



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 3, 2007
Released on May 30, 2007**

"Amos Challenged Injustice"

Printed Text: Amos 5:10-15, 21-24

Background Scripture: Amos 5:10-24; 8:4-12; 2 Kings 13:23-25

Devotional Reading: Psalm 82

Amos 5:10-15, 21-24

10 They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.

11 Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.

12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.

13 Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.

14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.

15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine the facts about Israel's unjust living and to understand what God wanted them to do about it.

Principle: to show that God punishes injustice and that He calls His people to repent.

Application: to help students realize that God will punish our injustice unless we repent.

How to Say It

JEROBOAM. Jair-uh-*boe*-um.

TEKOA. Tih-*ko*-uh.

UZZIAH. Uh-*zye*-uh.

Introduction - The Price of Telling the Truth

Have you ever had to tell someone an unpleasant truth? Have you ever paid a price for telling the truth? Amos, the prophet who delivered the message of today's lesson text, was a truth-teller. He paid the price of ridicule, even direct rejection (Amos 7:12, 13).

Telling the truth was dangerous in Amos's world. Even today, a person with a message like Amos's might be dismissed or killed. Yet what the world needs today are more people like Amos, willing to stand up for the truth when it is inconvenient or even dangerous.

Amos is often ignored in the contemporary church. This might be understandable if we had solved all the problems Amos talked about, but we haven't. Maybe we ignore Amos today for the same reason people ignored him in his own time—he hit too close to home.

Background Scripture

Amos lived in the village of Tekoa, a few miles south of Bethlehem and close to the Dead Sea. He was a herdsman, meaning he was an owner of at least one flock of sheep. He also took care of sycamore-fig trees (Amos 7:14). He ministered about forty years before Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria. Uzziah was the king of Judah, and Jeroboam II was the king of Israel.

It was a time of great material prosperity, as seen in Amos 3:15 and 6:4-8. Sadly, those who were rich oppressed those who were poor, making themselves richer as the poor became poorer. There was a great deal of injustice going on throughout the land. In order to warn them about the judgment they were facing, God called Amos while he was taking care of his sheep.

Israel was enjoying peaceful relationships with other nations and within their own land. Jeroboam had restored most of the boundaries of the nation to what they had been under David and Solomon. The threat of their being overtaken by another nation was highly improbable. The wealth was plentiful for many, but the injustice that had pervaded the social structure did not please God.

Ungodly Living (Amos 5:10-15)

1. What prompted Amos to speak the message from God so forthrightly? (v. 10)

Amos was very straightforward with his message. Here we catch Amos in the middle of a strong indictment against the behavior of God's people. This verse deals with a court situation at the city *gate*.

Him that rebuketh is someone in authority who renders verdicts. Amos thus charges his listeners with being completely uninterested in justice and truth. In modern terminology we could say that people don't want honest judges or witnesses (compare Proverbs 24:23-25; Isaiah 29:21).

Apparently it was now time to stop being gentle with the people and give the God's warning in more outspoken ways.

2. What was so important about the city gates, and what was happening to there in Israel at that time?

The city gates were the place where many business and legal proceedings took place. Judges met to arbitrate for the people at the city gates. Examples are recorded in Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Ruth 4:1-11. Unfortunately, the city gates were the place where the most injustices in Israel had become most common, for the judges had become corrupt. No one dared to stand up for what is right since the fabric of justice was so thoroughly destroyed. Those who dared to stand up for righteousness were hated and were even put in dangerous situations. This indicates the depth of evil in Israel. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly" (Amos 5:10). Amos was not a very popular person in Israel.

3. What was one of the most common serious injustices being committed then? (v. 11)

The Lord commands all to take care of the poor (Deut 15:7-8). The people were not following this commandment. The rights of the poor were exploited by the rich. The rights of the poor were being trampled on, especially through the levying of excessive taxes. Some of which were the grain taxes, which reduced their already meager food supply. It is likely that the poor leased land from those who were rich, and the percentage that the poor had to give were exorbitant. Thus, the poor were denied the opportunities to better themselves, and their role was reduced to increasing the wealth of those who were already wealthy.

All this allowed the rich to build homes of hewn stones instead of the usual sun-dried bricks. But God said they were not going to live in and enjoy their fancy homes and pleasant vineyards. Justice demanded that He bring punishment upon them. Amos warned that it was coming. The ancient curse of Deuteronomy 28:30 is about to be fulfilled!

4. What were the leaders doing about the situation? (v. 12-13)

The leaders were promoting injustice in Israel. The judges were accepting bribes from the rich. The rich were allowed to have their way and increase their wealth at the expense of the poor. Thus, the judges were denying justice to poor people. The leaders punished those who spoke out against the injustice. The leaders had no concern for obeying God's commandments.

5. What was the result of this action? (v. 13)

Those who wanted to speak out concerning the injustice were afraid to do so. They did not want to be hated, and they did not want to suffer the dangerous consequences that would result of speaking against the injustice. As a result, the poor were in a hopeless situation. Their rights were denied. Sin continued to reign in the nation of Israel, however, God's judgment was right around the corner.

6. Should sensible people "keep silence?"

This seems to be a strange verse at first glance. Aren't we supposed to speak up when we see injustice and not *keep silence*?

Amos is merely describing the situation as it exists at the time as he observes it. He is not recommending that people stay quiet-he himself certainly hasn't! He is illustrating that things have become so corrupt that even sensible people are afraid to speak the truth. Things have become so bad that *prudent* people just keep quiet. They don't want to make trouble for themselves. They live in a society that does not reward tellers of truth-it punishes them.

7. How did God express His desire for their repentance? (v. 14-15)

The unjust judges of Israel were seeking evil; God told them they should seek good instead. The American Heritage Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin) defines the word "seek" as "to try to locate or discover; search for." They were actively searching for the wrong lifestyle, and God wanted that to be reverse. This is a clear call for repentance. The judges' hearts and thoughts were focused on evil; they needed a change of heart and thought toward good.

God then took things a step further; they were to hate evil, love good, and once again establish justice in the city gates (Amos 5:15). Perhaps then God would be gracious and withhold His judgment.

The phrase *remnant of Joseph* hearkens back to Amos 5:6, which has "house of Joseph." Joseph was father to Ephraim and Manasseh, after whom 2 of the 12 tribes are named (Joshua 14:4). The dire predictions against the house of Joseph in verse 6 are balanced against a promise of hope. It's not too late to repent!

Meaningless Worship (Amos 5:21-24)

8. How had Israel's worship lost its reality in God's sight, and how did He say He felt about it? (v. 21-22)

Israel had deteriorated to the point of practicing religion without having a real relationship with Yahweh, their God. God felt strongly opposed to what they were doing. The repetition of "I hate, I despise" at the beginning of Amos 5:21 reveals a vehement and passionate display of emotion, and it was their worship ritual that He loathed. The feast days and solemn assemblies referred to include the three annual religious feasts that everyone was to attend in Jerusalem (the feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks [Harvest], and Tabernacles).

It seemed ironic that the things God hated were the things the people thought He would probably love the most. The nation of Israel was so sinful that God would not accept any offerings from them, and He commanded the people to remove them from His presence.

9. How do we know under normal conditions, God has a true appreciation of music? (cf. Zeph. 3:17)

Throughout the Old Testament, we see plenty of evidence that music was an integral part of the worship of Israel. We see this especially during the reign of David, who apparently commissioned the making of many musical instruments (1 Chron. 23:5). We know music was part of Saul's kingdom because when David returned from war victorious, women from all over the kingdom came singing and dancing and playing musical instruments (1 Sam. 18:6).

Perhaps Zephaniah 3:17 indicates God himself sings. Hearing how much musical talent He has imparted to the people He created leads us to believe that God must love music. In spite of that, because of Israel's sinfulness and the lack of justice in the land, God said, "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols" (Amos 5:23). It is obvious that God does not accept any phase of our worship when our hearts are not right with Him. The talent or precision of performance makes no difference.

10. What does God's refusal to hear Israel's music indicate to us? (v. 24)

In a nutshell, no relationship with God equals no worship with God. God is most concerned with what is in our hearts. External motions of worship mean nothing to Him if the heart is full of sin. In fact those external motions are an insult to Him if not backed up with a right relationship with Him. He desires righteousness to flow from within us like a stream of water! Only then will our worship be acceptable to Him.

Conclusion - Speak Up or Stay Silent

Amos was not a professional prophet. He was not even a citizen of the northern kingdom of Israel. He might well have contented himself with pruning the fruit trees and watching sheep. But he could not keep silent. He chose to tell the people the truth, an unpopular truth at that.

The people's complacency was exactly why they needed a prophet like Amos. Gary Smith says that Amos's challenge was much like a doctor telling a patient he has a terminal disease. Sometimes people get angry with the messenger. Instead of being angry with the messenger, they need to take the cure. Amos did not just diagnose, he also prescribed. The problem is that the people did not want the prescription.

Amos drew a lot of attention when he came north. His activities were reported to the king himself (Amos 7:10-12). By coming north and condemning the worship in Bethel, he was coming to the center of idolatrous religion in the northern kingdom. Amos caught the ire of the lead priest at Bethel. That man told Amos to go home and prophecy to his own people if he was determined to preach (Amos 7:12, 13).

We know that Amos's prophecy was true, for history reveals Amos was right. We don't know if Amos continued to preach for the rest of his life or if he went back to farming. One thing is sure: his message has not been forgotten. Or has it?

Prayer

Dear Father, help me to be concerned about the things that concern You. Help me to live in a way that reflects my commitment to You. Let not my worship be isolated from my behavior and my devotion of the heart. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Thought to Remember

Repentance, not ritual.
Commitment, not complacency.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

In our lesson next week we will see how the Prophet Hosea sought to bring his people back to God. Study Hosea 4:1-4; 7:1-2; 12:8-9.

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