

Discipleship Group Weekly Resources

Week 1: Introduction to Amos

Amos is considered a minor prophet not because his prophecy is unimportant, but because his book is shorter than the other books of Isaiah, Jeremiah & Ezekiel, who are known as the major prophets. When we hear the term “minor prophets” we may casually infer that those are secondary or lower tier level spokespeople for God (think minor league baseball). However, their messages are just as relevant today as when first delivered.

The minor prophets rarely give details about themselves—their homes or careers. They do not seem interested in talking about themselves. Amos does give some information about himself (1:1) He is from the village of Tekoa, which was located six miles south of Bethlehem. He was a shepherd and fruit farmer (7:14) and is not descended from prophets. Amos lived in the eighth century before Christ, and his contemporaries include Jonah, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah.

His ministry came during the time of the divided kingdom. He lived in Judah but is called by God to go north to Israel. His name means, “burden bearer” and Amos lives up to his call.

As he looks at Israel, he sees a few things:

- National Prosperity

This is the golden age of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). Israel is freed from the tyranny of the Syrians, who have been conquered themselves, and it gives a few years respite from oppression. This allowed King Jeroboam to grow the territory of Israel not seen since the reign of Solomon (2 Kings 14:23-25). It also allowed for new trade routes to be opened which created a strong economic opportunity for tradesmen and merchants. A wealthy, ruling class was beginning to grow and they enjoyed the blessing (Amos 6:1, 4-6). Some considered the blessing of prosperity as a stamp of God’s favor.

- Religious Vitality.

If you went to church with Amos, you would find more people coming to church, the smoke of sacrifices fills the air, the praise band is rocking. From the outside looking in, the prosperity was good for the religious gathering and the priests. But God has a differing view (5:21-24).

- Economic Inequality.

The nation of Israel is a place where the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. While prosperity is a blessing, it is not reaching everyone. The rich are oppressing the poor and greed and injustice seems to win the day (2:6-7; 5:11-12). While the wealthy sit in church, God reveals through Amos what they are thinking about (8:4-6). Amos’ preaching is a call for justice, and a component of biblical justice seems to

be an economic issue rooted in the understanding that God is the ultimate owner. Tim Keller wrote, "While secular individualism says that your money belongs to you, and socialism says your money belongs to the State, the Bible says that all your money belongs to God, who then entrusts it to you (1 Chronicles 29:14; 1 Corinthians 4:7). In Luke 16:1-16, Jesus calls us to be wise stewards of our wealth. A steward was the manager of an estate under its owner, making him both a master and yet a servant. So, our wealth belongs to us and yet does not belong to us."

A frequent metaphor in Amos for God is a lion (1:1-2). God is the great lion. As a shepherd, Amos heard lions roar. He knows that a lion only roars when it is about to pounce. When he says, "I have heard the roar of the Lord," Amos is saying, "God is coming to judge." Amos confronts us with the integrity and intensity of a God that would rather domesticate than tame. Our question that we must wrestle with when we study Amos is this: does the lion still roar? Does God care less about justice today than he did then? Have his standards changed?

Questions to Consider:

- When you think of biblical justice, what things come to mind? (Here is a good primer from Timothy Keller: [Timothy Keller on Justice in the Bible - Gospel in Life](#))
- Why does the fact that God judges sin indicate that He cares about humanity?
- Do you believe in a God who roars? How does that affect how you live?