

Seek God

AMOS 5:4-15

⁴ For the LORD says to the house of Israel: **Seek me and live!** ^A ⁵ Do not seek **Bethel** ^B or go to **Gilgal** ^B or journey to **Beer-sheba**, ^B 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**; ^C it will consume everything with no one at Bethel to extinguish it. ⁷ Those who turn justice into **wormwood** ^D also throw righteousness to the ground. ⁸ The one who made the **Pleiades and Orion**, ^E who turns **darkness into dawn** ^F 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. ¹⁰ They hate the one who convicts the guilty at the **city gate**, ^G and they despise the one who speaks with **integrity**. ^H ¹¹ Therefore, because you trample on the poor and exact a **grain tax** ^I 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**. ^J 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. ¹⁴ **Pursue good** ^K and not evil so that you may live, and the LORD, the God of Armies, will be with you as you have claimed. ¹⁵ ^L **Hate evil** and love good; establish justice at the city gate. Perhaps the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious to ^M **the remnant of Joseph**.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- A** A call to return to faithfulness to God (Deut. 4:29-31).
- B** Cities where Israelites gathered to worship; Amos warned the people not to try to find God in these places, as they would soon be destroyed.
- C** While the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh descended from Joseph, the intent here is the entire Northern Kingdom (see Ezek. 37:16,19).
- D** "Bitterness" (NIV).
- E** Amos reminded Israel of the magnitude of God's power. Even these well-known constellations are under God's control.
- F** God keeps the universe in motion (Col. 1:17).
- G** In ancient Israel, law cases were argued at the city gates. They were the equivalent of our modern courthouses (Ruth 4:1-12).
- H** Honest and blameless; a fulfillment of the ninth commandment. However, in this circumstance, the officials despised the following of the Law.
- I** The poor were being overtaxed and were left with too little to provide for their families.
- J** "How terrible your sins are" (GNT); "your sins are great" (NASB).
- K** As the Israelites were to seek God, they were also to pursue good. A person who seeks God lives a life that reflects His character (Isa. 1:17).
- L** For God's people, evil isn't to be tolerated, or simply avoided, but it is to be hated.
- M** "The people of this nation who are still left alive" (GNT).

1. THE CHOICE (AMOS 5:4-9)

- In his third recorded sermon, Amos called for the people of Israel to seek God instead of participating in idolatry.
- He announced a coming judgment on those who distorted justice.
- Amos identified the Lord as the sovereign Creator who brings judgment to all, even the strong.

2. THE REALITY (AMOS 5:10-13)

- Amos delivered an indictment against the people of Israel, calling out their perversion of justice and oppression of others.
- As a result, the people would not enjoy their gains because of their mistreatment of others.
- Amos indicated that the wise would sit in silence as God exacted His judgment.

3. THE SOLUTION (AMOS 5:14-15)

- Amos called for the people to begin to pursue good and establish justice with the hope of God being gracious to them.
- Seeking God leads to life.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God expects His people to seek Him and demonstrate His character.

- All people must choose to trust God.
- Believers should expect God to take action to discipline His people.
- Believers are to be characterized by loving good and upholding justice.

MEMORY VERSE

Amos 5:4

KEY DOCTRINE

God

There is one and only one living and true God. (See Ex. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:17.)



ENGAGE

What is something people must seek to find it? How does a person go about seeking that thing? (PSG, p. 28)

- Three year olds love to play hide and seek. They want us to count while they run and hide. They hide in easy places because they want to be found.
- As we begin a lesson about seeking God, it is good to note that He is not hiding in difficult places far away from us—because He, too, wants us to find Him.

EXPLORE

1. THE CHOICE (AMOS 5:4-9)

What are substitutes that people seek instead of God, and how do those substitutes fall short of true worship? (PSG, p. 32)

- If Israel refused to turn from their false worship at false altars, God would “spread like fire throughout the house of Joseph” (v. 6).
- God desires worship on His terms from lives that are surrendered to Him.

How does focusing on God’s rule over all things created impact a person’s worship? (PSG, p. 32)

- Amos declared that God “brings destruction on” (v. 9) those who think themselves to be strong. Even the strongest people are not immune to the judgment of God.
- Israel may have considered themselves stronger than Judah, and they were politically and economically stronger at times. But what were they in comparison to God?

2. THE REALITY (AMOS 5:10-13)

Why might a person believe that God would overlook the mistreatment of the poor and unethical gain because of that mistreatment? (PSG, p. 33)

- The refusal to seek God not only manifested itself in the wrong places the Israelites went to worship but also in their lack of character.
- Because Israel refused to care for the least in their society, God would take action against them.
- The Israelites were using their oppression of the poor to build grand homes. But because their nation was going into exile at the hands of the Assyrians, they would never inhabit them.

Why it is easy to remain silent in the midst of injustices around us? Why is it difficult to remain silent when we are in the middle of God’s discipline? (PSG, p. 34)

- Because the poor could not have their day in court, they were silenced by their oppressors. However, God would turn the tables on the Israelites when it was their day in court.
- The Israelites would sit in silence as God exacted His judgment upon them. They would be unable to defend themselves, as the poor were currently unable to defend themselves.
- Far from oppressing the Israelites, God was exacting justice against them.

3. THE SOLUTION (AMOS 5:14-15)

Bonus: What are examples of hating evil and loving good? How is this kind of behavior an indicator that a person seeks God?

- Outward behavior is evidence that a person seeks God often and His Spirit resides within that person.
- True religion is about more than rituals. It is about a relationship with God that reflects itself in one’s relationship with others.

Why are loving good and upholding justice indicators that a person is seeking God? (PSG, p. 35)

- Far from loving those they oppressed, the Israelites expressed their disdain for the oppressed by their actions toward them and lack of justice for their cause. The place to start seeing change was the place where oppression was the greatest—at the city gate.
- Those who loved good and upheld justice would indicate they were sincere in seeking God, and therefore they would live.

CHALLENGE

Discuss as a group what pursuing good and establishing justice looks like.

What principles should guide your group as you seek God by seeking to do those things? (PSG, p. 36)

Encourage individuals to reflect on this question in response to the group time:

Look for ways you may be seeking a substitute for God rather than seeking the Lord. How can you more fully seek the Lord in your life. (PSG, p. 36)



BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, p. 31)

Use a Bible dictionary to better understand the background.

Read articles in a Bible dictionary about Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. Note what events recorded in the Old Testament happened at these locations in Israel's history and consider how Israel allowed commemorating those events to become a substitute for their own devotion to the Lord. What should believers today learn from what Israel did in Amos's day?

To conclude the group time, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 31). Create three teams. (An individual can be a team.) Assign each team one of the three locations, and direct them to review articles in a Bible dictionary to discover events that took place in that location. Encourage each team to complete the Bible Skill for their assigned city. Reassemble the group, inviting a representative from each team to share.

OPTION: VISUAL

Gather paper and pencils or markers.

Read aloud Amos 5:4-15. Instruct the group to listen for specific descriptions that Amos provides, contrasting the actions of the Israelites with those who were seeking God.

Distribute paper and pencils or markers to each person. Share that Amos presented a contrast of God's judgment and His mercy.

Direct the group to fold their paper in half, labeling one side *God's judgment* and the other side *God's mercy*. Guide them to use pictures or words to illustrate the contrasts revealed in the verses. Allow time for several people to share their work with the group.



DIG DEEPER

CITY GATES AND JUSTICE

One of the major concerns in this passage is the miscarriage of justice that was taking place in Israel. It was common in the cities for elders to take up their responsibilities of administering justice close to the city gates. This is seen in the story of Ruth and Boaz in Ruth 4:1-12, as well as in Deuteronomy 21.

According to the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "In the typical town plan, the marketplace, often an open plaza, was just inside the gate complex. Close by might be either administrative buildings, military buildings, or a shrine or temple. The biblical description of various activities within the gates of the city/town indicates the business of that area. . . . Elders gathered at the city gate to administer justice or judgment (Deut. 21:19; 22:15,24) as well as transact sales. The prophets have a number of references to proper justice at the city gate (Amos 5:10-15; Zech. 8:16)."¹

In the days of Amos, the concern was that justice was not being done at the gates. Instead these trials were being treated more akin to business transactions instead of God-honoring justice.

The elders of the towns were using the justice system as ways to gain money through bribes (Amos 5:12), and to protect the upper classes from being held to the rule of law (v. 12). There was no true concern for the truth, as they "despise the one who speaks with integrity" (v. 10).

However, the Old Testament law is clear on the expectations of fair justice for everyone in Israel. Moses wrote to Israel in Deuteronomy 16:18-20, "Appoint judges and officials for your tribes in all your towns the LORD your God is giving you. They are to judge the people with righteous judgment. Do not deny justice or show partiality to anyone. Do not accept a bribe, for it blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Pursue justice and justice alone, so that you will live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Israel's failure in providing a just and fair legal system was an offense to God and one of the reasons the Northern Kingdom would no longer possess the land.

1. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN, B&H Publishing Group, 2012).