

# Listen to God

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

AMOS 2:4-16



## ISRAEL'S SINS

Am pressed under you, as a sheaf of wheat under the threshing sledge; *that is* full of sheaves. Before the flight shall perish from the land, and the strong shall not strengthen themselves; neither shall the mighty deliver himself:

Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and *he that is* swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself.

<sup>16</sup>And *he that is* courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

## GOD HAS SPOKEN

**3** Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,

<sup>2</sup>You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

<sup>3</sup>Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

<sup>4</sup>Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

## FAITHFULNESS

the Amorite before him, *his* height was like the height of the oaks; and he was strong as the oaks; and he cut his fruit from above, and he was fruitful beneath.



**What are some reasons drivers ignore their dashboard warnings?**  
**What are some reasons Christians ignore God's warnings?**

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. 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.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Amos was from the small village of Tekoa, eleven miles south of Jerusalem and eighteen miles west of the Dead Sea. The land there is barren and useful only for herding sheep and desert vegetation. It is not surprising that before God called Amos to preach, the prophet was a shepherd (Amos 1:1). The name Amos means “a load or a burden,” which aptly describes the burden he carried for the people of God.

Though Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God would call him to go preach to Israel in the north. He began his prophecy with warning signs of judgment against Israel's neighbors. He chastised Damascus for attacking the people of Gilead (1:3-5). He announced the sins of Gaza, who handed over a community of God's people to Edom (1:6-8). Amos spoke against Tyre for the same crime as Gaza but also indicated they had broken a treaty with the people of God (1:9-10). Edom also received a warning because they had conducted raids in Judah and exterminated its citizens (1:11-12). Like Damascus, the Ammonites had attacked the people of God in Gilead, and their attack was

especially violent (1:13-15). Amos also gave a warning to Moab because they had desecrated the dead (2:1-3). With these prophecies, Amos completely surrounded the nations of Judah and Israel geographically.

Amos prophesied in a time of economic prosperity, and many of the people in Israel's capital, Samaria, had become very 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 neighboring enemies and expand their borders. Their victories brought an economic boom which led many to believe the prosperity to be a sign of God's good pleasure. However, they were mistaken. Instead, God had taken pity on them despite 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. They had become as wicked as the pagan nations surrounding them (Amos 1:3-2:3).

# AMOS 2:4-16

**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**<sup>A</sup> have led them astray. **5** Therefore, I will send fire against Judah, and it will consume the **citadels**<sup>B</sup> of Jerusalem. **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**,<sup>C</sup> and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines. **9** Yet I destroyed the **Amorite**<sup>D</sup> 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**<sup>E</sup>. Is this not the case, Israelites? This is the LORD's declaration. **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**<sup>F</sup> 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.

## Key Words

- A. They followed the lies of false prophets who led them astray (Jer. 23:30-32; Ezek. 13).
- B. "Palaces" (KJV); "strongholds" (ESV).
- C. The law required pledged garments from the needy be returned to the owner by sunset, and a widow's garment was not to be taken in pledge at all (Deut. 24:12-17).
- D. The Amorites were the people who occupied the promised land before Israel.
- E. A Nazarite was an Israelite set aside for God's service, who vowed to abstain from alcohol, let his hair grow, and avoid contact with corpses (Num. 6).
- F. Bows and arrows were long-range arms (up to 400 yards), with some bows being from three-to-six feet in length, requiring the archer to stand for accuracy.



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## 1. WRONGS REVIEWED

(AMOS 2:4-8)

God expects His people to live a life of obedience that reflects His character.

**Why should the people of God live to a higher moral standard than others?**

**What are the dangers of allowing culture to decide what is right and wrong?**

## 2. HISTORY RELIVED

(AMOS 2:9-11)

Believers should recount God's grace in their lives, responding with obedience.

**How does God's providing messengers and examples in history point to His grace?**

## 3. JUDGMENT RECKONED

(AMOS 2:12-16)

Only through God's grace will a person escape His complete judgment.

**What are ways God uses His character to notify us that our character is out of line with His character? Which of these are most effective? Which do we tend to resist?**

**What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment?**

## APPLY THE TEXT

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?**

### KEY DOCTRINE: The Scripture

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

### 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?

# TALK IT OUT

**Focus on Amos 1:2. What images come to mind when thinking about the roar of a lion or a storm?**

The word translated roar can refer to the sound of a lion or the sound of an approaching storm. The predatory lion and the thunder of a storm both point to force. The focus was on the appearance of God and the impact He has on His creation.

**When has God's Word felt like the roar of a Lion or a clap of thunder?**

The message of Amos must have sounded like the mesmerizing fear that overcomes the prey as the lion roars or like the response of a clap of lightning close by. The message of Amos startled and shook his audiences with its power. God's message delivered by his authorized messengers will always have an authentic ring and a startling effect. The message of Amos was an announcement of the Lord's judgment upon His disobedient people.

**Discuss what this verse tells us about the power of God's Word. How can we help each other live out what we discover in God's Word?**

Place Amos 1:2 on your phones or on cards and memorize it together.

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## DAY 1: Amos 2:4-5

***Compare the crimes of Judah to actions tolerated today.***

After listing the sins of the surrounding nations, Amos turned his attention to his own people in the Southern Kingdom of *Judah*. He would have spoken dishonestly if he had gone straight to his readers in the Northern Kingdom of Israel while neglecting his own nation. Amos listed the indictments against Judah. The other nations were judged by their crimes against humanity, but Judah received judgment for unfaithfulness to the covenant of God.

The people of Judah had returned to their old way of life prior to knowing God. They were living like the pagan nations around them and reverting to a way of life that the covenant people of God should not have embraced. For that reason, God promised to bring judgement upon Judah by sending *fire* and consuming *Jerusalem*, the capital city of the nation of Judah. By virtue of their relationship with God, Judah was expected to live a life of obedience that reflected His character. The Israelites, like Christians today, were held to a higher moral standard of conduct because they had heard and received the Word of God.

**Why should the people of God live to a higher moral standard than others?**

## DAY 2: Amos 2:6-8

***Reflect on how the treatment of the poor points to a bigger problem.***

God would also punish Israel. Their first crime was enslaving the innocent and needy. The price being a pair of sandals showed the callousness of the people. Slavery, though widely practiced in that day, was a means that Israel used to oppress people while at the same time increasing their own wealth. A second wrong was oppression of the poor. The true measure of a person is how they treat the weaker or less powerful, and Israel certainly failed that test. Disregarding the Word of God, the Israelites refused to help those who were in need, callously blocking their road to freedom.

The third wrong was the abuse of the maiden, or young *girl* who was legally a minor. The reference is to a cultic prostitute. Cultic prostitution was clearly prohibited by the Word of God (Deut. 23:17), as was sexual relations with the same woman by a father and son (Deut. 22:30). The fourth offense related to the rich keeping the cloaks of the poor, and then using fines to purchase wine for their false worship rituals. The Israelites knew better. Amos sounded the warning alarm to Israel, that these wrongs would not go unpunished.

**What are the dangers of allowing culture to decide what is right and wrong?**

**How does the treatment of the poor in your culture compare to what was going on in Israel?**

## DAY 3: Amos 2:9-11

*Circle ways God showed grace to His people.*

Israel only needed to look to the past to remember God's grace. Because of God's grace, He delivered them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and allowed them to take the Promised Land. Ironically, the Israelites were committing the same crimes against humanity as their surrounding neighbors, even though God had been so gracious to them. Even when Israel was unfaithful to God, God remained faithful to them by sending warnings through His prophets. In the Eighth Century BC, God raised up Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, in addition to Amos, to warn His people. He also raised up young men as Nazarites who were dedicated to God, and they demonstrated that by taking a vow to refrain from alcohol, to never cut their hair, and to not defile themselves by touching the dead (Num. 6:1-8). Rather than leave the Israelites to their enemies, God raised up deliverers who would preserve their nation.

A quick look at Israel's history revealed that God was full of grace and merely awaited Israel's repentance to receive the grace that they needed to avoid further judgment for their wrongs. Even though they were committing some of the same crimes as the nations around them, they should have known how God would be gracious if they repented. Christians, likewise, should recount God's gracious activity in their lives and respond with obedience rather than disobedience. Seeing God's grace should not make one want to sin more but less.

**How does God's providing messengers and examples point to His grace?**

## DAY 4: Amos 2:12

*Contemplate the value of a warning issued.*

Even though God warned the Israelites that their mistreatment of others would bring His judgment, they chose to ignore His warnings. First, they *made the Nazarites drink wine*. Israel was supposed to be distinct, holy. The Nazirites had become symbolic, nuisances to a people who were determined to ignore God. Israel sought to eliminate the irritation by coercing Nazirites to drink wine and thus break their vow to God. Then the Israelites would no longer have to face the examples of pure and devoted lives in their midst. In addition to neutralizing the Nazarites, the people commanded the prophets to stop delivering God's messages. 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. Ignoring a traffic light will not make the oncoming traffic go away but will only put the driver in impending peril.

**What are ways that God uses to notify you that your character is out of line with His character? Which of these are most effective? Which do you tend to ignore?**





# Listen to God

## 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?*** (p. 13)

**TRANSITION:** *Today we begin a study of the book of Amos. During our study, we will discover the timelessness of his message. Amos begins his prophesy 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 addresses 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.

**CONTEXT:** Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Amos; Jonah; Hosea; Micah Time Line*). Note the time frame of Amos's prophesy. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 13), **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Prophets of the Eighth Century*), and **Pack Item 2** (*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** (*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 prophesy took place during a time of economic prosperity and peace. Amos first addresses 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 Amos 2:4-8 aloud, directing the group to listen for God's indictments of His people.

- **(2:4)** Using the familiar formula, *for three crimes, even four*, Amos began to list the indictments against Judah. All these indictments, unlike the previous ones made against other nations, were judged against the fact that Judah had received direction from God and chose to disobey.
- **(2:7)** The picture is of those who were not poor pushing the heads of the poor into the dirt. They were also obstructing the path of the needy. In God's law, the needy had a pathway for their most basic needs to be met (Deut. 15:7-11).

**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?*** (p. 15)

**DISCUSS:** ***What are the dangers of allowing culture to decide what is right and wrong?*** (p. 15)

**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.

- **(2:9)** The passage describes the fear of the Israelites as they approached the promised land, stating that they saw the enemy's height *like the cedars* and its fortification as *sturdy as the oaks*. This resembled the report of the spies from Kadesh when Moses sent scouts into the land of Canaan (Num. 13:32-33). The spies, all except Joshua and Caleb, saw the Canaanites' physical size and entrenched army as reason to retreat rather than to go forward. As a result of their unbelief, the children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness before the conquest of the land.

**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?*** (p. 15)

**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.

- **(2:13)** As a full *wagon* presses down into the earth, so God was about to press Israel down. Ironically, Israel had pressed down the poor (Amos 2:7), and now God would return the action toward them.
- **(2:14)** Israel would try to flee like those who were *swift*, but they would not be able to escape the judgment of God. Amos stated this truth again in verse 15, emphasizing the folly of trying to run.
- **(2:16)** God had warned His people by His prophets. This should have caused them to realize God is full of grace and desires to make people right with Himself. However, they ignored His message and instead began to store up God's judgment.

**RESEARCH:** Direct the group to form pairs and use the information on page 18 of their DDGs 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 19 of their DDGs for reference.

**DISCUSS:** *What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment?* (p. 15)

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

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## CHALLENGE

**APPLY:** Draw the group's attention to the question set under Apply the Text on page 15: ***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.

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## AFTER THE SESSION

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.