

Listen to God

AMOS 2:4-16

⁴ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing **Judah** **A** 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** **B** have led them astray. ⁵ Therefore, I will send fire against Judah, and it will consume the **citadels** **C** of Jerusalem. ⁶ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they **sell** **D** **a righteous person for silver** **E** 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**, **F** profaning my holy name. ⁸ They stretch out beside every altar on **garments taken as collateral**, **G** and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines. ⁹ Yet I destroyed the **Amorite** **H** 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**. **I** 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** **J** 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** **K** — this is the LORD's declaration.

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- A** One of the twelve tribes of Israel. After the death of Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom took the name *Israel*, and the Southern Kingdom, *Judah*. The nation of Judah also included the tribe of Benjamin (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 11:10).
- B** They followed the lies of false prophets who led them astray (Jer. 23:30-32; Ezek. 13).
- C** "Palaces" (KJV); "strongholds" (ESV).
- D** Israel was guilty of the atrocity that God delivered them from in Egypt: forced slavery.
- E** "The poor who can't repay their debts" (NLT); "honest people who cannot pay their debts" (GNT), demonstrating the low value placed on human life.
- F** Prohibited by the law (Ex. 21:7-11; Lev. 18:8), Paul echoed the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 5:1, and demanded that the church exercise discipline and remove the offender from the church.
- G** 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).
- H** The Amorites were the people who occupied the promised land before Israel.
- I** A Nazirite 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).
- J** Bows and arrows were long-range arms (up to four hundred yards), with some bows being from three to six feet in length, requiring the archer to stand for accuracy.
- K** "The most courageous of your fighting men will drop their weapons and run for their lives" (NLT).

1. WRONGS REVIEWED (AMOS 2:4-8)

- Amos identified various sins of Judah and Israel that were cause for them to experience God's judgment.

2. HISTORY RELIVED (AMOS 2:9-11)

- Through the prophet Amos, God reminded Israel and Judah of His actions on their behalf, especially providing them the promised land.
- He noted that Israel was committing the very crimes of the Amorites, whom God had removed from the promised land to make way for the Israelites.
- Amos also pointed to God providing prophets so the people would know His expectations and serve Him alone.

3. JUDGMENT RECKONED (AMOS 2:12-16)

- Amos stated that Israel and Judah chose to ignore God's prophets, trying to silence them. God's judgment would come in response.
- Amos presented seven images that indicated God's judgment would be complete and applied to all.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

- God expects His people to live lives of obedience that reflect His character.
- Believers should recount God's grace in their lives, responding with obedience.
- Only through God's grace will a person escape His complete judgment.

MEMORY VERSE

Amos 1:2

KEY DOCTRINE

The Scripture

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



ENGAGE

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

- Automobiles have all kinds of warning lights built into the dash.
- 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.

EXPLORE

1. WRONGS REVIEWED (AMOS 2:4-8)

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

- The people of Judah had returned to their old way of life prior to their knowledge of 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.
- The Israelites, like Christians today, were held to a higher moral standard of conduct because they had heard and received the Word of God.

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

- A true measure of a person is how they treat the weaker or less powerful, and Israel failed that test.
- Amos sounded the warning alarm to Israel; these wrongs would not go unpunished.

2. HISTORY RELIVED (AMOS 2:9-11)

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

- A quick look at the history of Israel revealed that God was full of grace and awaited Israel's repentance to receive the grace they needed to avoid further judgment for their sins.
- Even though they were committing many of the same sins as the nations around them, they should have known better than others how God would respond to them with His grace.
- Likewise, Christians 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.

Bonus: How do these activities initiated by God encourage His people to respond?

3. JUDGMENT RECKONED (AMOS 2:12-16)

Bonus: What are ways God uses 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?

- The Israelites' disregard of God was evident. The Nazirites had become symbolic, 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, thus breaking their vow to God. Then the Israelites would no longer have to face the accusations of devoted lives in their midst.
- The people thought by closing the mouths of the prophets they could neglect the consequences of their own sin. However, God did not send the prophets to initiate judgment against Israel but to warn them of impending judgment.

What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment? (PSG, p. 17) Bonus: How do these things give a false sense of security?

- Amos presented seven images indicating God's judgment would be complete and applied to all.
- 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 that would eventually be poured out upon them when the Assyrians overtook Samaria in 722 BC, about thirty years after the prophet Amos preached.

CHALLENGE

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? (PSG, p. 18)

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

If Amos had been addressing 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)



BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, p. 14)

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?

To conclude the group time, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 14). Explain that Amos 1:2 serves as a summary of the message to be delivered by Amos. After creating a summary of the teaching of the listed passages as suggested, call attention to the three summary statements under each outline point on page 18 of the PSG and the session summary statement under the title on page 10. Guide the group to identify how the three

outline statements relate to the session summary statement and the summary developed in the Bible Skill activity. Emphasize that the Bible consistently points to judgment awaiting those who ignore God and His grace.

OPTION: BRAINSTORM

Gather a board or large sheet of paper and markers.

Discuss as a group the role the group can play in helping each other listen to God and His truth. Write responses on the board. Discuss: *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 God's character.



DIG DEEPER

AMOS

Amos, whose name means "burdened" or "one who is supported [by God],"¹ was a prophet who declared God's case for judgment against Israel. His ministry took place about 750 years before Jesus was born. He was a layperson, who reminded us of his lack of professional credentials in Amos 7:14-15 where he said, "I was not a prophet or the son of a prophet; rather, I was a herdsman, and I took care of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" Amos is another example of how God used ordinary people to carry out extraordinary tasks.

Internationally, during Amos's life there was relative peace. At home, both Israel and Judah were politically stable. When Amos began to prophesy during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, there was prosperity like there had been during Solomon's reign. But with prosperity came the social, moral, and religious problems that the people faced. Amos spoke God's judgment against these problems. He called on the people to be accountable to the sovereign and righteous God for their actions.

When God called Amos to his prophetic ministry, Amos spoke indictments against both Judah and Israel. He confronted them about their superficial religion, exploitation of the poor, dishonesty, immorality, and distortion of justice. Amos illuminated the people's misdeeds. He pointed out that they did not have a right relationship with God, and that God would judge them for their actions.

The people's moral corruption was rooted in their pagan worship practices as well as their unfaithfulness to the one true God. There was decay present in the society because of their perverted prosperity and self-indulgence. Yet the people mistakenly thought that the prosperity was a sign of divine favor.

The primary theme of Amos can be found in Amos 5:24: "But let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream." While Amos's prophecy told of God's judgment against the people's disobedience, it also carried the hope of God's mercy and love.

1. "Amos," *Holman Illustrated Pocket Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004), 15.

Turn to God

AMOS 4:1-13

¹ Listen to this message, you **cows of Bashan** **A** who are on **the hill of Samaria**, **B** women who **oppress** **C** the poor and crush the needy, who say to their husbands, “Bring us something to drink.” ² The Lord GOD has sworn by his **holiness**: **D** Look, the days are coming when you will be taken away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks.

³ You will go through breaches in the wall, each woman straight ahead, and you will be driven along toward Harmon. This is the LORD’s declaration. ⁴ Come to Bethel and **rebel**; **E** rebel even more at Gilgal!

Bring your **sacrifices every morning, your tenths every three days**. **F** ⁵ Offer leavened bread as a thanksgiving sacrifice, and **loudly proclaim your freewill offerings**, **G** for that is what you Israelites love to do!

This is the declaration of the Lord GOD. ⁶ I gave you absolutely nothing to eat in all your cities, a shortage of food in all your communities, yet **you did not return to me**. **H** This is the LORD’s declaration.

⁷ I also withheld the rain from you while there were still three months until harvest. I sent rain on one city but no rain on another. One field received rain while a field with no rain withered. ⁸ Two or three cities staggered to another city to drink water but were not satisfied, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD’s declaration. ⁹ I struck you with **blight and mildew**; **I** the **locust** **J** devoured your many gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD’s declaration. ¹⁰ I sent **plagues like those of Egypt**; **K**

I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I caused the stench of your camp to fill your nostrils, yet you did not return to me. This is the LORD’s declaration. ¹¹ I overthrew some of you as I overthrew **Sodom and Gomorrah**, **L** and you were like a burning stick snatched from a fire, yet you did not return to me — This is the LORD’s declaration. ¹² Therefore, Israel, that is what I will do to you, and since I will do that to you, **Israel, prepare to meet your God!** **M** ¹³ He is here: the one who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, the one who makes the dawn out of darkness and strides on the heights of the earth. The LORD, **the God of Armies**, **N** is his name.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- A** “Women of Samaria, who grow fat like the well-fed cows of Bashan” (GNT). The poor were exploited to satisfy the women’s self-serving, insatiable desires.
- B** King Omri of Israel bought Samaria for his royal residence.
- C** “Exploit” (NASB).
- D** God is perfectly and completely holy (Isa. 43:15).
- E** God was describing their hearts; no matter the place, they were inclined to “multiply transgression” (ESV, NKJV) or “sin” (NIV).
- F** The issue was the heart and attitude of the worshiper. They believed doing the rituals was enough and that faithfulness to God in their lives was optional.
- G** “Brag about the extra offerings you bring!” (GNT). Jesus warned against such practices (Matt. 6:1-18).
- H** God lovingly disciplines His covenant people so they will repent and walk in faithfulness (Prov. 3:11-12).
- I** Diseases that affect the health and growth of crops.
- J** Insects common in the Middle East that devour all vegetation.
- K** A reference to the ten plagues that God sent upon Pharaoh and Egypt in Exodus. God was now punishing Israel in a similar way as he did Egypt, showing how far Israel had fallen in their covenant faithfulness.
- L** Towns God destroyed due to their sins (Gen. 19).
- M** “Get ready to face my judgment!” (GNT).
- N** God commands His heavenly hosts (angels). It was the Lord who once aided Israel in their conquest of Jericho (Josh. 5), and now He would strike Israel.

1. INDULGE (AMOS 4:1-3)

- Amos called out the women of Samaria, pointing to their personal indulgence at the expense of others. He declared that God would exact punishment on these women.

2. WORSHIP (AMOS 4:4-5)

- Amos mocked the worship of the Israelites at the sites they considered to be places for worship.
- In doing so, Amos was declaring that God detested their insincere sacrifices and false worship.

3. REFUSE (AMOS 4:6-11)

- Amos recounted numerous ways God sought to get His people's attention so that they would return to Him.
- Instead, the Israelites refused to turn to God.

4. PREPARE (AMOS 4:12-13)

- Amos challenged the Israelites to prepare to meet God to give an accounting. The prophet reminded the people of God's power and sovereignty to emphasize the seriousness of this meeting.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

God seeks His people, holding them accountable for how they respond to Him.

- Believers are to be champions of the poor and oppressed, not oppressors of them.
- Believers are to worship God with humility and repentance.
- Believers should look to God in repentance when facing His discipline.
- All believers should live knowing that God will hold them accountable.

MEMORY VERSE

Amos 4:12

KEY DOCTRINE

The Christian and Social Order

We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. (See Deut. 10:18; Jas. 1:27.)



ENGAGE

On a scale of zero to ten, how important is accountability in deterring bad behavior? Is it possible to have justice without accountability? Explain. (PSG, p. 19)

- Courtrooms can be intimidating places. They are places of accountability, and most of us believe people need to be held accountable for their actions.
- Amos spoke to Israel as one who was witnessing Israel's consequences for their actions. God seeks His people, and there are consequences for how they respond to Him— both in the present and in the future.

EXPLORE

1. INDULGE (AMOS 4:1-3)

Bonus: How does failure to listen create problems?

How does a person's treatment of others, especially those in need, indicate their spiritual condition? (PSG, p. 22)

- Amos saw the corruption of a society that was insensitive to the plight of the poor and needy. Those with the power and authority to change that plight cared little about the ones being oppressed.
- God called this indulgent society to accountability for its sins against Him and against one another. He had desired that they be the champions of the oppressed, not their oppressors.

2. WORSHIP (AMOS 4:4-5)

How can the self-indulgent practices of people like those mentioned in verses 1-3 also affect the way that they worship in verses 4-5? How can a person's worship practices be a cover up for their sins? (PSG, p. 23)

- Not only did Israel fail in the way they treated one another, but they also neglected to demonstrate love for God through worship in the way He prescribed (Matt. 22:34-40).
- Offerings, sacrifices, and tithes were good things, but the boastfulness of the worshipers in doing those things was the issue. The outward motions of worship were not enough to please God.
- Even today, without the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross, we have no right to come before God in worship (Heb. 9:22).

3. REFUSE (AMOS 4:6-11)

Bonus: What keeps a person from confessing their sin and turning back to God?

Why might two people experience the same sets of calamities and one turn to God while the other refuses to turn to God? (PSG, p. 25)

- In these verses, Amos listed five calamities that should have turned the hearts of Israel back to God but did not.
- God's involvement in the events of verses 6-11 was redemptive in nature. He orchestrated the events in Israel to give them the opportunity to repent, but they refused.

4. PREPARE (AMOS 4:12-13)

How should the promise of standing before God impact how one lives? (PSG, p. 26)

- The time of accountability had come. The God who was a consuming fire and a jealous God was prepared to bring the nation to accountability.
- Israel had relied on themselves and their religious performances. Their unwillingness to return to God would result in Him coming to them in judgment.
- All who are outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ can expect that they will one day be called to accountability for their refusal to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

How does a person's understanding of God impact how a person lives his or her life? (PSG, p. 26)

- If God was their Creator, He was the One to hold them accountable.
- He had revealed Himself through the Law, and He would soon reveal Himself through Jesus Christ the living Word and through the Bible, the written Word. Israel had no excuse for not knowing God and loving Him.
- The God that Israel faced was formidable, and He alone had the power to bring judgment against them for their rejection of His grace.

CHALLENGE

Discuss as a group ways of reminding each other of your accountability to God.

How can this be done with humility and transparency? What principles from today's study should the group follow in holding each other accountable? (PSG, p. 27)

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

Evaluate your attitudes toward people with need, toward the oppressed, and toward worship. How does your attitude in these areas compare with the attitudes Amos addressed? What adjustments do you need to make in these areas to align more with God's desires? (PSG, p. 27)



BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, p. 26)

Use a Bible dictionary to better understand a word.

Read articles about “judgment” in a Bible dictionary. Review Bible passages identified in the articles. What was the significance of God’s pronouncement of judgment on Israel through His prophet Amos? How do these pronouncements of God’s judgment help us understand what God did for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross?

To conclude the Explore portion of the group time, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 26). Provide Bible dictionaries and invite volunteers to read aloud the articles found or to present a summary of the articles. You may want to pre-enlist a person prior to the group time to present a summary of the articles.

OPTION: DISCUSSION

Emphasize the Key Doctrine: *The Christian and Social Order*. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (PSG, p. 22). Create teams of two to four persons. Instruct each team to read together Deuteronomy 10:18 and James 1:27 and discuss: *How does a person’s treatment of others, especially those in need, indicate their spiritual condition?* Guide the group to focus their hearts on God’s desire for us to be the champions of the oppressed. If time permits, have each team share key points from their discussions.



DIG DEEPER

GOD’S DISCIPLINE

In this text, we see that God had tried repeatedly to bring Israel to a place where they recognized their sin and turned from it. God had caused a shortage of food, a drought, crop disease, plagues, war, and disasters, but in all of these difficulties and warnings, the Israelites did not turn back to God (v. 11). While many instances of a natural disaster, disease, drought, or food shortage are not due to God’s punishment for sin, in this series of events, that was the cause. Why was God disciplining Israel in this way? The writer of Hebrews tells us,

My son, do not take the Lord’s discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reprov’d by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives. Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn’t we submit

even more to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb. 12:5b-11).

God disciplines out of love, with the goal and hope of His children repenting of sin and growing in righteousness. God’s deep love for Israel (Mal. 1:2) drove His discipline. God knew their sin would result in their ruin. Their religious rituals would not save them (vv. 4-5) because they lacked genuine faith. The Lord desired for them to return to Him. As Ezekiel 33:11 says,

Tell them, “As I live—this is the declaration of the Lord God—I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should turn from his way and live. Repent, repent of your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?”