

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 5:1-27**

To learn more about the judgments of God against Israel for her sin.

It Sounds Like a Funeral Dirge!

I didn't grow up in the church. I came to faith at the age of 21, and prior to that, I had only been in a church a handful of times. I began my ministry career as an assistant to the pastoral staff at the church where I currently serve, and I also volunteered as a worship leader. The fact that I wasn't "churched" in my early years gave me some distinct advantages in that I wasn't married to an idea of how things should have been done. I was able to think outside of the box because, for me, there was no box! It also gave me a disadvantage, however, in that I didn't have a real connection or understanding to how certain traditional songs should go. I remember one time we introduced Chris Tomlin's new, updated version of *Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)*. Of course, even without a church upbringing, I knew the song *Amazing Grace*, but only by exposure from other popular media sources (movies, shows, etc.). I was so excited, nonetheless, to lead a song that I knew would touch some of our older congregants who grew up singing this cherished hymn. After all, *Amazing Grace* might be the greatest song ever written (either that or *Bohemian Rhapsody*). After the first service, an elderly woman approached me to speak with me. I had only had a few conversations with her in the past, and they were all usually a very negative critique of the newer style of worship music. To my delight, when she approached me, she had a smile. I was so certain I had finally struck a positive note! She said, "I wanted to comment on that new rendition of one of my favorite songs, *Amazing Grace*." I responded, "Yes ma'am! What did you think of it?" And with a smile she said, "It sounded like a funeral dirge." And then she walked away. God always humbles me in the funniest ways.

In Amos chapter 5, God issues a funeral dirge for Israel, indicating that while He hasn't actually passed judgment, the judgment is essentially already locked in. People will die. A funeral will be had (metaphorically), and people will remember that nation that God once protected. It's a pretty grim scenario in which it seems like God will wipe out 90% of Israel's population (Amos 5:5). Yet, though judgment is sure, God's grace is still enough to offer mercy to those who repent, as we will find out this morning.

The Creator

Verses 8 and 9 explore more of the creative power of Yahweh. Below is a brief outline of some of the details.

THE AUTHOR OF... ASTROLOGY?

The first detail Amos underlines is that God is the author of the well-known constellations in the ancient world. “The Pleiades” and “Orion” were known and revered in pagan cultures during Amos’ time, and so it would come as a surprise to the non-believer that these heavenly bodies are actually created by an even higher power.

DAY, NIGHT, AND RAINFALL

It is also the LORD who brings darkness and light to separate night from day (Gen. 1:3-5, 14-19). The precise nature of the sun’s rotation around the earth is dictated by His hand. Beyond that, the rain is also dictated by Him. This is not merely a scientific explanation of the way the world works, but a decree of God’s sovereign rule over the well-being of His people. Without proper rainfall, crops cannot survive, and famine sets in. In the ancient world, the Canaanites believed their god Baal controlled rainfall, and so this is also a correction to their false theology, a theology Israel would have been very familiar with.

DESTRUCTION ON THE WICKED

Finally, it is Yahweh who literally, “brings destruction upon a fortified place” (Amos 5:9). Even the most secure cities with the most advanced military strategies cannot stand against the fury of God against sin. If God desires to bring destruction, nothing can stop Him. As Amos has already written: “Does disaster come upon a city unless Yahweh has done” (Amos 3:6)?

The Prevention of Justice

Verses 10 through 13 admonish those who specifically stand in the way of justice. Their idea of, “reproving in the gate,” has to do with an ancient custom of settling disputes at the gate of a city (Ruth 4:1-12; 2 Sam. 15:2). These individuals not only avoid telling the truth, but they, “abhor him who speaks the truth” (Amos 5:10). The pattern laid out here is three-fold: 1. Someone who is not able to defend themselves is taken advantage of by someone in power, 2. Those people in power then use their power to bribe others from bringing those charges against them at the gate, 3. Those who have been taken advantage of are ignored as they plead their own case at the gate. Again, the pronouncement of judgment is similar to what God has already laid out in previous chapters. The people in question have taken advantage of the poor and used the proceeds they have exacted from them to build houses and vineyards, neither of which will be enjoyed because of the coming judgment of God (Amos 5:11).

There is, however, an appeal to do the right thing that the hope of mercy might come to pass. Amos says, “Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice at the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:14-15). Even in the face of certain judgment, there is a chance for redemption, as there had been in years past. When you consider the lifespan of Israel (the northern kingdom), there are several calls to repentance in the face of what seemed like certain judgment, and yet, God was always faithful to forgive. Here, nothing has changed. God is merciful. That’s an eternal truth that believers can trust in. However, there is a timeframe for repentance, and when that timeframe is up, judgment comes, which is why the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7-8: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:15).

A Modern Warning

It's important to consider what the spiritual condition of Israel might have looked like. Clearly, based on Amos' indictment, they were spiritually far from God and in utter rebellion. However, on the surface, it might not have appeared that way. These sins of exacting unfair wages from the poor and needy were veiled to the public eye. The bribes were done behind closed doors. And the spiritual practices were still happening. They were still holding their religious feasts and assemblies as prescribed by Moses, and yet they were detestable to God (Amos 5:21). They were still making burnt offerings, peace offerings, grain offerings, and lifting up Psalms in praise to God (Amos 5:22-23).

The lesson we learn from this is an important one. The quality of one's spiritual health is not determined by the good things we do. Sacrifices, offerings, assemblies, songs, and feasts were all *good practices* expected of God's people in the Old Testament. While we don't practice all of these things today, we do go to church services, give our offerings, worship with God's people, serve in different ministries, and participate in church-related events. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that as long as I am doing good things for Jesus, I must be in a good place, spiritually speaking. However, it is not the action (nor has it ever been the action), but the heart behind the action, that matters. The hearts of these people were clearly in rebellion based on how they took massive advantage of others, covered their sin, and indulged in whatever they wanted. When we stop seeing people as people, there is something wrong inwardly. When we are no longer crushed by injustice against human beings, we have perhaps veered further off the path than we are willing to admit. Amos warns us that when this happens, no amount of good, church-related practices will keep us from experiencing the discipline of God.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 5:1-2. What kind of word is being spoken over Israel? What is Israel called in verse 2?

2. Read Amos 5:3-7. Percentage wise, how many will be destroyed and how many will be spared in God's judgment of Israel? What offer is put out in verses 4 and 5? What offers are made in verses 6 and 7?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 5:8-9. What has God made? What does he call forth and pour out? What is His name? What does he bring against fortified cities?

2. Read Amos 5:10-15. What is the main issue at hand in verses 10 through 13? What is the significance of the gate? What does God tell His people to seek in place of evil? What is the promise if they will?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 5:16-17. In your own words, describe what it will be like when the Lord passes through Israel's midst, according to these verses.

2. Read Amos 5:18-20. What is the day of the Lord going to be like? Will it be positive or negative? Why?

Day Four

1. Read Amos 5:21-24. What spiritual practices was Israel committed to? What kind of sacrifices were being made? According to the notes, did God command these things? Why did God reject these things? What was the issue?

2. Read Amos 5:25-27. What are Sikkuth and Kiyun according to verse 26? Where is God going to send the house of Israel?

Week 6 Discussion: Amazing Grace

It's easy to read the Old Testament, particularly the prophets, and come away with the idea that God is a lot more angry than He is in the New Testament. Amos is no exception. The level of judgment is dreadful, and the certainty of it seems unquestionable. Yet, there are moments when God offers His hand of grace still. In Amos 5:4, God says, "Seek me and live." Amos 5:15 reads, "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." God's hand of mercy is still extended to those who are so far into their sinful rebellion that they don't even realize it. Talk as a group about the seriousness of sin and the beauty of grace.

1. Icebreaker: Do you feel like God is too harsh in judgment in the Old Testament? Why or why not?
2. How does understanding the severity of sin in the sight of a holy God help you accept God's punishment?
3. Is God obligated to be merciful towards us? Why or why not?
4. What is grace?
5. Why is grace cheapened when sin is viewed as, "not that bad?" In other words, when sin is tolerated grace is not as amazing. Why?
6. How does God's grace towards you help you show grace towards those who have wronged you?

Takeaways:

1. God takes seriously those who stand in the way of justice.
2. Even in the face of certain judgment, God offers His hand of mercy to Israel.

PRAYER REQUESTS: