

**Amos:**  
**Choices Have Consequences, Too**  
**Study Guide**  
**prepared by David W. Chadwell**

[www.davidchadwell.com](http://www.davidchadwell.com)

**An Important Note To Students And Teachers**

God's desire is to use His character and power to bless us. He refused to "give up" on us when humanity became (by choice) everything God did not create it to be. His creation, including people, was "good" (Genesis 1:31). It was people's choice to become "evil." God's original intent was for us to be and know only good.

When we failed God through rebellion, God did not give up. When people proved it was impossible for them to correct their mistake, God did not give up. God's intent was to rescue people from evil through a Messiah. That was His promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3b). His intent was for Israel to lead people to God (Isaiah 49:6). His purpose from His promise to Abraham was to send His son to serve as our Messiah or Christ (Acts 3:12-26). We are the saved because God sent Jesus to be our Christ.

However, there is a limit to God's patience. God does not anger easily, but He has a "point of anger." Unlike humanity, His anger is just. When His just anger is aroused by human rebellion and indifference, the resources that would have blessed are redirected toward our destruction. Amos' message is an unforgettable example. In the entirety of the Kingdom of Israel's existence, there was not one king who led his subjects to God. Repeatedly, they turned to idolatry. Their religious efforts for generations insulted God. Finally, God could endure no more. He sent Amos to tell them of certain destruction.

Amos' message came at a time of great prosperity and political stability. God's declaration seemed impossible. Amos underlined two offenses that irritated God: (a) their use of prosperity for self-indulgence; (b) their abuse of poor and needy Israelites. Amos made two points that are chilling. Point one: God does not prosper His people for the purpose of self-indulgence. Point two: When God's people exploit the poor and needy, they do so to their own spiritual destruction.

Amos in a basic way deals with the objective of life. Is life to be defined by self-indulgence? Do powerless people exist to be used by powerful people? Amos declared that God's purpose for His people is the opposite of a self-indulgent lifestyle. He also declared the abuse of the poor (either by exploitation or ignorance) is an abuse against Him. The height of deception in any generation is in believing security results from confidence in (a) who we are and (b) what we accomplish. Because of deception and wicked behavior, they who were God's people would no longer exist as a nation. God's people became God's enemy by forsaking God's ways. This is a relevant message for us today!

## Lesson One

### Important Background

*Text: read the Book of Amos (9 chapters)*

King David, the second King of Israel, ruled well. Though he made some personal mistakes, there was never a question that he belonged to God. When he became aware of his mistakes, he accepted personal responsibility for the mistakes (rather than resorting to self-justification), and repented. He ruled over a United Kingdom composed of twelve tribes known as Israel.

King Solomon was Israel's third king. He began his rule in wonderful fashion with God at the center of what he did. Under his early rule, the United Kingdom (the twelve tribes) was prosperous as Solomon expanded the kingdom's territory and influence.

Often Solomon's expansions were made by treaties. Then treaties among kingdoms were often sealed by the intermarriage of the royal families of the kingdoms. In his success, Solomon accumulated a number of idolatrous wives. Due to the influence of these wives on Solomon, the older Solomon adopted their idolatrous gods (1 Kings 11:3, 4).

Jehovah God was furious at Solomon for turning to idolatrous gods (1 Kings 11:9-11). He had abundantly blessed Solomon. He told Solomon of His fury. (Read I Kings 11:1-13.) As a consequence of Solomon's idolatrous behavior, Solomon's son would not rule a United Kingdom of twelve tribes when Solomon died.

Ten of the tribes were given by God to Jeroboam. In fact, God promised to bless Jeroboam in the same manner He blessed King David if Jeroboam would follow God with King David's loyalty and obedience (I Kings 11:28-38). However, when Jeroboam became king he feared that he would be deserted by his tribes if these people returned to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish temple (I Kings 12:26-29). In that fear, he made two worship centers in his territory (Dan and Bethel), made a golden calf for each, and announced they were Israel's gods (the ten tribes) that brought them from Egypt.

King Jeroboam's decisions began a rule in the breakaway ten tribes (known as Israel) that lasted for just over two hundred years. In these tribes during this period: (a) idolatry was the official religion [though Jehovah God was often included in the gods they worshipped], (b) there was never a reform king or a period of national repentance, and (c) this kingdom maintained its distinction from the Kingdom of Judah. Judah was at times a cooperative neighbor, at times simply there, but was often an enemy.

Amos was sent by God to prophesy to these people near the end of the two-hundred year period. Though that kingdom was quite successful during Amos' time by a physical standard, Amos declared the kingdom to be a horrible failure because of the ungodly behavior of the people.

Amos was sent to tell the people of Israel that they would endure the consequences of their behavior. Though by all the physical standards around them—a king who had served as king for years, seeming stability, an age of prosperity, and a luxurious lifestyle—declared success, Amos declared things were miserable and the unthinkable was unavoidable.

God had issued numerous calls to repentance, and none of those calls were noted or heeded. The time of responding was past. The full consequences of ungodly behavior would now occur. The blessings of repentance were possible, but the consequences of their continued behavior were a certainty.

Amos' message/writing is sobering for numerous reasons:(a) Amos pronounced some serious, major consequences in a society in a period of major accomplishments, major expansion, and major prosperity. Though the period by physical standards was outstanding and significant, Jeroboam II hardly receives anything more than a mention in the biblical record. What to people would be an astounding time under a truly successful king was absolutely unimpressive to God because it was a period of ungodliness.

(b) It was a period of significant ungodliness because it was a period of injustice that exploited the poor. People were more concerned about their standard of living than they were about the suffering and struggles of other people.

(c) Many thought they could obtain God's blessings (or at least His silence) by performing what they regarded as basic rituals rather than having the kind of faith that trusted God. Their approach to godliness was to pacify God rather than to serve Him. Obedience to God was a matter of perfunctory rituals, not a matter of faith in the One Who is the Source of Blessings.

It is easier to "tip one's hat" to God than it is to actually belong to Him. Ungodliness is ungodliness in spite of human definitions and priorities.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. Summarize King David's rule over the United Kingdom.
2. Summarize King Solomon's rule over the United Kingdom.
3. Explain how his treaties contributed to Solomon's departure from God.
4. How did God react to Solomon's idolatrous practices?
5. To whom (after Solomon's death) was leadership over ten tribes given?
6. Because of personal fear, Jeroboam did what?
7. What was Jeroboam's fear?

8. What three things began in these ten tribes with Jeroboam's rule?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
9. When did God send Amos to prophesy to these people?
10. Physically, how would that kingdom look to people? Why?
11. How did that kingdom look to God? Why?
12. Give three reasons for us to look at Amos' message/writing as sobering.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
13. Ungodliness is ungodliness in spite of what?

## Lesson Two

### The Power of Human Choice

*Text: Jeremiah 18:5-10*

Among the most difficult biblical topics is the one of God's interaction with people. Among the reasons for it being a difficult topic is the nature of the situation. The situation involves the interaction of an eternal being Who has creative powers with a physical being who deceptively believes he can manipulate the eternal being. It involves the interaction of the eternal being who made the physical being. This interaction includes: (a) a physical being who is accurately "knowable" to the eternal being; (b) an eternal being Who is completely unlike the physical being (Isaiah 55:8, 9); and, (c) a physical being who, at best, is limited to understanding the material. The nature of the situation demands that it be a faith relationship in which the material being trusts the eternal being.

The nature of this interaction/relationship was debated extensively and intensively before you were born, and will continue to be debated long after you die. The physical being will use the material in every way he can to explain the eternal being, but no amount of material understanding is ever enough to fully encompass the eternal.

Some things are constantly affirmed in scripture. (1) The physical being is continually accountable for his choices. (2) The physical being's repentance has a profound impact on his relationship with the eternal being. (3) The physical being can progress into the ungodly and anti-godly to the point that it is "too late" for him to escape the consequences of his ungodly choices.

Consider today's text. The location of the revelation is in a potter's house. While that is an unknown to most of us, it was highly known and understood to Jeremiah's intended readership. Their eating utensils, many of their food preparation implements, and many of their "necessary for life" utensils were made by a potter. The origin of an exquisite piece or a common piece began in the same way: a lump of clay placed by the potter on his potter's wheel.

It was unthinkable (and impossible) that a lump of clay would suggest to the potter what it wanted to become. The product the lump of clay became was the result of the potter's intent, not the clay's request. God was the potter. Judah was the clay.

The point is not a declaration of predestination. The point was an affirmation that God had an intent for Judah. God's intent, not Judah's desire, determined the ultimate outcome. God's intent, not Judah's desire, determined Judah's future.

The problem was seen in the fact that Judah was not willing to allow God to use them as He had long intended. The people who were supposed to belong to God, who existed to devote themselves to God's purposes, had become so ungodly that they were useless to God. God

needed to remind them that He was the potter and they were the lump of clay. They did not control God's intent. They existed to serve God's purposes.

Was there nothing they could do? (People always seek a means to defer consequences. Every generation wishes to defer consequences to the next generation.)

There was something potent they could do, but the potency of this "doable" thing would not avoid consequences of her ungodly decisions. Judah could repent of her ungodliness. She again could become useful to God's intent rather than arrogantly rebelling against God by selfishly pursuing her own desires and purposes.

While everyone in Judah would admit it was ridiculous for a lump of clay to instruct the potter on what to make it, Judah needed to understand there was something they could do. Judah needed to understand the power of repentance in their relationship with God. They needed to stop trusting in who they were and begin to behave like God's people.

As a reminder and an encouragement God gave Judah two affirmations about the power of human repentance in God's relationship with His people. Affirmation one: If God has declared calamity against a nation, and the people repented, God would relent on bringing the calamity. Affirmation two: If God declared He would bring blessings on a nation, and that nation turned to ungodliness, God would withdraw the blessings and replace them with evil.

Judah could not change God's intent. She could not dictate to God how she wanted Him to use her. Nothing would allow her ungodliness to continue and life be lived as it had been—that was not an option.

God's intent had not changed! If there were to be changes, those changes would be in Judah. The option: Repent, and let God use you as a people for His intent.

**For Thought and Discussion:**

1. What is among the most difficult biblical topics?
2. List three things included in the interaction of God (the eternal being) with the human (the physical being).
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. The nature of the situation demands what?
4. What does the physical being do? No amount of material understanding will do what?

5. List three things biblically affirmed.

a.

b.

c.

6. In what location did Jeremiah's revelation occur?

7. What typically occurred in a potter's house?

8. What was unthinkable and impossible?

9. The point was not what? What was the point?

10. What was the problem?

11. How ungodly had Judah become?

12. What do people always seek to do?

13. What did Judah need to understand? What was it?

14. List God's two affirmations.

a.

b.

15. What was Judah's available option?

## Lesson Three

### “Get them God! ... Uh-Oh!”

*Text: Amos 1:1-2:8*

How frequently have we become the victim of our own attitudes? How often are we guilty of using a double standard to justify ourselves and condemn our enemies? Is it not true that we are guilty of doing what we condemn in others?

The author, Amos, gives us three ways to date this prophecy. He spoke this message to Israel during the reign of King Uzziah in Judah (792—740 BC), during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (793—753 BC), and two years before the earthquake (used as a historical reference point by other writers).

Amos was not someone who trained to be a prophet. We would likely think of him as a herdsman and a farmer. These were not “glamorous” occupations, but common, essential occupations. Some of the other prophets were apprentices to a recognized prophet or went to schools for prophets (neither were condemned if the people accurately heard and faithfully delivered God’s message to others). Amos was not affirming “the virtue of ignorance” but affirming God’s message is not confined to those who train.

He was from an area south of Jerusalem. Thus we have a man coming from the Kingdom of Judah to prophecy to the Kingdom of Israel. Unfortunately, people in the Kingdom of Israel would not expect a prophet from the Kingdom of Judah to have something good to say about the Kingdom of Israel. They would be likely to attribute the prophet’s message to prejudice rather than to God.

Amos’ message was truly a “hard sell” for the situation then. In both kingdoms, it was a time of prosperity and political stability. Even to this day, times of economic prosperity and political stability are equated with “everything is okay.” It is extremely difficult to create an understanding that “danger is upon us” if we are prosperous and our society is stable. Times of danger are associated with economic distress and political instability. Amos’s message from God declared, “Nothing is okay!” at a time when prosperity and stability screamed, “Everything is better than fine!” Unless a person is paranoid, he prefers not to see “danger” in the face of “fine”!

The danger was real! God Himself was depicted as a hungry lion roaring. God was roaring from Jerusalem (not a place Samaria [the capitol of the Kingdom of Israel] wished to receive a spiritual message). The sheep pastures and the constantly green top of Mount Carmel took God’s roar seriously!

Amos had a message from none other than the Lord Himself in verses 1:3-2:8. Note several observations in the messages.

Observation one: Amos' message began in a way that would put the Kingdom of Israel at ease. Israel would expect Amos to begin by declaring how bad they were. Instead, Amos began by declaring how bad their horrible neighboring nations were. Amos began by declaring how bad Damascus, Gaza (the Philistines), Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah were.

One almost can hear the initial response of the Kingdom of Israel. "It is about time! Those people have done terrible things, some of their terrible things were done to us, and some of them have done terrible things for a long time. We were at times bad, but never as bad as they have been. It is past time for God to punish them for the bad things they did! Go, Lord, go! Lord, Your punishment is just and overdue!"

Observation two: the injustices of these nations centered in abuses of people rather than in failures in spiritual rituals. An interesting case could be made for the idolatrous influences in the Kingdom of Israel. While there is some indication that YHWH (the Lord that created and was the God of Abraham) was acknowledged in Jeroboam's (the II) reign, there is no indication YHWH was honored above their other gods—He was one among the others. In the declarations of Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 6:4, there would be no surprise if the existence of and the influences of idolatry were the core of Amos's message from God.

However, the concern of God's message in Amos focused on the improper treatment of people rather than the improper treatment of God. That combined with Jesus' statements should make us aware of how important our treatment of others is.

Observation three: other people's mistakes do not obscure our mistakes. The fact that Israel's neighbors treated people badly did not excuse Israel's bad treatment of people.

Observation four: God is concerned with the existence of evil treatment of people even when it exists in people who make no pretense of being His people. Everyone is accountable for their actions even if they do not pretend to belong to God.

While God does not pronounce a consequence in Amos 2:6-8, the rest of Amos deals with the consequences Israel would pay. Especially note Amos 6:7, 8.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. As this lesson began, what does the lesson suggest we ask ourselves?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. Give three ways Amos provided to date this prophecy.

a.

b.

c.

3. Amos was not what? He was not affirming what, but what?

4. To what was the Kingdom of Israel likely to attribute Amos' message?

5. What about the "then" situation made Amos' message a "hard sell"?

6. How did Amos depict God?

7. Give four observations about today's text.

a.

b.

c.

d.

8. What consequence does Amos 6:7, 8 declare on the Kingdom of Israel?

9. In today's text, what do you find to be the most insightful? (What should provoke in us some sober thinking?)

## Lesson Four

### An Offended God

*Text: Amos 2:9-16*

Few happenings distress us as much as (1) doing something thoughtful and significant for someone in dire need, and (2) the one in need receiving the kindness without being appreciative.

This distress did not arise from the arrogance of an insecure benefactor who must have another's uttered praise in order to feel a sense of significance. Instead, it arises from the crushed spirit of a benefactor who cares deeply. This benefactor mourns because the helped does not know he was helped. The helped feels no appreciation because he is unaware of his needs. The helped seems to be "without a clue" as to what life would be without the benefactor's help.

Amos did not depict an insecure, arrogant God who needed human praise. Amos depicted a grieved God mourning because Israel was "without a clue" of the many helps God provided them. The behavior of the helped became intolerable to the God Who helped.

Much of Amos' message to Israel could be summarized in this statement: "He who in his need received help should show compassion to others in need."

The Amorite people had a lengthy history in the area that dated all the way back to Abraham's times. In their early days they were a nomadic people who lived in the area Israel was to later inhabit. Numbers 21:21-32 spoke of a time when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, and they (Israel) asked the Amorites for permission to peacefully, nondestructively pass through their territory. The Amorites refused that right to Israel, and a battle ensued. The end result was that Israel defeated these strong, now settled people, and Israel took the Amorite cities in the conquered area for their own. These were the places across the Jordan that were settled by Gad, Reuben, and half of Manasseh. Though the men of these tribes settled their families in this area, they were a part of Israel's army that conquered the area east of the Jordan River (see Numbers 32).

Amos cited five occasions when God was unquestionably helpful to the Kingdom of Israel. (These are not the only times God was with them.) The five occasions Amos cites are: (1) the defeat of the Amorites; (2) the deliverance from Egypt; (3) caring for them in the experience of the wilderness wanderings for forty years; (4) the conquest of the land they inhabit; and (5) the use of their sons as prophets and Nazarites.

Note that we might summarize what Amos emphasized concerning God's help in this way: "You exist, you are what you are, and you have what you have because of what I did for you." Without God's help, they would not even exist.

Whereas God had helped them at critical moments, they resisted God's influence. God made their sons prophets (which was considered honorable in a society based on religion), but they would not permit their sons to prophesy things they did not wish to hear. Consider 2 Chronicles 18:1-27. In devotion to God, some of their sons took the Nazarite vow (which forbade drinking during the course of the vow), and they encouraged those under the Nazarite vow to drink. To read about the conditions of the Nazarite vow, read Numbers 6:1-21. It basically was an optional vow of individuals who (for a period of time) devoted themselves to the Lord by separating themselves from typical existence. Amos' point is this: "When people among you devote themselves to the Lord, you resist such devotion."

To illustrate the depth of God's frustration, Amos used several images. He basically said two things: (1) "You are too burdensome for the Lord to endure. (2) Escape from God's frustration with you is impossible."

### **Image #1**

"I am exhausted trying to bear you—you are like a loaded wagon bringing in the bound sheaves at harvest." At harvest, people made sure a wagon was fully loaded with the bound sheaves—they did not wish to make any unnecessary hauls. The heavy wagon would settle down in the soft soil, and the wagon would be difficult to pull. The point: "You are too heavy a load for Me to pull!"

### **Image #2**

Israel's consequences are certain.

1. No matter how fast you are, you cannot run away.
2. No matter how strong you are, you are not strong enough to escape.
3. No matter how skilled you are in battle, you cannot defend yourself.
4. No matter how brave you are, you will hastily flee in full retreat.

Those images are frightening! Though Israel was prosperous and the situation seemed stable, an inescapable danger was coming from which there was no escape and no deliverance. The ultimate consequence must be faced!

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. Few happenings distress us as much as what?
2. The distress does not arise from what? Instead, it arises from what?
3. Why does the benefactor mourn? Why is the helped unappreciative?
4. Much of Amos' message to Israel could be summarized in what statement?

5. What does Numbers 21:21-32 speak of? Who eventually settled there?

6. What were the five occasions Amos cited when God unquestionably helped Israel?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

7. What statement summarizes Amos' emphasis?

8. How did Israel resist God's influence?

9. How did Amos illustrate the depth of God's frustration? Give Amos' five images.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

10. Why are those images frightening?

## Lesson Five

### Spiritual Maturity

*Text: Amos 3:9-15*

There are a few people that “it takes a lot to make them angry.” These are the people who are not easily provoked. Their tolerance of others is astounding! However, some get angry very quickly. They are easily provoked and quickly react with hot, negative emotions. There are still others who get angry and keep a sense of resentment for a long time—their anger (which may have been a just provocation) poisons their future because they cannot forget what happened in the past. They simply cannot “get past” an injustice that occurred years before to see the present for what it is.

One of the major injustices against God usually involves God’s anger. Those who misunderstand God and have little understanding of scripture often portray God as an angry, intolerant being who quickly, emotionally reacted to any human provocation or perceived injustice.

Consider the situation Amos addressed as an illustration. Begin with the understanding that Israel started as a United Kingdom which included all the Israelite tribes. That United Kingdom ended with Solomon’s death because of Solomon’s idolatrous acts. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, made some critical mistakes in seeking to become King of the United Kingdom, ten of the Israelite tribes made Jeroboam king, established a new kingdom known as the Kingdom of Israel, and permanently separated themselves from the Kingdom of Judah.

In this new kingdom that appointed Jeroboam as king, several things were true. (1) God promised to bless Jeroboam and establish his dynasty in that breakaway kingdom if he wholeheartedly followed God [1 Kings 11:30-40]. (2) Jeroboam, in fear, turned to idolatry and refused to trust God [1 Kings 12:25-33]. (3) From the time this kingdom began, there is no scriptural record of it ever instituting a religious reform to return to God. (4) In the kingdom’s 200 plus year history as a kingdom, there is repeated declarations of the wickedness of the kings of this nation [as examples, 1 Kings 15:25, 26; 15:34; 16:7; 16:13; 16:25, 26; 16:30, 31; 22:52, 53; 2 Kings 10:29-31; 13:2, 11; 14:24.] (5) If it is assumed that Amos prophesied around 760 B.C., the wickedness and rebellion of the Kingdom of Israel lasted just over 160 years before Amos declared God would exact the consequences of the Kingdom of Israel’s wickedness. Though there were many past provocations in the Kingdom of Israel, never in those past provocations did God react as Amos declared was to come. God’s promised reaction was hardly a quick outburst of anger over a minor incident of injustice and rebellion!

God had been patient for generations, and the Kingdom of Israel was not even aware of God’s patience. The Kingdom of Israel exploited God’s patience like someone who is delivered from an impossible indebtedness only to use their deliverance to produce a new impossible indebtedness. There was no appreciation of God’s patience, only an arrogance that increased the Kingdom of Israel’s self-indulgence.

Amos, in chapter 3, began to detail the reasons for God being infuriated. Chapter 3 only begins the reasons for God's deep frustration with the Kingdom of Israel. This frustration does not mean there were no godly people in that kingdom (see 1 Kings 18:3, 4 and 19:18 as examples). It means the Kingdom of Israel was wicked as a kingdom in spite of the presence of some godly people. (Is it not frightening to understand that godly people can suffer as the result of the wickedness of the majority?)

Chapter 3 began with a series of rhetorical questions with obvious, predictable answers. The point: "With an unusual relationship with God also comes unusual responsibilities." The fact these people in the past had a unique relationship with God meant they also had unique responsibilities. The fact such unusual responsibilities existed for them should be obvious! As a person had reason to fear when he heard a lion roar, the Kingdom of Israel had reason to be afraid when God was frustrated with them!

Thus God gave an invitation to the Philistines and the Egyptians to come watch what happens to those who offend God by (1) ignoring the needs of others and (2) trusting in the security they built.

God's message to the Kingdom of Israel is this:

1. A superior enemy will surround you and make you powerless.
2. What you trust in as your protection and strength will not protect you—you will be looted as you powerlessly watch.
3. As a shepherd rescues pieces of a dead sheep to prove he did not steal the sheep, there will be nothing alive among you to rescue.
4. Your idolatry frustrates Me endlessly, and your false gods cannot protect their altars or you.
5. Your prosperous indulgence will not and cannot deliver you—your prosperity cannot buy your way out of My fury!
6. I, God, am telling you it is over!

This is a chilling rebuke for those who trust in themselves instead of the Creator God!

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. Give three reactions to anger found in groups of people.
  - a.
  - b.

c.

2. What does one of the major injustices against God usually involve?

3. When did the United Kingdom that included all the tribes of Israel end? Why?

4. State five things that were true of the Kingdom of Israel.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

5. How long was God patient, not destroying the Kingdom of Israel?

6. Did God's frustration mean there were not godly people in the Kingdom of Israel? Explain

7. What should we today find frightening?

8. What was the point of the rhetorical questions in the opening of chapter 3?

9. Give possible reasons the Philistines and Egyptians were invited to be witnesses.

10. Give six statements of God's message to the Kingdom of Israel.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

11. Why should all find this rebuke chilling?

## Lesson Six

### Why Was God So Angry?

*Text: Amos 4:1-13*

No one can imagine going back. Each generation imagines only going forward. The older adults commonly shake their heads at the younger adults because of all the experiences the younger adults have not had. The older adults like to speculate on “what if ...” The younger adults commonly regard the older adults as irrelevant because they are so easily confused by today’s newer ways. They regard the “what ifs ...” of the older adults as concerns that have no meaning in today’s world. The older question the values of the younger, and the younger question the lack of flexibility in the older. Nothing is new in any of this—it has happened generation after generation.

Real crisis comes for everyone (old and young) when a new, unanticipated danger redirects existence into ways and experiences no one has had. In dramatic fashion, life cannot continue as it has been, and no experience in the past equates to the “new now.” No one knows what to do. These disastrous conditions have never existed. Nothing works. Everything gets worse as the “living nightmare” continues and unfolds into more dreadful events and conditions. No one—old or young—has answers.

Amos chapter 4 is not the only discussion of the reasons for God’s intense anger with the Kingdom of Israel. Many situations that contributed to God’s anger occur throughout the book of Amos. Reasons for the divine anger begin in the last of chapter 3 with God’s reaction to their false gods and their luxurious lifestyle. However, chapter 4 deals with reasons for God’s anger in unexpected ways—in passive contributors and in commonly recognized solutions.

Begin with a simple understanding. That world in the Kingdom of Israel and our American world have little in common. In our American world, women earn incomes by being a part of the work force. It seems in most instances to be necessary for a wife to work in order to provide the level of necessary income to make possible the things that the family unit wants. (Single adult women are expected to work to provide their own needs.) There are very few things that men can do work-wise that women cannot do, and some things women do better than men. Even women in higher social levels have jobs with an income when they are in families that make such jobs unnecessary financially. (This is not at all the suggestion that women who are not in the work force and do not “earn an income” do not work and work hard.)

What Americans consider “job opportunities” for women hardly existed in the Kingdom of Israel in Amos’ time. To enable themselves and the family to exist, women did hard, difficult, demanding labor.

If you would like to read in scripture some of the things wives could do, read Proverbs 31:10-31. A woman’s dream in the Kingdom of Israel was to have a husband who was so financially successful that she would not have to engage in demanding, difficult work.

Success was viewed in terms of a lifestyle, not in terms of productive work. For a woman, “having it made” was having a husband who made a luxurious lifestyle possible. The cows of Bashan are the wives of financially successful men who lived in the royal city of Samaria.

Important question: How did these women oppress the poor and crush the needy? Shocking answer: They did so by urging their husbands to make more (regardless of who was hurt in the husbands’ commitment to success), so the wives could continue and increase their indulgent lifestyle.

Shockingly, God was angered by a passive oppressing of the poor and crushing of the needy. These women were not indicted for any direct actions against the poor and needy. They angered God because their passion for a self-indulgent lifestyle pressured their husbands to “use” the poor and needy rather than to “help” the poor and needy. The poor and needy were opportunity, not people. These women were indicted because they were only concerned about their self-indulgence, not struggling people.

We are accustomed to thinking that only a direct action of behaving evilly results in any sense of accountability. Here accountability is incurred by pressures that encourage and become the motivations for evil acts. It was accountability through indirect pressure.

Often people regard the solution to evil’s consequences to be religious acts. As an example, think of common reactions in America after the twin towers were destroyed in the September attack of 2001. In the aftermath of the attack, God was invoked and acts of worship were profuse. The religious outpouring was astounding!

God declared He would regard their religious acts as transgressions—sacrifices, tithes, thank offerings, and freewill offerings are declared to be transgressions. God would be offended by their religious acts!

God previously tried to gain their attention through starvation (cleanness of teeth), a withholding of rain, major inconvenience, a destruction of gardens and orchards, plagues, and military disasters. They refused to listen, connect events with conduct, or understand. God tried to gain their attention before this ultimate disaster, but they would not listen. Their wickedness left God no choice!

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What can no one imagine?
2. When does real crisis come for everyone?
3. Amos chapter 4 discusses what? Name two things that make chapter 4 unique.
4. What simple understanding should begin your thinking? Contrast views of women.

5. What does Proverbs 31:10-31 provide?
6. Women in the Kingdom of Israel then viewed success in life how?
7. Give the important question asked, and give the shocking answer.
8. Shockingly, why was God angered?
9. How are we accustomed to thinking?
10. What is the second way we are accustomed to thinking? How was God influenced by their religious acts?
11. How had God tried to gain their attention?

## Lesson Seven

### The Need

*Text: Amos 5:1-17*

In all generations, people fail to grasp the destructive power of evil. It robs a person and a people of time, of physical strength, and of quality of life. It creates the illusion that “we are free and in control” when in fact, we are enslaved to our desires and out of control. Though the fact that we are enslaved and out of control may cost us our health, “cost is insignificant.” It may rob us of much or all of what we produce, but “it is worth what it costs.” It often causes those we say we love the most to suffer terribly, but “it is not our fault that they hurt.” Life is needlessly shortened, but we are deceived into believing we are lengthening life “by making living worthwhile.”

No matter what happens as a result of our attitudes and actions, it is always others' fault. Later, people will analyze the reasons for our failures, but we never see nor recognize those reasons. In our eyes, we are never accountable for our mistakes. Though our ethics and morals are horrible, what happens is never a matter of ethics or morals. Our society crumbles around us as justice dies, the righteous are opposed, and the good are treated as enemies. Yet, if someone seriously asks, “How are things?” we seriously reply, “Everything is fine!”

It is amazing how rotten a society can be as its people pronounce it good! What commonly are the criteria used to measure people's attitudes and conduct? Is it a matter of finances? A matter of fulfillment of desires? A matter of standard of living? Or is it a matter of justice? A matter of respect for people? A matter of commitment to right and good? What determines when a people are successful? What determines when a society is beneficial and worthwhile?

Often what people view as evidences of success are viewed by God as indicators of failure. People often in some way couple concepts of social success with financial success expressed in improvement of physical lifestyle. In societies, God defines success in the way people treat people. It is quite possible for a society to be successful in its own eyes while (at the same moment) it is seen as a failure in God's eyes.

In the book of Amos, the Kingdom of Israel would have said they were quite successful. The elite of society had an incredible lifestyle. The nation enjoyed a lengthy period of national prosperity. Jeroboam II had a lengthy reign, so the society enjoyed political stability. If people were in the right levels of their society, existence was incredibly good.

However, if you were stuck in the lower levels of society, people struggled to exist and endured continual injustice. Your level in society actually determined if life was good or life was terrible.

God speaking through Amos said your condition is terrible. You need Me whether you know it or not. The pronouncement that matters is not yours (“All is great!”) but Mine (“All is terrible”).

First, consider your need (5:1-3). You have fallen, and you will not get up again. You are like a helpless virgin who has fallen in a field outside of the city. She is defenseless, and there is no one who will come to protect her in her vulnerable condition. Whether you know it or not, you also are defenseless, and no one will come to protect you. Though you think you are strong, soon you will have reason to mourn how few remain.

Second, realize Who I am. Do not trust in your cities, your territory, or your defenses. Your security does not lie in any of those. Your security lies in Me. If My protection is lost, you will be consumed as if a fire devoured you. Do not think your strength is in yourselves. You will not make yourselves strong by making justice weak and holding righteousness in contempt!

I am the One Who made the stars you worship, Who changes the darkness of night into the light of morning, and Who takes water from the sea and puts it on the earth. I am the One who destroys the physically strong.

Third, contrast what I can do with what you have done. You hate the man who judges with integrity (you want a justice that can be bought and sold rather than a justice that is concerned with what is right). You charge the poor impossible rent and tax them unfairly (you make poor people's existence impossibly difficult). While you do that to those who have little or no choice, you live in expensive houses.

Here is what will happen to you. You will plant vineyards, but you will not own the vineyards when they produce. I know every wrong you have done, and your wrongs are huge! (You made the righteous miserable, you made justice a matter of economics, and you refused to listen to cases of poor people.) It is all going to come crashing down upon you. If you are smart, you will keep quiet instead of making matters worse by trying to justify yourselves.

Fourth, it is time for you to repent! I, God, am the only hope you have! Saying, "I am sorry!" is not enough. It is time to search for good instead of following evil. You will do so because you despise evil and love good! It is time to stop making justice a matter of money—bribes are evil!

Then—and only then—maybe I will listen to you and be gracious.

Our mistakes are always small in our eyes. That is not the issue! The real issue is what size our mistakes are in God's eyes. This text suggests there is a connection between (1) Our mistakes bringing us physical prosperity, and (2) The size of our mistakes in God's eyes.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What have people always failed to grasp?
2. No matter what happens as a result of our attitudes and actions, what do we commonly do?

3. Regardless of how rotten a society is, what do people in that society often do?
4. Often what people see as evidences of social success are seen by God as what?
5. In Amos, the elite of the Kingdom of Israel had what? What about the poor?
6. People in the Kingdom of Israel were like what?
7. What did they need to realize?
8. What had they done?
9. Why would they plant vineyards but not own the vineyards when they produced?
10. What was it time to do?
11. What connection does Amos suggest?

## Lesson Eight

### “Your Hope Is No Solution”

*Text: Amos 5:18-27*

No matter what religious people do, they always are certain “God would approve.” (The contrast the writer is making is between religious people and righteous people. In this context, religious people know there are gods or a god, but do not depend on biblical revelation to determine the nature and character of deity. Righteous people use all of biblical revelation to consider and determine the nature and character of deity. Religious people commonly assume the nature and character of deity OR they absorb [with little question] the views of deity their culture reflects. Righteous people know deity exists by observing the world and life, but they also understand they cannot determine deity’s nature or character unless deity reveals itself. Religious people are not bound by the Bible and revelations in it. Righteous people are.)

Consider as an example people in today’s American culture. The example considers only people who are personally convinced that God exists (there are quite a number that reject any form of deity). How often do you hear people who believe that a god exists say, “My God does not think that way.” Or, “My God would not do that.” Or, “That is not the value of my God.” Or, “My God wants me to be happy (or have fun)”. Or, “That would never upset my God.”

If that person is shown biblical declarations that contradict his or her view, he or she says to you, or murmurs under his or her breath, or says to self after you leave, “That is not my God!” Here, one holds a view of God formed by revelation from the Bible. The other holds a view of God determined by something other than the Bible OR some statements from the Bible plus something else.

In Amos 5:18, the people who received Amos’ message counted on ‘the day of the Lord’ for vindication that would make everything okay. We could focus for several lessons on their concept of ‘the day of the Lord’ and never note the point Amos made.

A way of ignoring Amos’ warning and reassuring themselves that everything would be fine was by “trumping” Amos’ warning through an appeal to ‘the day of the Lord.’ It was similar to a Christian saying, “When God’s final judgment comes, you will know I am correct! I am right and you are wrong, and God will prove it!”

To the people of the Kingdom of Israel, ‘the day of the Lord’ was a good event, not an event to be feared. They did not have anything to fear from God, and the ‘day of the Lord’ would prove they had no reason to fear.

God was not upset with them! Terrible times were not about to come! There was no danger on the horizon because God was upset with them! They were a religious people! ‘The day of the Lord’ would show Amos how mistaken he was!

Amos said to them, “You think ‘the day of the Lord’ will deliver you! You think for you it will be a wonderful event! You could not be more mistaken! For people like you, ‘the day of the Lord’ is not a deliverance event! You will be like the person who flees from a lion and runs into a bear. You will be like the man who goes to the security of his home, only to lean on the wall of his home and be bitten by a snake. ‘The day of the Lord’ will not bring you light or brightness. Instead, it will bring you darkness and gloom.”

Why were they so sure that ‘the day of the Lord’ would be an event that would deliver them from danger? Why did they think it would be an event that would prove that God was not upset with them? Why—because they were a religious people who did the ‘right things’ to keep God from being upset with them.

Hundreds of years previously they had come from idolatrous Egypt, who worshipped many different gods. Though God sent Moses, worked through the miraculous wonders of the plagues, delivered them from slavery, rescued them by a path through the Red Sea, and gave them Canaan as their homeland, still they never got idolatry out of their system.

YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah, often translated the LORD) to the Kingdom of Israel was one of many gods to be acknowledged or honored. Speaking simplistically, divinity in general was unconcerned with human affairs, but divinity could hurt humanity. Thus humanity must do ‘the right things’ to keep a god content. Humanity did not dare do the ‘wrong things’ and upset a god.

The Kingdom of Israel was certain they had ‘done the right things’—from their perspective God had no reason to be upset with them. God said, “I hate your religious festivals, your solemn assemblies, your burnt offerings, your grain offerings, your fat sacrifices, and your songs to Me.” Why? Were these not the ‘right things’ to do? They worshipped God. Why should He be upset?

God was upset because honoring Him in worshipful acts did not affect their daily acts. They failed to understand worship was meaningless if honoring God did not express itself in just, righteous daily acts.

Amos made a profound accusation (also examine Acts 7:43). They took idolatry with them when they left Egypt (Amos 5:26), and never abandoned it! In spite of all God did for them, they never understood what it meant for God to be One, the only God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Exodus 20:1-6). The result: exile awaited them.

Acts of worship are not a substitute for godly behavior. There is more to being righteous than keeping God happy.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. Give (in this lesson) the contrast between religious people and righteous people.

2. Illustrate this in American culture. For what basic reason does the difference exist?
3. For what did the Kingdom of Israel rely on 'the day of the Lord' to produce? Why?
4. To the Kingdom of Israel 'the day of the Lord' would be what? Amos said what?
5. Why were they sure 'the day of the Lord' would be a day of deliverance?
6. What was Egypt religiously?
7. Why was the Kingdom of Israel certain God was not upset with them?
8. Why was God upset with them?
9. What was Amos' profound accusation?
10. Acts of worship are not a substitute for what?

## Lesson Nine

### Do You Realize How Pitiful You Are?

*Text: Amos 6:1-14*

It is simple to be sold on our own goodness. All we have to do is to compare ourselves to someone near us. In fact, the comparison is better if we can make a comparison to several people. In our comparison, “I” am better (at least less offensive) than “they” are. Our comparison is human-to-human, not human-to-God. Thus, “I” am good because “you” (in “my” opinion) are worse than “I” am. “Your” ‘awfulness’ makes “me” good simply because “I” am not as ‘awful’ as “you” are. So no matter how bad “I” am, “I” am okay because “I” am not as bad as “you” are.

Many of us (Christian and non-Christian) use this reasoning often. If society is obviously more evil than I am, then I am okay because I am not as bad as society.

One of the frightening but impressive things about Amos and his message to the Kingdom of Israel is this: “Compare yourself to God’s expectation, not to those around you.” In today’s lesson, Amos dealt with self-indulgence—an extremely difficult matter! “What ‘you’ do in your lifestyle is self-indulgent! What ‘I’ do in mine is necessary!” It seems common to view what “you” do as excessive and what “I” do as reasonable.

It is simple to be excessive when we live in a society filled with excess. “I” want to define what is excessive for “you,” but “I” want everybody to leave me and my lifestyle alone—“your” lifestyle is “on limits” to “me”, but “my” lifestyle is “off limits” to “you” and everyone else.

All of us see excess differently if we see what we have and use through the eyes of a deprived culture. Just to stimulate our thinking, carpeting looks different to people who live on dirt floors. Or, personal telephones look different to people who live in a town of thousands with few business phones. Or, having multiple cars for one family looks different to people in a city where only the extremely rich have one car.

Yet, we amazingly become accustomed to that which is commonplace. To grandpas or older people carpet, multiple cars in a family, and anything more than a “party-line” of 4 or more was excessive. To many of today, carpet, multiple cars in a family, and a cell phone are essentials. Carpet is everywhere in our society, and so are multiple cars in a family, and cell phones. Amazingly, if something is common, it quickly becomes essential. ‘Want’ becomes ‘need,’ and ‘need’ becomes ‘must have.’ Every parent of a teen understands this progression. However, the progression is not limited to teens.

Amos felt sorry for those who deceived themselves into thinking a lifestyle of ease declared the existence of security. He said they should examine other prominent cities near them. Would they say that nation was invincible because the elite had an incredible lifestyle?

In those societies, would the fact that the elite lived well postpone invasion and the violence it brought? If their answer was no, then why did they think an incredible lifestyle for the elite meant something different for them?

Amos described the lifestyle of the elite—ivory beds, leisurely furniture, the best of foods, entertaining music (and they had no electricity or technology gadgets), exquisite wines served in exquisite containers, and the latest in skin care. The problem: they were not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. They were so wrapped up in their lifestyle of excess that they did not even notice the suffering of their brothers living in dire poverty. In fact, their excessive lifestyle contributed to the suffering of their brothers. They forgot God had a purpose for all of them, and it was not reflected in their excessive lifestyle.

The result: their excessive lifestyle would be but a dim memory when they were defeated exiles.

How upset was God with their fixation on lifestyle instead of the suffering of their brothers? God swore by Himself (there was none higher to whom He could appeal) the situation would not continue. When their strength disappeared, the best they could hope for was to be unnoticed when they hid. They would be that helpless! All they valued in their excess would be hopelessly destroyed.

It would happen! Exile was certain! Why? They turned justice into poison (no justice existed), righteousness to bitterness (righteousness and their lifestyle could not co-exist), and they trusted in themselves instead of God.

People are never as strong as they think they are. People believe in themselves instead of God's purpose, and they never realize this is weakness until it is too late.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What is it simple to be sold on? How do people do that?
2. If society is obviously more evil than "I," then how do "I" reason?
3. What is one of the frightening but impressive things about Amos' message?
4. In chapter 6, what does Amos address?
5. It is simple to be excessive when what is true?
6. Who looks at what we consider normal differently?
7. What do we become accustomed to?
8. Who did Amos feel sorry for?

9. Would the lifestyle of the elite postpone invasion and the violence it brought?

10. Describe the lifestyle of the elite. What did they not notice?

11. What was the result?

12. How upset with them was God?

13. Why was exile certain?

## Lesson Ten

### It Is Too Late!

*Text: Amos 7:1-8:3*

We all have had the experience of knowing we made a serious mistake when it is too late to correct the mistake. Once in graduate school, the final examination allowed the students to select one of several questions. The examination was to fully answer the question selected. After writing furiously for over two hours, I suddenly realized that I had begun my answer at the wrong place. With only 15 minutes left, I tried to connect my answer to the correct beginning. I knew I was not successful, and my examination grade proved it. I realized my mistake much too late.

The mistake may be made in a project, in a situation, or in a relationship. It may be job-centered, family-centered, friend-centered, or congregation-centered. Ask a divorced person when the “killing” mistake occurred in the non-existent marriage, or former close business partners who became alienated, or former good friends who are no longer acquaintances, and all of them will likely be able to identify the “too late” moment.

It is chilling to know that even in the closest relationship, a “too late” moment can come. To me, the most horrifying thing regarding such moments is that always we seem to know when those moments occurred looking back. Rarely do we see such moments coming. In fact, we are often surprised when they occur.

We need to understand that we can produce such moments in our relationship with God through our attitudes, our behavior, and our priorities. God is incredibly patient. He is incredibly kind, forgiving, and merciful. However, we can heap such abuse on our relationship with God that we drive God from us. There is a difference between ignorance resulting from a lack of exposure to knowledge and rebellion that proceeds from an “I don’t care” attitude. One did not know any better, but the other acted out of a defiant attitude. Even people often are sympathetic to those who did not know, but have a different attitude regarding those who are defiant.

Generations before, their forefathers knew the attitudes and lifestyle of the Kingdom of Israel were ungodly. Though there had been a time of knowledge and understanding, their forefathers failed miserably to pass that knowledge and understanding on to their children. Instead, following generations cultivated a “do not care” attitude toward God that was communicated well. The result: abuses of God constantly multiplied and grew increasingly serious.

God tried to call their attention to what was happening, but God’s efforts failed. God told their forefathers prior to entering Canaan the consequences that disobedience would produce (read Deuteronomy 28).

God planned to send a locust swarm to eat the vegetation just as the seed sprouted. Amos saw how horrible the consequences would be. He pled with God not to destroy the Kingdom of

Israel, and God changed His mind. Yet, the Kingdom of Israel neither heard nor learned anything. Nothing changed.

The Lord intended to send a fire that would produce major destruction. Amos saw God's intent, and he pled with God not to destroy the Kingdom of Israel. God did not follow through with His intent. The people did not change their attitudes or behavior.

Then God measured them with a plumb line. What they were would determine God's actions. Amos was silent. It was "too late" to plead with God. The wickedness of Israel was beyond the pleas of a righteous man.

The Kingdom of Israel's reaction was the opposite of repentance. The high priest of Bethel told the king that the words of Amos were undermining the confidence of the nation. The high priest even told Amos to return to his own kingdom and prophesy. He was neither wanted nor needed in Bethel (a worship center in the Kingdom of Israel).

Amos told the high priest (Amaziah) that Amos was doing only what God told him to do. The day would come when the high priest's wife would be a prostitute, his children would be killed, his land would be sold, and he would die in a gentile country as an exile.

Just as ripe fruit marked summer's end, the Kingdom of Israel was facing her end.

Desperate times were surely upon the Kingdom of Israel! Their wickedness brought those days upon them! They, not God, were responsible for what would happen!

Among the lessons to be learned, three are chillingly obvious: (a) A "too late" moment in our relationship with God can come because of our abuse of God. (b) If it arises, all God has to do is to let us face the consequences of our attitudes and behavior. (c) God is under no obligation to protect the people He loves if those people reject Him.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What experience do many of us have in common?
2. In what ways can this mistake be made?
3. Most people can recognize the "too late" moment when?
4. Christians need to understand what about the "too late" moment?
5. Discuss the difference between the ignorance from lack of exposure and the ignorance of rebellion.
6. In what way did the Kingdom of Israel's forefathers fail miserably?

7. Discuss Deuteronomy 28.

8. God planned to bring enormous destruction on the Kingdom of Israel how? Why did God change His mind?

9. Discuss God's use of the plumb line.

10. What did the high priest of the kingdom of Israel tell the king?

11. What did the high priest tell Amos?

12. State five things Amos told the high priest.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

13. State three lessons we should learn from today's lesson.

a.

b.

c.

## Lesson Eleven

### You Will Be Victimized by Your Transgression

*Text: Amos 8:4-14*

To go from bad to worse is demoralizing. To expect things to get better only to witness things get increasingly dire crushes the human spirit. It is simple to expect good days to become better days (that is what people always expect). We never think good days cannot be improved so that the future is filled with even better days.

However, we always expect bad days to come to an end. There is always a bottom to the bad but “the sky is the limit” with the good. If it is bad, it can only get so bad—there is always a limit to how bad it can get. “Badness” is limited by human expectation. But “good,” “good” is a different story. There is no ceiling on “good.” “Good” is unlimited.

Have you noticed that if we have experienced the “good” we can never go back to the bad? Take the “good ole days” as an example. We long for the simplicity of those days, but not with the expense of enduring the bad. Anyone for outhouses? Or no in-house running water? Or no water heaters? Or no electronics? Or limited medications? Or no air conditioning? Or lower life expectancy? “Oh, we could never ‘go back to THAT.’ Those days are long gone and could never come again.” Really! Do you realize that is current existence for many people alive right now?

Amos addressed those who trampled the needy and regarded the humble as an unwanted handicap to their society. This time Amos addressed a problem that should make our blood run cold. Amos factors religious attitude into the motivation that resulted in trampling the poor and rejecting the humble.

When religion is reduced to “a necessary evil,” religious people are in trouble! These people had to be religious; they did not dare make God angry by not worshipping and honoring “correct” religious expectations.

However, these people could not wait for religious occasions to be over. They did what they were supposed to do by being at the correct place. However, they did not think about God. That was a waste of time! They thought about how they could take advantage of people—how they could cheat people in the wheat market by using dishonest scales, or taking advantage of the helpless, or by selling an inferior product.

After all, it was just business! And business was business! Everyone did it! That was just the way the game was played! If you were going to do business, you had to play the game, and play it better than others. If someone was hurt as people played the game, it was too bad—that was simply the reality of the situation.

If you could make “God time” profitable time (instead of wasted time) by thinking of ways to take advantage of the helpless and needy, good. Turning wasted time in a money-making direction was good, not bad.

Amos said they needed to consider the impact of their thoughts on God (whom they were seeking to pacify and manipulate). God said He knew what they were doing and would never forget it. (What human wants his ungodly acts to live always in God’s memory?)

The consequences defied human understanding. Their land would quake, the people would mourn, and things would happen as mysteriously as the Nile’s rise and fall. The predictable would become unpredictable—it would be dark at noon, their festivals would sound like funerals instead of celebrations, and there would be no occasions of happiness, only occasions of sorrow and bitterness.

“I, God, tried to talk to you, and you would not listen. I will try no more. It will be so obvious I am not among you that you will travel everywhere in your attempt to find Me. There will be a famine, but it will be a famine of My words. Your choice people will die, and all will know it is because I am not with you.”

The other gods you worshipped will be powerless to help you. Their powerlessness will be obvious. You will have nothing but your wicked selves to turn to: I am gone and your false gods cannot help. What a pitiful situation! All you will have is your wickedness!

The lessons: (a) “God time” is for honoring God. (b) To be at the correct event and fail to think about God offends God. (c) Honoring God includes respecting the helpless. (d) For our evil deeds to live in God’s memory is a horrible thing. (e) For God to withdraw His presence from people is destructive to the people. (f) It is possible to trust in something that has no power to help us with our greatest needs.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. What is demoralizing? What crushes the human spirit?
2. What do we expect to end? There is always a bottom to what?
3. When we have experienced the “good,” what cannot happen (we think)?
4. What did Amos address in this lesson?
5. When religion is reduced to a “necessary evil,” what is the result?
6. These people could not wait for what? Why?
7. In this way of thinking, when a person turns “God time” into money making time, it is *good* and not *bad*.

8. What did Amos say they needed to consider?
9. Describe the consequences of their desires.
10. Since God tried to talk to them and they would not listen, what would happen?
11. What lessons should we consider?

## Lesson Twelve

### No Place To Hide

*Text: Amos 9:1-6*

Even when the worst of circumstances come, we figure at least a few will escape. **Perhaps** some will be away from home and will escape by being absent. **Perhaps** there will be some fluke happenings and some will escape. After all, even in the worst tornado there always is a living infant cradled in a treetop or an uninjured person in the rubble! People always marvel at the few who escape when destruction is everywhere. **Perhaps** someone will successfully hide and escape by being unnoticed. **Perhaps** some will just be sneaky enough to figure out how to get away or hide.

Total destruction rarely means all people were destroyed. Maybe all buildings were destroyed. Maybe all animal life died. Maybe there were no signs of life at first glance. Maybe outsiders say, “No one could live through this much destruction!”—yet, someone always does.

There are always survivors! No matter how bad the event was, there are always survivors! We always hope for survival by an incredible, unexplainable escape. After all, who invented the statement, “We are hoping against hope”? So no matter how bad an event is—from plane crash to hurricane—we always look for survivors, and we expect to find them.

We are unaccustomed to thinking that “total destruction” means a complete loss of human life. “There will always be the exception, and that exception will be me. Everyone else may die, but I will survive!”

Amos neared the close of his short written prophecy by declaring the unthinkable: There will be no survivors! Why? “You have made a very patient God justly angry. In His just anger, He declared no one shall escape the consequences of the offenses.”

Amos revealed his vision by declaring that the Lord God was standing by the altar. Ordinarily, that was good! The Lord God by the altar often meant that the Lord God accepted the human gifts presented at the altar. The Lord God speaking by the altar brought words of blessing as He spoke in truth.

Not this time! The Lord God would speak in truth, but it would not be words of blessing. Instead of truthful words of blessing, He spoke truthful words of destruction.

What did He say?

He, the Lord God, would break the unbreakable! Their impressive structures would not protect them! The Lord God would strike the tops of the columns with such force that the bottoms of the doorways would shake. (That would be a force beyond imagination! Imagine fleeing to your strongest building only to have it fall on you.)

Not everyone would be successful in fleeing to their strongest buildings. The ones who did not make it would be killed with the sword.

Whether by the collapse of their strongest buildings or by violent acts of war, none would escape. If it were possible to dig a hole (to hide in) in Sheol, there would be no escape. (Sheol was the undefined world of the dead, here pictured as the lowest possible realm.) If a person were to ascend to heaven, the Lord God would pull him down. They could hide on the highest mountain accessible to them, and God would find them. They could go to the bottom of the sea, and God would send a serpent to bite them. They could even go as captives to their enemies, and God would direct a sword to them.

All of this said something simple: “There will be absolutely, positively no escape from My just anger. Were it possible to do anything imaginable, it would not work. When you make God justly angry, you will face His anger. If I say you will be destroyed, you will be destroyed—there is no escaping and no place to hide. When I say it will happen, it will happen.”

“Do you understand who I am? Do you understand the power I have? I can make the earth melt and give people reason to mourn. I am the mysterious one Who is beyond explanation. There is nowhere that I am not. I do things you cannot explain. I am the Lord!”

God has great power to do us good, and does us good. That is His preference! However, if we reject Him and refuse to learn His purposes or live by His values, we give Him no alternative. The power that He wished to use for our good is turned to be used for our destruction. See Jeremiah 18:5-10.

### **For Thought and Discussion:**

1. Even when the worst of circumstances come, we figure what?
2. How can escape occur?
3. Total destruction rarely means what?
4. There are always what?
5. In most people’s thinking, who will be the exception?
6. As Amos neared the close of his written prophecy, he declared the unthinkable. What was the unthinkable?
7. In Amos’ vision, discuss the fact that the Lord God was by the altar.
8. The Lord God would strike the top of the columns with such force that what happened?
9. What happened to those who could not reach their strongest buildings?

10. Discuss the hopelessness of escaping.

11. State the simple thing Amos said.

12. Discuss God's use of His great power.

## Lesson Thirteen

### Hope Even in Despair

*Text: Amos 9:7-15*

Humans are very creative when a situation must be confronted by an explanation of “why this could not happen to us.” Recently, I listened to a discussion based on this premise: “Things happen not because of what you can do but because of who you know.” Thus, something bad cannot happen to “us” because of who “we” are, and “we” know the “right” people.

As an example, consider the confidence of many Christian individuals and congregations who would declare today, “Nothing bad could happen to us American Christians or our American congregations because of who we are. What would God do without us? Who would do ...?” When people feel indispensable to their perception of God’s purposes, they enter grave peril. God’s resources are never confined to the actions of a single person or a single group.

While time is a huge factor to humans, time is not a factor to God. Remember Numbers 14: 11, 12? In spite of all God invested in getting Abraham’s descendants through Isaac out of Egypt, in spite of what God did in rescuing these people at the Red Sea, and in spite of all God did for these people for almost a year in the wilderness, God was more than willing to begin again with one man of faith. To God it was a viable option to begin to construct a nation with Moses.

God’s options are never limited to the “group at hand.” God is never forced to do “the best He can with what He has.” God could fulfill His promise to Abraham and accomplish His intent *by rejecting these Israelite mourners He first brought to Canaan!* Time is of human concern, not of divine concern! God’s options never struggle with the limitations humans confront in the limitations of being physical beings.

Consider Amos’ last recorded words to the Kingdom of Israel as Amos closed his prophetic message.

First, “My work and purposes involve much more than just you. Because the Kingdom of Israel disappears forever from maps does not mean My intent disappears. Simply because you are gone does not mean that My work (God’s work) is out of options. That truth should be self-evident to you as you look at the nations around you. My purpose is accomplished in spite of the acts of nations. I am always at work. Of all nations, you should understand that.”

Second, “Of all people, you should know that I, God, will not tolerate prolonged, unrepentant evil. I know how wicked you have been. I know how long you have been wicked. I know both your rebellion and your refusal to repent that characterize you as a people. You are a sinful kingdom. You have been an unrepentant, sinful kingdom for generations. As God, I declare to you that you will no longer exist as a kingdom.”

“What I am about to do to you could be compared to a sifting process I will not lose one kernel of grain, but every sinful person will be killed in the violence I am sending. The time of accountability has come for you! I have had enough of your wickedness!”

Third, “I know some will say, ‘This cannot happen! God cannot do this to us! He has forgotten who we are! All we have to do is remind Him of who we are!’”

“I am not dependent on you! Despite what you think of yourselves, there is more to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac than the Kingdom of Israel. I will take the tattered, seemingly worn out tabernacle based on King David, resurrect it from its ruins, and function through the remnant of those who still belong to Me (those who are not involved in the rebellion and evil. Remember, not all in the Kingdom of Israel were involved in the idolatrous rebellion against God. See 1 Kings 18:3, 4 and 19:18.).

“When I, God, finish restoring what I intend, incredible success will occur. There will be successful days! I, God, promise it! However, you people will not see those days. You people will hardly be a memory when My success comes.”

(My understanding of God’s intent is this. God’s promise to achieve His intent was announced to Abraham in Genesis 12:3b when God promised a universal blessing to all nations through Abraham’s descendants. [See passages like Acts 3:19-26 and Galatians 3:8, 16.] Jesus was often referred to as “the son of David.” [See passages such as Matthew 1:1, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30, 21:9, Mark 10:47, 12:35-37, Luke 18:38, etc.] The intent of God will be accomplished in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and the return of all things to God [see 1 Corinthians 15:20-28].)

The choice confronting all in every age: will we with understanding cooperate with God in achieving His intent, will we rebel against God’s intent, or will we see ourselves as God’s intent to the exclusion of all others (thereby granting us the “right” to live as we please)? We can rebel against God’s intent, or we can help God achieve His intent. The Kingdom of Israel made the wrong choice.

### **For Thought and Discussion**

1. Humans are very creative when? Give a scriptural example.
2. God’s resources are never confined to what?
3. What is a huge factor to humans but no factor to God?
4. God’s options are never limited to what?
5. In Amos’ last recorded words to the Kingdom of Israel
  - a. What is his first emphasis?

b. What is his second emphasis? What comparison did Amos make?

c. What is his third emphasis?

6. Amos told the Kingdom of Israel that God was not what?

7. When God finished restoring what He intended, what would be the result?

8. Discuss God's intent.

9. What are the choices confronting people in every age?