



## CENTRAL truth

God wants us to seek Him and show the world who He is.



# 03 session 3 JUSTICE SERVED



## EXPLORE scripture AMOS 5:4-15

### AMOS 5:4-9

**4** For the LORD says to the house of Israel: Seek me and live! **5** Do not seek Bethel or go to Gilgal or journey to Beer-sheba, for Gilgal will certainly go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing. **6** Seek the LORD and live, or he will spread like fire throughout the house of Joseph; it will consume everything with no one at Bethel to extinguish it. **7** Those who turn justice into wormwood also

throw righteousness to the ground. **8** The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns darkness into dawn and darkens day into night, who summons the water of the sea and pours it out over the surface of the earth — the LORD is his name. **9** He brings destruction on the strong, and it falls on the fortress.

### AMOS 5:10-13

**10** They hate the one who convicts the guilty at the city gate, and they despise the one who speaks with integrity. **11** Therefore, because you trample on the poor and exact a grain tax from him, you will never live in the houses of cut stone you have built; you will never drink the wine from the lush vineyards

you have planted. **12** For I know your crimes are many and your sins innumerable. They oppress the righteous, take a bribe, and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates. **13** Therefore, those who have insight will keep silent at such a time, for the days are evil.

### AMOS 5:14-15

**14** Pursue good and not evil so that you may live, and the LORD, the God of Armies, will be with you as you have claimed. **15** Hate evil and love good;

establish justice at the city gate. Perhaps the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.



## EXPLORE options

### 1. Everyone's Problem

Before your group meets, write down at least ten different social issues on note cards, such as discrimination, poverty, bullying, hunger, gossip, homelessness, or unequal access to health care. Tape these cards up around your room and give each student a blank sticky note as they arrive. Ask them to put their sticky note under the topic that affects them or someone they know most. Point out the topics that have no sticky notes underneath them. Explain that Christians have a responsibility to pursue justice for all people—even if the injustices don't affect us directly—because God Himself is just. Today, we'll talk about how the Israelites failed to reflect God's divine nature when they allowed their justice system to be perverted. We'll also talk about the role of obedience in sincere worship and consider the importance of loving and pursuing good for God's glory.

### 2. R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Give each student a piece of paper and pencil and ask them to divide the paper into three columns. In the first column, ask them to make a list of people they respect. In the second column, ask them to list the reasons they respect each person in the first column. In the third column, ask them to describe how their respect for each person impacts the way they interact with them. Ask a few volunteers to share what they wrote about one person on their list. As a group, come up with a list of reasons people should show reverence for God. Explain that God deserves our obedience for many reasons, but mainly because He alone is holy. When we choose to disobey Him by not living the lives He calls us to, we misrepresent Him to the world. Today, we'll discover how Israel misrepresented God and find out what God planned to do about it.



### LET'S talk

**Why do some people mistreat, bully, or pick on others?**

**What should we do when we see people being mistreated?**



### THIS WEEK'S focus

Because sin has been around since the garden of Eden, most of us are used to watching it play out around us. Often, we only fight it when it affects us or those we love. But God expects more from us. When we let evil happen, we become participants in that evil. We give others the impression that the God we serve is okay with the way people hurt each other. When we serve justice, we show the world who He really is. When we worship God by standing against evil and doing the good deeds He has prepared for us to do (see Eph. 2:10), we paint a clear picture of Him—one this world needs to see. The Israelites in Amos's day didn't worship God in this way, and they suffered the consequences.



# CONVERSATION questions

## READ AMOS 5:4-9.

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throw righteousness to the ground. **8** The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns darkness into dawn and darkens day into night, who summons the water of the sea and pours it out over the surface of the earth — the LORD is his name. **9** He brings destruction on the strong, and it falls on the fortress.

Amos began his third sermon to Israel with a lament for their nation—like the ones that would typically be sung at a funeral—to indicate the seriousness of the situation they were in. If nothing changed, Israel would be destroyed, and there would be plenty of reasons to mourn. God would wipe them out, leaving only a remnant of Israel for Himself (see Amos 5:1-3).

But even though all seemed lost, Amos told Israel there was still hope. Even as His righteous anger against Israel burned because they had failed to show Him the reverence He deserved, God invited individuals in Israel to seek Him as they once had. If they did, He promised to grant them life in the midst of the destruction He would bring to the rest of Israel. Then God clarified His expectations. God didn't want these people to go to Bethel or Gilgal or Beer-sheba—the centers of worship traditionally recognized as being sacred places—and continue to engage in the same meaningless acts of worship people had been practicing. In fact, God intended to destroy those places to prove that acceptable worship had nothing at all to do with location or ritual. No, God wanted people to seek Him right where they were in their everyday lives. God wanted them to prove their devotion by obeying Him in their interactions with others.

### KEY QUESTION

**.01** Why is it so much easier for us to go through the motions of worship in a church service than it is to worship God by treating people the way He tells us to?

Some of the Israelites thought their ancestry and position in society excused them from being judged for their behavior. They proved this by perverting the justice system they were a part of. Instead of using their influence to show the world the true nature of the God they claimed to serve, they used it to make more money

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## SCRIPTURE commentary

for themselves and control the poor. They turned justice, something intended to bring peace, into something off-putting and foul like wormwood (a bitter desert plant). So God promised to destroy them for their disobedience to prove that no one was immune to God's power or above the obligation to worship Him as He deserved.

### **.02** What are some ways we continue to take what God established for His glory and use it instead for our own pleasure?

### **.03** What kinds of things give us a false sense of security today when it comes to God's judgment?



#### **HISTORY | Who was Joseph, and why was he such a big deal to the Israelites?**

Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. The eleventh son of his father Jacob, Joseph was his father's favorite child, and his jealous brothers sold him into slavery (see Gen. 37). However, he matured into a humble servant of God and rose to a position of power in Egypt that made it possible for him to help his family during a severe famine (see Gen. 41-47). Joseph's family settled in Egypt and eventually became Egyptian slaves. Before Joseph died at 110, he told his brothers that God would deliver them from Egypt to the land God had promised their forefathers. He made them promise to bury his bones in this promised land (see Gen 50:24-26). They did, and the twelve tribes of Israel were named after him and his eleven brothers. Joseph served as a model of faith in God, and his life served as a reminder of God's sovereignty (rule and authority) and redemption.

### **AMOS 5:4-9**

**5:4-5.** *Bethel . . . Gilgal, and Beer-sheba* were three pilgrimage shrines. Bethel was where Jacob had his vision of the stairway into heaven (see Gen. 28:12-19), but it was also one of the places where King Jeroboam I of Israel set up calf idols (see 1 Kings 12:28-29). Gilgal was the starting point for the crossing of the Jordan River and the invasion of Canaan, and Joshua set up a memorial there (see Josh. 4:19-20). Beer-sheba, far to the south, is closely associated with the sojourns of Abraham (see Gen. 21:14), and we know from archaeology that there was a shrine there.

**5:6-7.** *Fire* would be the agent of destruction, as in the oracles against the foreign nations in chapters 1-2. Even their sacrifices at *Bethel* would not be able to save them.

**5:8.** The God who created the mountains and the wind (see 4:13) also created the constellations. *Pleiades* and *Orion*, two well-known constellations in the mind of the ancient world, stand as representatives of the heavenly bodies created by God and subject to His sovereign control. In light of 4:7-8, Amos reaffirmed that famine, rainfall, and flood are in God's control.

**5:9.** The emphasis is still on God's control. He is the one who causes *destruction* against a *fortress*. God might use some foreign army to bring destruction in Israel, but Israel needed to understand that God was in control of that army. Israel's God—who created the constellations, controls day and night, and is in charge of rainfall—also brings destruction on His people in the very fortresses where they thought they were secure.



# CONVERSATION questions

## READ AMOS 5:10-13.

**10** They hate the one who convicts the guilty at the city gate, and they despise the one who speaks with integrity. **11** Therefore, because you trample on the poor and exact a grain tax from him, you will never live in the houses of cut stone you have built; you will never drink the wine from the lush

vineyards you have planted. **12** For I know your crimes are many and your sins innumerable. They oppress the righteous, take a bribe, and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates. **13** Therefore, those who have insight will keep silent at such a time, for the days are evil.

The people who were abusing the justice system and making a mockery of the concept of righteousness not only did evil themselves, but resented anyone who tried to take a stand for justice. They wanted to declare innocence or guilt to serve their own purposes and control what happened instead of justice being served. After all, they profited when poor people had to pay for crimes they didn't commit. In fact, they'd made their living from it, using fines collected from the poor to build their houses and develop their own fertile fields.

## **.04** Read John 3:19. Why can darkness seem more appealing to us than light sometimes?

Because these people had comfortable lives, they thought they were getting away with going through the motions of worship. Yet they were not obeying God—they were not treating people right. They thought their worship was either good enough to balance out their bad behavior or that God wasn't all that concerned about the way they had corrupted His justice system. They were wrong, and God was about to show them what justice looked like.

### KEY QUESTION

## **.05** Why did the Israelites assume that God was okay with the evil they were practicing? What are some examples of ways this still happens in our world today?

Because Israel deserved the punishment that was coming, God warned those who were wise to stay out of it. If they spoke up to defend or explain away Israel's crimes, they would become accomplices to the corruption around them, but if they obeyed and worshiped God, they would be spared as part of the remnant God intended to keep for Himself.

**.06** What might motivate us to excuse or defend the evil practices of another person? Why is it wrong to do so?



**CULTURE |** What did Amos mean when he said “the days are evil,” and how does this warning apply to us?

Amos used the phrase “the days are evil” (v. 13) to describe the condition of society in his day. Time itself was not evil, but people were spending their time doing so much evil that it characterized the entire time period they lived in. Amos’s observation was a warning to the wise to refrain from doing evil so they didn’t face the same judgment as everyone else. The apostle Paul used the same phrase in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul warned the Ephesians not to get used to the evil practices of those around them or follow their bad habits, but to learn God’s will for their lives and actively pursue obedience to Him (see Eph. 5:8-17). Because people are not righteous by nature, Paul and Amos’s observations are still true, and we do well when we follow their advice to walk in the light.



**LEADER PACK**

**ITEM 4 |** Because God is just, He expects His people to practice justice. See the **10 Words in Hosea, Amos, Joel, & Micah** poster to discover what justice looks like.

**AMOS 5:10-13**

**5:10.** The condemnation of injustice begun in verse 7 is resumed here. Those seeking justice ran up against a system corrupted by the wealthy. Witnesses with *integrity* were available, but their testimony was squelched. The system was anything but impartial. It was manipulated by wealthy landowners through bribes and intimidation.

**5:11.** The way some people in Israel would *trample on the poor* was by taking from them the fruit of their labor. The greed of those condemned would be matched in God’s judgment by taking away the material advantages gained from trampling the poor. The statements here are similar to futility curses found in ancient Near Eastern texts. The oppressors had taken from the poor to build their fine *houses* and to plant their *lush vineyards*. But others would dwell in their houses and drink their *wine* (compare with Deut. 28:30b-44; Mic. 6:15; Zeph. 1:13). The future reversal of this curse is announced in 9:14.

**5:12.** Both God and the prophet knew how many were the *crimes* and how great were the *sins* of Samaria and of Israel.

**5:13.** Many interpreters consider this verse a wisdom saying rather than an expression of judgment. Silence, however, is not recommended in the verse. Certainly Amos was not *silent* in his time, nor were those referred to in verse 10. Although speaking out might be a waste of effort, the righteous could not keep silent. The point could be that the times were such that wise men, who in better times would be consulted for their wisdom, were silent because no one would listen.



# CONVERSATION questions

## READ AMOS 5:14-15.

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Next, God told those who wanted to be included in His remnant exactly what to do and the attitude they should have: they should love and pursue good and they should hate and reject evil. One of the ways God expected them to do this was to return their court system to what He intended for it to be: a place that upheld justice and reflected God's character and love for the poor. If they did as God asked, God would consider extending grace beyond the limits He had previously established. The God of Armies, who had previously used His infinite power to defend Israel and give her victory, would show mercy to the few who were willing to give up life as usual for the abundant life He offered. God continues to do the same today for those who choose to follow Him obediently.

### **.07** In what ways does our modern justice system reflect God's divine nature? In what ways does it not?

God is just, which means He makes sure that the right thing gets done. Many of the laws that exist today were written to address specific problems that came up in specific contexts that have changed over time. Sometimes, the changes in those contexts make it so that enforcing those laws no longer ensures that the right thing gets done. There have been times when those laws actually made it possible for evil to thrive. When that happens, God's people must act to see those laws changed. When we do, we help the world understand true justice and understand the God we serve a little better. We help them see that our God does not play favorites, but loves everyone the same. When we don't, we give them reason to think that the God we serve cares more about some people than others, and this just isn't true.

### **.08** The Bible says that true wisdom begins with "the fear of the LORD" (Prov. 9:10). What does this mean?



## LEADER PACK

**ITEM 8** | Because the evil prevalent in Amos's day is still prevalent now, we would all do well to follow his advice. Display the verse poster for **Amos 5:15a** this week.



## LEADER PACK

**ITEM 3** | Amos and the other prophets we are studying this quarter prophesied during the 8th century BC. Show your students the **8th Century BC** timeline poster to give them more context.



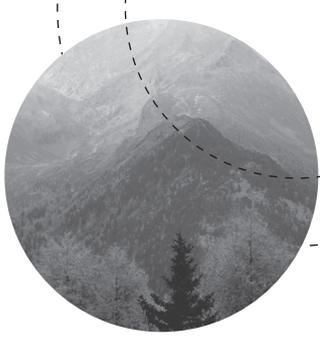
## BE VULNERABLE

We all enjoy being comfortable—so much so that we are sometimes tempted to overlook the suffering of others to maintain the comfort we enjoy. Consider telling your group about a time you were tempted to let someone else suffer so you could stay comfortable. What did you decide? What was the outcome for you? What was the outcome for the other person(s)? If you had to make the decision over again, what would you choose? Why?

## AMOS 5:14-15

**5:14.** Seeking what is good is not the same as seeking God, but it is related. Seeking God and seeking *good* represent the two dimensions of true religion, not rituals and forms but relationships with God and other persons. “Good” refers to that which pleases God, here especially justice for the poor. To *pursue* it in this context means not only to live in such a way oneself but also actively to endeavor to see good prevail over *evil*, the denial of justice for the poor.

**5:15.** If Israel were to seek good, they must *love good*, almost an equivalent expression. To “love” something means to choose it and to delight in it. And to delight in seeing good prevail, one must *hate evil*. That is, one must abhor behavior that displeases God, as the wicked hate and despise righteousness (v. 10). Even repentance does not obligate God to be *gracious*. The hope was that repentance might move God to spare some, *the remnant of Joseph* (see also 5:6; 6:6) when the inevitable destruction came upon the Northern Kingdom, as it did in 722 BC.



# NOW What?

## CENTRAL truth

God wants us to seek Him and show the world who He is.

**.09** What can we do to make sure our worship of God is sincere?

**.10** What should we do when we are tempted to excuse or defend evil?

### KEY QUESTION

**.11** Why does God care so much about justice? How might our lives and priorities be different if we cared more about justice the way God does?

**.12** What steps can we take to pursue justice for those around us?



**THE STUDENT LEADER PACK** is available for purchase on [lifeway.com/explorethebiblestudents](http://lifeway.com/explorethebiblestudents). It includes valuable posters that are referenced throughout the *Leader Guide*, Family Connection guides that equip families to discuss the Bible on the go, a Midweek study of a complementary book of the Bible, a link to training audio to help leaders prepare for each session, and PowerPoint templates with graphics from the quarter study to help prepare slides for teaching.



# DAILY devotions

The Bible is no ordinary book—it is God’s powerful Word and it is given to us for our good (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12-13). So we should read the Bible more carefully and thoughtfully than any other book. This is where the 7 Arrows of Bible Reading come in—these 7 questions will train you and your students to get more out of your time in the Bible and experience its life-transforming power. Your students’ *Daily Discipleship Guide* (item 005646504) contains five days of Daily Devotions built on the 7 Arrows. Here is a summary of the texts they will be studying. We encourage you to follow along and use the 7 Arrows questions to guide your own study of God’s Word.

## 7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE reading



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about man?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

## LEADER challenge

### MEMORIZE

Amos 5:4

### CONNECT

Send a group email or group message to your students, encouraging them to complete their daily devotions. You might also consider sharing your own insights from the daily readings as a means of encouraging them.

**DAY 1** AMOS 5:1-3

**DAY 2** AMOS 5:4-9

**DAY 3** AMOS 5:10-13

**DAY 4** AMOS 5:14-17

**DAY 5** MATT. 7:21-23