the people were (with the plumb line), he didn't ask for mercy because he could see that the judgment was deserved.

What is the main point of these visions? First we notice that the first two visions are like motion pictures. Amos responds to them emotionally and is overwhelmed by the destruction and effect on the nation. The third vision is like a snapshot. It invites reflection from the one seeing it. Amos sees the nation as God sees it. He looks at

the situation theologically (the plumb line) and from reality (Amaziah's response) and sees that the judgment is deserved.

The Reaction (10-17)

The biographical account in 7:10-17 seems out of place but really isn't. It shows the reaction of the leaders of Israel (especially the priest) to the message of Amos. They rejected his warning and this proves that the visions are correct. The nation is corrupt all the way up to the priests and the king.

Amaziah's report is not accurate. He accuses Amos of conspiring to kill Jeroboam with the sword (7:11) but Amos' prophecy and reference to the sword was figurative language (metonymy of adjunct) referring to God's judgment on Jeroboam or perhaps it was picturing the severing of the king's line. Amaziah also says that the Israelites will go into exile. Amos didn't say that.

Amos responded to Amaziah's accusation by describing in more detail what God's judgment would bring. It is ironic that the details of Amaziah's saying would indeed come true. Many would fall by the sword and the rest would be hauled away into exile.

D. The Vision of Ripe Fruit (8:)

The vision in 8:1-3 fits in nicely with the preceding section. The three visions, culminating with the vision of the plumb line, showed that judgment was very much deserved. The response of Amaziah, the priest, showed the corruption of the nation, even up through the leadership. It also showed that the warning was rejected. Finally, the vision of the basket of ripe fruit showed the time was ripe for executing the judgment. The time was now.

There is word play in 8:2 between the word for "fruit" and the word for "the end". They both sound the same. I believe this figure of speech is called paronomasia. When Amos said he saw a basket of fruit, God says, "Yes, the end has come."

This is one figure of speech that could be transferred into English. It is not the same type of figure of speech, but the idea is similar. The NIV says the fruit is "ripe" and God says the time is "ripe" for judgment.

8:5 shows the hypocrisy of the people. They went to worship on the Sabbath, but they resented the Sabbath because they couldn't go to work and make more money by cheating others. If loving God and loving your neighbor can sum up the law, the Israelites showed that they did neither. And as we have pointed out before, if you don't love your neighbor, it proves that you don't love God.

8:11 shows that it is worse to go without hearing the word of God than to go without food.

E. The Avenging Lord (9:1-10)

9:8-9 shows that God will shake the nation to separate the wheat from the chaff. And when God shakes, no chaff will remain.

Questions for group discussion

1. What truth is demonstrated by the difference between the first two visions and the last two visions in Amos 7:1-9 and Amos 8:1-3?
2. What do you make of Amos' courage in the face of danger in Amos 7:10-17?
3. In Amos 8:7-14, the burden of the message deals with social injustice. How are injustice and sin related in this text?
4. In Amos 9:1-10, what does this vision teach us about God?

A Passion for Justice

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#8 of 8--November 30th theme: Worship And Justice + Worship Fest

V. Restoration (9:11-15)

The ultimate purpose for God's judgment is not revenge; it is restoration. God punishes us to bring us back to Him. This is always the purpose for discipline. You see it in Matthew 18 when Jesus talks about reproving your brother. The goal is to bring him to the point where he sees his sin and repents. Peter understands this and so he asks the question in Matthew 18: 21 about how many times we must forgive. Jesus' answer is - always.

A. Political Renewal (9:11)

There will come a time when God will restore.

B. National Purpose (9:12)

9:12 shows that it will be time when godly people from other nations will be included. That was Israel's purpose all along -- to be a testimony to the world of how great God is and lead the nations to Him.

Ezekiel 17: 22-23: Thus says the Lord GOD: I personally will take a shoot from the top of the towering cedar, a cutting from the crown of the tree, and plant it on a high and towering mountain, on the high mountain of Israel. It will grow, putting out branches and fruit—a majestic cedar. Birds of every sort and kind will live under it. They'll build nests in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will recognize that I, God, made the great tree small and the small tree great, made the green tree turn dry and the dry tree sprout green branches.

Matthew 13:31-32: Jesus spoke this parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (RSV)

In these passages the birds represent the nations partaking of and benefiting from the establishment of the kingdom.

Questions for group discussion

1. What does this final section of Amos, 9:11-15 teach about the relationship between judgment and restoration in the purposes of God?
2. Looking back through the book of Amos what do you think is God's call for justice expressed in the community of faith and beyond?