



Listen to God

God's judgment awaits all who ignore Him and His truth.

AMOS 2:4-16

MEMORY VERSE: AMOS 1:2

STUDY Amos 2:4-16, noting warnings offered by Amos. Become familiar with the nations Amos addressed using **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*). Use Explore the Text on pages 15-19 to gain insight into the political, financial, and religious environment in Judah and Israel at the time of Amos's prophecy.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 20-22. Focus on helping the group see how the people thought they were right with God when they were far from Him. Point out the dangers of failing to see our sin and need for repentance.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)

Prepare to display:

- Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*)
- Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*)

Make copies of:

- Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Micah Time Line*)
- Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*)
- Pack Item 9** (*Handout: The Prophets in History*)
- Pack Item 12** (*Handout: New Testament References to Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the session by contacting the group to remind them a new study is beginning that will help them to understand God's reaction to sin, the need for repentance, and the wonderful hope of salvation found in Jesus Christ.

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

The Scripture

The Bible reveals the principles by which God judges us. (See Deuteronomy 17:19; Hebrews 4:12.)

Automobiles have all kinds of warning lights built into the dash. Though the lights are helpful, the driver must still pay attention to the warnings. Noticing the maintenance light does not automatically change the oil. The warnings are calls to action. The minor prophets acted as “dashboard lights” for the people of Israel and Judah. They signaled warnings of impending judgment, but it was up to the people to listen to God.

(In PSG, p. 10) **What are some reasons drivers ignore their dashboard warnings? What are some reasons Christians ignore God’s warnings?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

BIBLE SKILL

Review cross reference verses to gain insight.

Memorize Amos 1:2 in your preferred Bible translation. Then review the following verses that communicate a similar message: Isaiah 42:13; Jeremiah 25:30; Hosea 11:10; and Joel 3:16. Note the similar words and phrases. How does each passage give us a different view of God’s impending judgment? How would you summarize the teaching of these passages in one sentence?

AMOS 1:1–2:16

The book of Amos begins by (1) introducing the prophet for whom the book is named; (2) telling us something of the times in which Amos’s prophetic ministry occurred; and (3) revealing something of the nature of his message.

The book reveals little about the prophet himself. Amos’s name possibly comes from the Hebrew verb meaning “to load” or “to carry a burden.” It could be a play on words pointing to the heavy burden Amos would bear delivering God’s message to a hostile audience. Or, it could refer to how the people to whom he preached thought of Amos as a burden to them. The book also reveals Amos was a businessman who bought and sold livestock in Tekoa (1:1), which was about six miles south of Bethlehem and ten miles south of Jerusalem in Judah.

Amos prophesied during the time Uzziah reigned over the Southern Kingdom of Judah and Jeroboam II reigned over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It was a time of disunity between the north and the south. The fathers of Jeroboam and Uzziah, Jehoash and Amaziah respectively, had been at war with one another. When Israel won, it resulted in a frigid peace between the two kingdoms. It was in this context that God called Amos, a southerner from Judah, to go north to Israel and preach a message of judgment.

It was a time of economic prosperity, and many of the people in Israel’s capital, Samaria, had become wealthy. Furthermore, it was a time of military superiority for the Northern Kingdom, since Jeroboam was able to lead his troops to victory over their long-time neighboring enemies and expand their borders. The economic boom they experienced as a result of their victories no doubt led many to believe these happenings were a sign

of God's good pleasure. However, they were mistaken. Instead, God had taken pity on them in spite of their wickedness (2 Kings 14:23-27).

What resulted was a great deal of religious activity in Israel. They replaced sincere devotion to God with insincere religiosity. They failed to see their sin and need to repent, and their perverted misrepresentation of God suited their purposes but contradicted reality, leading to false hopes. They thought they were right with God when in reality they were in danger and far from Him. They had become just as wicked as the wicked nations surrounding them (1:3-2:3).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WRONGS REVIEWED (AMOS 2:4-8)

Verses 4-5

The first part of Amos's message pronounced judgment on six of the foreign nations surrounding Israel (1:3-2:3). God was going to judge these nations because of the wicked deeds they had perpetrated against others, such as the breaking of treaties, human trafficking, and a variety of extremely violent atrocities. God condemned them because they committed acts of wickedness that any human made in the image of God should have known were offenses against Him. These nations were all enemies of Israel, so Amos's audience surely received these oracles of judgment well.

Then in verses 4-5, Amos spoke of God's impending judgment on Judah. Given the recent conflicts between their previous kings, it is apparent the people of Israel looked down on the people of Judah with contempt (see 2 Chron. 25:21-24). Consequently, Amos's message against Judah also would have been well received by his northern audience. Amos's pronouncement of judgment against Judah began with the same wording he had used against the foreign nations: ***I will not relent from punishing Judah for three crimes, even four.*** There comes a point when enough is enough even with God, as patient as He is.

Amos laid out Judah's digression into sin, even though as God's chosen people they had a history of having experienced the marvelous grace of God. The people consciously rejected God's Word. They possessed and apparently heard God's instruction in their religious meetings but ignored it. Therefore, they disobeyed God's Word. Amos's final accusation against the people of Judah was that, like their forefathers, they had become intoxicated by the lies of false prophets and the cultures surrounding them. This had resulted in their rejection and perversion of God's Word to suit their own wicked desires. Judah's rejection of His Word was a rejection of the Lord Himself, and that was more egregious than the sins of the other nations.

VERSES 4-5

⁴ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Judah for three crimes, even four, because they have rejected the instruction of the LORD and have not kept his statutes. The lies that their ancestors followed have led them astray. ⁵ Therefore, I will send fire against Judah, and it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem.

VERSES 6-8

⁶ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they sell a righteous person for silver and a needy person for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and obstruct the path of the needy. A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning my holy name. ⁸ They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as collateral, and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines.

Verses 6-8

When Amos turned his attention to Israel in verse 6, he began with the same pattern of *for three ... even four* (see 2:1), emphasizing the complete and ongoing nature of Israel's disobedience to God and God's patience with them that was now coming to an end. Israel's transgressions were directly related to the Lord's covenant with Israel.

The prophet's greatest concern was Israel's disregard for one another as God's people. A nation who had a long history of oppression at the hands of other nations had itself become entrenched in oppressive behavior toward its own people. They were guilty of selling off into slavery those who had been falsely accused of owing money, or of selling off people into slavery who were unable to pay off very small debts akin to the price of a cheap pair of sandals. Instead of helping people in need as the law intended, they were misusing the law for their own profit and oppressing their Israelite brothers while doing so. They failed to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18).

In verse 7 Amos continued his accusations against Israel, saying first that they were treating the poor like the dirt on which they trampled. The people of Israel had established a society of exploitation that trampled on the rights of the poor and robbed them of what little they had. Moreover, they obstructed the poor from any opportunities to better their situation. Amos's message echoes Proverbs 22:22-23 which warns, "Don't rob a poor person because he is poor, and don't crush the oppressed at the city gate, for the LORD will champion their cause and will plunder those who plunder them."

Amos also addressed Israel's immorality, saying that a father and his son were both having sexual relations with a young female household employee. They were abusing a girl who worked for the family, was in need of her job, and was in a position to be taken advantage of.

The result of these sins was that Israel profaned the Lord's name. Instead of bringing honor to the Lord's name and displaying the holiness and greatness of God to the nations, Israel treated God with contempt and brought disrepute upon the nation and the holy name of their God.

The upper class of Israel flaunted their sins before the Lord in their religious feasts before their altars. First, the elite were using the coats they had taken from the poor to lie on as they went to worship the Lord. The wealthy came to the Lord's altar desiring mercy when they had failed to show mercy to others. It is difficult to imagine the poor had such nice cloaks that the wealthy would want to wear them to make a fashion statement. Maybe they were showing off their latest conquests and status of power over the weak or maybe their own cloaks were too nice to put on the ground.

Second, they brought wine to their feasts they had purchased with the fines they had wrongfully collected from the poor. The elite and wealthy of Israel pandered to their own indulgences as they took the very coat off of a man's back and used his last few shekels to purchase fine wine for their times of worship.

HISTORY RELIVED (AMOS 2:9-11)

Amos described what Israel had been doing, then turned to the Lord as his subject and reminded the Israelites of what God had done for them. In spite of Israel's behaving like the heathen nations and in contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord and its oppression of the weak and poor, through Amos the Lord reminded Israel of His faithfulness and continued kindness to His people, especially when they were weak and poor. Amos pointed out seven things God had done for Israel.

Verses 9-11

First, the Lord had defeated their enemies, the Amorites. **Amorite** refers to the entire population of Canaan when the Israelites entered the promised land. Amos likened the height of the Amorites to **cedars** renowned for their height, and he likened the strength of the Amorites to **oaks** known for their strength. The Israelites were intimidated by the Amorites (Num. 13:33), nevertheless God defeated them on behalf of His people.

Second, not only did God defeat the Amorites, He once and for all removed them as a threat to Israel. The destruction of **his fruit above and his roots beneath** poetically describes how God ended the posterity of the Amorites.

Third, the Lord delivered His chosen people Israel from slavery. As slaves in **Egypt**, the Israelites were mere property ruthlessly made to work at their taskmasters' bidding (Ex. 1:9-14; Deut. 25:6-7). Nevertheless, God delivered them from their bitter Egyptian bondage (Ex. 12:40-41,51; 20:2).

Fourth, the Lord led Israel through **the wilderness** with His providential care. He led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22), and He provided them with water and food (Ex. 15:22-27; 16:13-16).

Fifth, after being in Egypt for hundreds of years, God kept His promise to Abraham and caused his descendants, Israel, to **possess the land** of the Amorites (Gen. 15:13-16; 17:7-8).

Sixth, the Lord gave Israel spiritual leaders. The **prophets** were sent from God to proclaim His message to Israel. The prophets communicated God's Word to Israel by teaching, reproving, correcting, and pointing to the way of righteousness according to God's law. Even their messages of judgment demonstrated God's mercy and grace as they served as warnings and opportunities for repentance and reconciliation to God. No other nation was as privileged as Israel was to have God's Word directly proclaimed to them by God's messengers, the prophets.

The **Nazirites** were spiritual leaders given to Israel to communicate a message of commitment to God, not so much by what they said but by how they lived. They followed a disciplined lifestyle in order to demonstrate

VERSES 9-11

⁹ Yet I destroyed the Amorite as Israel advanced; his height was like the cedars, and he was as sturdy as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. ¹⁰ And I brought you from the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness in order to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹ I raised up some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is this not the case, Israelites? This is the LORD's declaration.

their commitment to the Lord (Num. 6:1-20). Some became Nazirites as the result of a vow made by a parent, such as Hannah made for Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11). In Samson's case, a messenger of the Lord visited Samson's barren mother, announced his birth, and told her Samson would be a Nazirite (Judg. 13:3-5). The Nazirite vow carried with it some prohibitions. They abstained from anything that came from the vine, including alcohol; this distinction would have been quite apparent in their culture and a contrast to the practice of devotees to other gods and the drunken feasts that were part of their pagan cults. Just as distinctive was their prohibition to cut their hair. Their untrimmed hair served as a sign they completely belonged to God and was in contrast to the pagans who shaved their heads for their gods. Further, Nazirites avoided contact with the dead, symbolizing they served the one true living God and contrasting any pagan practices of necromancy. The Nazirites also abstained from eating unclean food, demonstrating their consecration to the Lord (Judg. 13:7).

Seventh, the Lord gave Israel ample evidence of His kindness toward them. Amos completed the Lord's list of examples of His loving-kindness shown to Israel by asking the question, ***Is this not the case, Israelites?*** In other words, Israel could not plead ignorance when it came to a history of God's dealings with His people. They knew what God had done for them, and they knew why. As a result, they were without excuse for their actions.

(In PSG, p. 16) **How does God's providing messengers and examples in history point to His grace?**

VERSES 12-16

¹² But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets, "Do not prophesy." ¹³ Look, I am about to crush you in your place as a wagon crushes when full of grain. ¹⁴ Escape will fail the swift, the strong one will not maintain his strength, and the warrior will not save his life. ¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground, the one who is swift of foot will not save himself, and the one riding a horse will not save his life. ¹⁶ Even the most courageous of the warriors will flee naked on that day — this is the LORD's declaration.

JUDGMENT RECKONED (AMOS 2:12-16)

Verses 12-16

Verse 12 highlights an important truth: people who rebel against God will oppose those who live for God. The Lord gave the **Nazirites** to Israel to be "spiritual billboards," reminding God's people that the Lord is worthy of their total devotion and obedience. The Nazirites served as symbols of Israel's unique relationship to the God among the nations—Israel was to be distinct and holy. The Nazirites had become burdensome nags to a people who were determined to ignore God. Consequently, Israel sought to eliminate the nuisance of the Nazirites by coercing them to drink wine and thus break their vow to God. Then the Israelites would no longer have to face the accusations of pure and devoted lives in their midst.

Furthermore, the Israelites opposed God's **prophets**. On numerous occasions in Israel's history, the Israelites attempted to silence God's messengers. Even Amos would encounter this kind of opposition when Amaziah the priest insisted Amos leave Israel and return to his home in Judah (7:12-13). The Israelites had no desire to see or hear God's message.

The Lord had graciously provided for, saved, and protected Israel from its oppressors in great and miraculous ways on numerous occasions. Such kindness bestowed upon Israel should have motivated them to show such kindness to others. Instead of learning from the Lord's gracious example, Israel chose to follow the ways of the heathen nations. Here, the Lord used the emphatic personal pronoun to communicate what he had done and is about to do. He said, "I destroyed" (v. 9), "I brought you up" (v. 10), and now **I am about to crush you**. Just as the wealthy and powerful crushed the poor and weak, the Lord would crush Israel. The weight of the judgment will be such that Israel will be crushed under its weight like a **wagon** under too heavy a load. Note the irony. They would have so much ill-gotten abundance and prosperity that the cart would break under it. That which was the focus of their sin would become their undoing.

In verses 14-16, Amos foretold the slaughter of Israel's army. His description of the destruction of the army must have been unbelievable to his audience. With the exception of Israel's days of glory under the reigns of David and Solomon, no time in history did Israel amass so great an army as they had during the reign of Jeroboam II. Even so, Amos's portrayal is one of total annihilation of Israel's military. Regardless of how invincible one might believe oneself to be, God will oppose the oppressor of the poor and powerless. Furthermore, regardless of one's standing before God, whether pagans or his children, he will not allow such sin to go unpunished.

Every ability and tool of war would fail. Swiftmess is the first attribute one would develop for battle. Why? Because no matter how large or strong one's opponent, the first to strike is often the victor. Swiftmess provides the first advantage in combat, but what if a warrior's opponent is equally fast? If his enemy is equally as quick as he, then the warrior's next resource is his strength to overpower his enemy. But what if the enemy matches both the warrior's swiftmess and strength? Then the key to victory rests upon the warrior's keen sense of prowess and skill to defeat his adversary. Amos's message is clear. These three foundations of close combat and military maneuvering would fail when Israel's time came.

Notice how Amos's depiction of Israel's downfall follows the typical progression of battle in his day. When an enemy approached, it was the archers with their long-range arrows that commenced the defense of an army as the enemy approached. Next, the infantry would engage the attackers. Finally, the commander would utilize his swift cavalry to take advantage of the exposed weaknesses in the enemy's formations. Like so many battles before, Israel's military would attempt to defeat its enemy in this way. But in the battle Amos described, the archers, the infantry, and the cavalry would all attempt to flee to no avail (vv. 15-16).

(In PSG, p. 17) **What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment?**

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

ENGAGE

PREPARE: On a board or large sheet of paper, write: *Check engine, Traffic light, High blood pressure, Tornado siren.*

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, direct their attention to the words on the board.

ASK: *What do all of these terms have in common?* (All warn of the possibility of danger.) Record their responses on the board.

EXPLAIN: Whether it is a health issue, a light on your car dashboard, or some other type of alert, just noticing it doesn't solve the problem. The warnings are calls to action.

DISCUSS: *What are some reasons drivers ignore their dashboard warnings? What are some reasons Christians ignore God's warnings?* (PSG, p. 10)

TRANSITION: *Today we begin a study of the book of Amos. During our study, we will discover the timelessness of his message. Amos began his prophecy with a warning for the nations that God's judgment awaits all who ignore Him and His truth. After listing the sins of the other nations, Amos addressed his own people.*

EXPLORE

PREPARE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: The Prophets in History*) to the group and allow them time to briefly review the information. Use this content to supplement the introduction on page 8 of the PSG.

CONTEXT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah Time Line*). Note the time frame of Amos's prophecy. Using *Understand the Context*, (PSG, p. 11) **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets*

of the Eighth Century), and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*), provide an overview of this study and of the book of Amos. Also distribute copies of **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: New Testament References to Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah*) and point out the New Testament passages that quote the book of Amos. Refer back to these passages as applicable in future sessions.

OVERVIEW: Share a description of Amos, emphasizing that though he was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God called him to go preach to Israel in the North. Relate that Amos's prophecy took place during a time of economic prosperity and peace. Amos first addressed the surrounding nations before turning to Judah and Israel. Highlight that although the people appeared very religious, their lives did not reflect devotion to God, but rather a representation of the pagan nations surrounding them. Remind the group that both Judah and Israel had received direction from God and were now choosing to disobey.

MEMORIZE: Direct attention to Amos 1:2, stressing the powerful character of God. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*), point out that Amos 1:2 is the memory verse for this session, and encourage the group to commit it to memory this week.

READ: **Read aloud Amos 2:4-8**, directing the group to listen for God's indictments of His people.

IDENTIFY: Guide the group to identify the charges against both Judah and Israel. Record the charges on the board or a large sheet of paper.

EMPHASIZE: By virtue of their relationship with God, Judah was expected to live a life of obedience that reflected His character.

ASK: *Why should the people of God live to a higher moral standard than others?* (PSG. p. 13)

DISCUSS: *What are the dangers of allowing culture to decide what is right and wrong?* (PSG. p. 14)

TRANSITION: *The people of God had reverted to their old way of life prior to their knowledge of God, and Amos sounded the warning that their sins would not go unpunished.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Amos 2:9-11**, and instruct the group to listen for how God had protected His people in the past.

EXPLAIN: Amos called the people to remember all God had done for them in the past through deliverance from Egypt and the gift of the land they now occupied. These memories reveal that God was full of grace and mercy if the people would only repent.

ASK: *How does God's providing messengers and examples in history point to His grace?* (PSG. p. 16)

TRANSITION: *God is full of grace and desires to make people right with Himself. However, the Israelites had no desire to hear God's message.*

READ: Direct the group to read **Amos 2:12-16**, guiding them to note the seven images of God's judgment.

RESEARCH: Direct the group to form pairs and use their copy of the PSG to research the significance of silencing the prophets and discrediting the Nazarites. Invite volunteers to share their discoveries.

ASK: *How does the Israelites' attempt to silence the prophets and destroy the character of those devoted to God intersect with God's judgment?*

DIRECT: Instruct the group to turn to a neighbor, reread verses 12-16, and identify the seven images of God's judgment. Point them to page 17 of their PSGs for reference.

DISCUSS: *What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment?* (PSG. p. 17)

TRANSITION: *Amos reviewed the wrongs committed, reminded the people of God's provision and grace, and indicated that judgment was coming.*

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the bulleted statements under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 18). Invite the group to consider how to live out these statements as believers.

ASK: *What is one action that could be taken related to each statement?*

APPLY: Draw the group's attention to the first question set under Apply the Text on page 18 of the PSG: *Discuss as a group the role the group plays in helping each other listen to God and His truth. What actions might help the group support each other to a greater degree when it comes to heeding God's Word?* Create a plan with specific action steps to help each other live lives of obedience that reflect His character.

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking the Lord for His grace. Ask Him to help us recognize our sin and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit as we walk in our daily lives and to strengthen us to stay true to His Word in both thoughts and actions.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages. An expanded timeline for the book of Amos is included as a digital download.

MUSIC

Print and distribute copies of the lyrics to “Grace Greater Than Our Sin” by Julia H. Johnson. Play the hymn and lead the group to sing or simply listen. Highlight the second verse, inviting the group to share how this hymn could be connected to Amos 2:4-16. Conclude by reading the chorus together.

DRAMATIC READING

Pre-enlist three volunteers. Instruct two to read in an alternating pattern the warnings given to each nation in Amos 2:4-16. Direct the third to insert the phrase “The Lord says” between the warnings to each nation. At the end of the reading, call on group members to list warnings the Lord might give our nation today. Encourage them to list without elaborating.

BRAINSTORM

Board or large sheet of paper, markers

Brainstorm the role the group can play in helping each other listen to God and His truth. Write responses on the board. Discuss: *If Amos had been addressing to you, what wrongs would be listed and what history recounted of God acting on your behalf? How do each of the things identified serve as motivation to follow Him and His truth? What actions do you need to take considering what you identified?* (PSG, p. 18). Invite volunteers to share personal experiences of God acting on their behalf.

BIBLE SKILL

Create four teams to examine the verses included in the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 14). Assign each team a verse to examine: Isaiah 42:13; Jeremiah 25:30; Hosea 11:10; and Joel 3:16. Instruct the teams to be prepared to summarize their verse to the group and point out similar words and phrases to Amos 1:2. Ask: *How does each passage give us a different view of God’s impending judgment? How would you summarize the teaching of these passages in one sentence?*

OBJECT LESSON

Automobile user’s manual

Secure an automobile user’s manual and locate the listing of warning lights. Draw selected warning lights on the board or a large sheet of paper. As the group arrives, invite them to identify each warning light. Encourage volunteers to propose possible action steps to take in response. Compare responses to what is encouraged in the manual. Lead a discussion about why people ignore the warnings.

EXPANDED TIME LINE

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 15** (*Amos: Time Line*) to set the historical context for Amos’s life.