

WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



LESSON 5 - AMOS

FACILITATOR'S

Note

This lesson explores the preaching and prophesies of Amos. Amos is not known for being the “make you feel good” prophet. He speaks to the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and highlights their deplorable spiritual bankruptcy. Unlike Hosea, Amos was not “one of them” as he is a “farmer/shepherd” and comes from lowly and poor conditions. So, Amos doesn’t have much sympathy for these well-to-do Israelites who have trampled God’s courts with their “worship” that God considers “noise”. God will not be flattered by pomp and ceremony. While other “prophets” were simply “crowd pleasers” who spoke only what the Israelites wanted to hear, Amos was anything but. He spoke the blaring message of “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel” (4:12). In this lesson, spend time considering whether or not we have similarities in our modern day, western Christianity as that of the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom. How might we steer away from the trap of self-indulgence and complacency while having the illusion of being “faithful Christians”?

Through this lesson we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

HEAD  **→ HEART**  **→ HANDS** 

We hope that by this study your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the “Living Word” to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this “Living Word” concept.

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for this lesson by digging into the Word and reading through the book of **Amos**. We also encourage you to read/scan through **2 Kings 14:23-29; 15:1-7; and 2 Chronicles 26** as a background to the book. As you move through **Amos**, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.*

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PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Presentation of introductory material on the prophesy of Amos.
- Recognize the state of “spiritual bankruptcy” that the Israelites were in.
- Understand God sees directly into the heart and does not stand for “empty worship” while ignoring justice and mercy.
- Realize that God’s people should always be “Prepared to meet their God” by how they live their faith.
- In God’s great mercy and grace, He always preserves a faithful remnant that He will restore and bless.

DISCUSSION STARTERS (OPTIONAL)

- Is it possible to simply “go through the motions” of worship while being completely void of honoring and praising God? Explain.
- In what ways might we find ourselves practicing “empty worship” today?
- Have you ever heard the phrase, “Are you ready to meet your Maker?” What does it mean? Does it bring to mind positive or negative thoughts/feelings? Why?
- Should we be ready to “meet our Maker”? Explain.

KNOWLEDGE HEAD

From God’s Word through Amos

- OVERVIEW
 - Author
 - Amos means, “burden bearer”.
 - He is known as the “farmer prophet” or “country prophet” because he was a sheep herdsman and grower of sycamore figs from a small village in Judah called Tekoa.
 - Amos was an older contemporary of Hosea.

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- Amos' prophecy/sermon is spoken to the Northern Kingdom, but he also condemns the practices of neighboring nations (including Judah).
 - Amos was preaching/prophesying to a nation at the top of its political and economic power. Therefore, the Israelites had booming business and a great deal of material prosperity. This led the Israelites into a time of self-sufficiency and pompous complacency. They had thus ruled out God but continued in their "religious practices" toward Him. This angered God greatly!
- It is interesting to note the contrast between the life Amos lived (simple and poor) and the people (Israel) who he was preaching/prophesying to. It goes without saying that he had no sympathy for their behavior or God's stern message toward them.
- **Date**
 - Amos wrote between the reigns of Uzziah (also known as Azariah), king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. This most likely places his writing around 760-750 B.C.
 - Interestingly, Amos mentions his writing two years after a major earthquake. While the date for this earthquake is uncertain, it appears the prophet Zechariah also mentions it in Zech. 14:5.
 - During this time Israel enjoyed increasing wealth and expansion of its borders, but as a nation they were spiritually bankrupt. Flagrant sin was rampant and arrogance of the people was seen in how they treated those less fortunate than themselves. They practiced indulgence (3:12, 15; 4:1-3; 5:12; 6:1-7) while perverting justice (5:10-12) and oppressing the poor (2:6-8; 4:1; 8:4-6).
 - Their sinful practices corrupted their hearts and their worship toward God. Yes, they still worshipped God, but God found it empty, unacceptable, and considered it nothing but "noise" (5:21-24).
- **Theme(s)**
 - The overarching theme in Amos is woe: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (4:12)
 - Amos was unlike the prophets found throughout Israel during his day. While they simply told the people what they wanted to hear ("crowd pleasers"), Amos brought a message that would not be popular.
 - While we witnessed a great showing of God's love and compassion in Hosea, we do not see a lot of sympathy, love, or compassion in Amos.
 - Amos does intercede for the people in 7:1-5 and calls them to repent and return to God to avoid His punishment in 5:4-6, 14-15).

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- Yet, most of the message centers on doom and punishment from a righteous and holy God.
 - The “Day of the Lord” (5:18) is a recurring theme as a part of this discussion. However, it is not discussed in the positive light of hope for God’s people. Instead, it is regarded as a day of punishment for the Israelites.
 - Israel would be punished for their many sins littered throughout the prophecy. Instead of being a holy people focused on righteousness, justice, mercy, love, worship, and adoration; they had become a people who were rebellious, self-centered, and cruel.
 - God will send them into exile due to their unfaithfulness to Him (5:27; 9:8).
 - Israel believed that since they were God’s people and they were offering their extravagant worship before Him, then He would surely grant them His favor. They were dead wrong! God will not put up with false pretenses and empty worship.
 - **ASK:**
 - Do we struggle like the Israelites thinking that since we are “saved” we can live a life separate from God during the week and be “holy” on Sundays? After all, isn’t God all about forgiveness? How?
 - Can we get caught in simply going through the motions of worship in order to check a box to get to heaven, while our hearts are far from God? Explain.
 - One other minor, but major theme. There is a message of hope laced within the pages of this prophecy. God promises that He will preserve a remnant of His people from destruction (9:8).
 - This remnant is a sign that God has a future glory prepared for His people as He plans to restore them (9:11-15).
 - This is a Messianic prophecy according to James as recorded in Acts 15:13-18. He interprets this to mean the inclusion of all people (not just Jews) under the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - **ASK:**
 - Amos demonstrates a God of punishment and wrath for the consequences of sin. Do we struggle seeing God like this? Why?

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- How do we teach those who don't have a relationship with God that this is also a part of God that they must accept in order to follow Him?
- **Amos in the New Testament**
 - "Did you bring me sacrifices in the wilderness" (Amos 5:22-27 – Acts 7:42-43) – Stephen appeals to the unfaithfulness of the Israelites in the wilderness.
 - "All the nations who are called by my name" (Amos 9:11-12 – Acts 15:16-17) – The tabernacle (or tent of David) has been rebuilt and is now open to all peoples.
- **THE TEXT**
 - According to Jack P. Lewis, it was not uncommon for prophetic books to have three elements: (1) oracles against nations, (2) oracles of doom and punishment for Israel, and (3) oracles of hope.¹ Amos contains these three elements and can be divided accordingly:
 - **Oracles Against Nations**
 - Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the neighbors of Israel (including Judah), their sins, and their specific punishment. This pattern is repeated 7 times before turning to Israel in 2:6-16.
 - **Oracles of Doom and Punishment for Israel**
 - Amos 3:1-9:10 focuses on Israel's sins and the doom and punishment that will ensue as a consequence. This section can be divided in two parts:
 - Chapters 3-6 highlight Israel's guilt and her punishments. Chapters 3-5 begin with "Hear this word..." from the Lord. God draws from His past dealings with Israel.
 - Chapters 7:1-9:10 present 5 visions that describe further condemnation of Israel's sins.
 - **Oracles of Hope**
 - Amos 9:11-15 promises a future glory for the remnant preserved of God's people. In the midst of such sinfulness and unfaithfulness, God provides hope for His faithful children.
 - **1:1-2:16 (Oracles Against Nations)**
 - Have someone read Amos 1:2 – God is **ROARING** from Zion. This is not an auspicious beginning.
 - **1:3-2:3** – God pronounces His displeasure and punishment on the surrounding nations.
 - **2:4-5** – *Have someone read these two verses.* God addresses Judah's sin. It is different from the other Gentile nations as it addresses their rejection of God's law. God is displeased with His people's unfaithfulness to His Word.

¹ Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets*, 11th printing (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 17-18.

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- **NOTE:** God is concerned and displeased with sin wherever it occurs and with whomever commits it. God's judgment is not limited to His own people, but to all His created children. He calls neighboring nations who do not worship Him into account as well.
- **2:6-16** – Israel's punishment.
 - Read 2:6-8 – What were Israel's sins?
 - Read 2:10-12 – What did God do for His people in verses 10-11? How did Israel respond according to verse 12?
- **ASK:**
 - Do we have a tendency to reject God's Word as Judah did? In what ways? How do we excuse it?
 - Do we ask our prophets not to prophesy to us today? In what way? Why?
- **3:1-9:10 (Oracles of Doom and Punishment for Israel)**
 - **3:1-6:14**
 - God condemns the wealthy ruling classes for civil and religious oppressions (3:1-4:5)
 - God knows Israel, which makes her corruptions greater (3:1-8)
 - Because God chose Israel, her sins must be addressed (vv. 1-2)
 - The prophet has the right to speak as God's chosen (vv. 3-8)
 - Civil oppression and God's judgment on those who oppress (3:9-4:3)
 - The sins and punishment of the ruling class (3:9-15)
 - The sins and judgment of self-focused women (4:1-3)
 - Take time to read 4:4-5 – Condemnation of their "empty worship" (self-serving not God-honoring) (4:4-5)
 - **ASK:**
 - What impacts you most about these verses?
 - Can we find ourselves offering worship to God that is by the book, but not by the heart? Explain.
 - Israel's ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and Failure to Return to God (4:6-13)
 - In this section, spend time recognizing that God often disciplines His unfaithful children as a means to bring them back to Him. Look at the constant pattern: both of God's attempts to get their attention, and the Israelites failure to return.

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- God's fatherly discipline goes unheeded (vv. 6-11)
 - Famine (v. 6)
 - Drought (vv. 7-8)
 - Disease, mildew, locusts (v. 9)
 - Pestilence and enemy attacks (v. 10)
 - Earthquake, burning (v. 11)
- **ASK:**
 - Does God still discipline us today? Can He use some of the same disciplines from above? What are some others?
 - Do we tend to allow God's discipline to go unheeded in our lives? Why?
- Read verses 12-13 as they sum up much of what Amos is about: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (vv. 12-13)
 - The Israelites had viewed God as a "god" (like any other) that could simply be flattered and He would continue to bless them. God looked upon Israel as children who needed to be disciplined. Unfortunately, His discipline had gone unnoticed and it was now time for them the "meet their God" who is "the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!" He ain't playing no more!
- Lamentation and Woes (5:1-6:14)
 - Lamentation and Plea (5:1-17)
 - Lamentation – Both the God and the prophet lament that Israel is fallen and must be punished (vv. 1-3)
 - Read these verses – God still pleads with His people to seek Him and live (vv. 4-6, 14-15)
 - Yet, Israel still turns righteousness into unrighteousness and oppresses the poor and needy. This unrighteousness must be punished (vv. 7-13)
 - Unless they seek God, hate evil, love good, establish justice (vv. 14-15)
 - Verses 14-15 once again demonstrate God's desire for His children's return and the grace He wishes to give to them.
 - God's announcement of judgment (vv. 16-17)
 - First woe – fear the Day of the Lord (5:18-27)
 - The Day of the Lord for unrepentant Israel: Darkness not Light (vv. 18-20, focus on 18 & 20)

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- Empty worship will not flatter God or prevent the Day of the Lord (vv. 21-24)
 - God's HATES empty worship (see also Isaiah 1:10-20)
 - Their empty worship has been inherited from their fathers. Their punishment will be exile (vv. 25-27)
 - Second woe - upon the puffed up and wealthy rulers of Israel (6:1-14)
 - The self-indulgent rich rulers (vv. 1-6)
 - Exile and destruction are certain (vv. 7-11)
 - Their prideful trust in their own power will not prevent God's judgment on them (vv. 12-14)
 - The oppressors will become the oppressed.
- **7:1-9:10 – 5 Visions Concerning Israel's Sins**
 - **Locusts** – in mercy God relents (7:1-3)
 - **Fire** – a more severe punishment than that of the locusts, again God relents (7:4-6)
 - **Plumb Line** – destruction on the idolatrous nation of Israel (7:7-9)
 - **An interlude:** Amos accused by Amaziah the priest (7:10-17)
 - Amos is commanded not to prophesy by the priest Amaziah. This demonstrates how even the religious leaders of the people were corrupt and could not see nor hear the Lord. They too were caught up in self-indulgent practices.
 - Amos responds by letting them know that he was not commissioned to prophesy by the religious leaders, but instead by God Himself. HE MUST SPEAK THE WORD OF GOD!
 - **ASK:**
 - Are we willing to speak a word from God even when we know that our own "religious leaders" may disagree or even chastise us for it?
 - How do we know when it is word from God rather than our own word (opinion)?
 - **Basket of Summer Fruit** – Israel is ripe for judgment (8:1-14)
 - The time for God's mercy is now past, destruction is at hand (vv. 1-3)
 - God's eclipse of the nation – the light of day will be darkened by the coming judgment of God (vv. 4-14)

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- Perhaps the scariest thing that is said in these verses comes in vv. 11-12. There will be a famine of God's Word. They will seek it, but they will not find it. SCARY!
- **Lord Standing Beside the Altar** – the destruction of the sinful kingdom of Israel (9:1-10)
 - You cannot flee from God (vv. 2-4)
 - Pay attention to v. 4b. We want God's eyes fixed upon us, but NOT in this way.
 - Who is God? (vv. 5-6)
 - NOTE v. 8 in particular. God will destroy the sinful kingdom of Israel. Yet, there will be a remnant of faithful people who He will not utterly destroy. The Remnant of Grace!
 - **ASK:**
 - Do you ever feel like you can hide or escape from God? Explain.
 - Throughout all of Scripture, God always maintains a remnant of His faithful people. What does this tell us about God? Why is this important?
 - This is a demonstration of God's grace and ultimate plan for His people. God is faithful and will uphold His promises to His people. He WILL save us all!
- **9:11-15 (Oracles of Hope)**
 - Read this wonderful passage together (make sure to include 9:8b)...
 - This conclusion is the only positive note in Amos. Notice how each prophecy (in the Minor Prophets) directed to either Judah or Israel has an optimistic note of future glory.
 - Look at some of the language here that demonstrates God's love and grace towards His people:
 - I will raise up...
 - Rebuild...
 - I will restore...
 - I will plant them...
 - Never again uprooted...
 - Read Acts 15:14-18 and compare the two passages.

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UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- What are some of the modern-day messages that we have heard through Amos today?
 - Do we find ourselves over-indulged and self-focused at times? How?
 - Do we neglect justice and mercy today and idly sit back while others are oppressed? In what way?
 - Have we at times performed “empty worship” before the Lord? Explain.
 - Do we truly “know” God and are we living up to that knowledge?
 - What we do matters, but why we do it is more important! How can we stay focused on the “why” while continuing to do the “what”?

WISDOM ✎ HANDS

- What messages did you hear in this lesson that need to be shared with people you know?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY? Think specifically.
- Commit to each other that you will all have the courage to share the message. Pray NOW and then pray for each other through the week to have the boldness to share.

PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God for forgiveness for our selfish tendencies and empty worship. Ask Him to help us in sharing His message of Love and Grace to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

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SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAH (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)