

DG Guide: Amos 1 & 2

Opening Prayer

Starter Question

Think of the last time you felt that little spark of satisfaction when someone "got what was coming to them." Don gave the traffic version: the driver who cuts everyone off three cars back, and then their lane banks up and you sail past, and something in you goes "yes." That sense that justice quietly landed without you lifting a finger. When did you last feel that, and how good did it feel?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Amos was a shepherd, not a professional prophet, sent from the south to the comfortable north.** Amos is described as a literal sheep breeder from Tekoa, just south of Jerusalem, "not really a prophet" by birth or training. God sent this outsider up to Israel, the northern kingdom, around 750 years before Jesus, in a time of great peace, prosperity, and comfort. Things felt like they were going great. The question Israel may have been asking: why would you even need a prophet if everything's going so well?
2. **Australia in 2026 is the comfortable north all over again.** On a global and historical scale we're one of the most comfortable, peaceful, prosperous nations that has ever existed, the kind of comfort that's almost unrivalled anywhere in history. And his point was a warning: when times are peaceful, "we are so quick to forget God and his ways."
3. **Amos sets a trap, and we love walking into it.** On Sunday, we walked through the oracles against the nations like a tour of the map: Damascus to the north-east, Gaza and Philistia to the south-west, Tyre on the coast, then Edom, Ammon, Moab pressing in. Every stop is an old enemy, every crime a real atrocity, and Don imagined the crowd cheering each one: "yeah, get them, get them," "smite the ites." We do the same thing. We love to see other people's sin judged, especially people we don't like.
4. **The longest indictment is reserved for the people cheering loudest.** The circle tightens. Judah gets named, then the hammer falls on Israel itself (2:6). Where every other nation got a verse or two, Israel gets almost a dozen verses. The very people in the room, the ones cheering hardest, turn out to be the main target.
5. **Israel's sins look mundane next to war crimes, and that's the point.** The nations were guilty of obvious horrors. Israel's sins were the sins of a comfortable, religious, prosperous society: selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, trampling the poor, sexual sin, and "baptising" their sin into their religion. They lay down at the altar on a poor man's confiscated coat and drank wine in God's house bought with money squeezed from the vulnerable. Like in James, their lives and their worship were lying about who God is.
6. **Privilege brings responsibility, and Israel had every privilege.** Read the grace-list (2:9-12): God brought them out of Egypt, led them forty years in the wilderness, gave them the land, raised up

prophets and Nazirites, then watched them silence the prophets and force the Nazirites to break their vow. As Don put it: "saved from slavery, now enslaving; saved from poverty, now squeezing the poor." The verdict was simple: "you should have known better." Amos 3:2 says it outright, "I have known only you... therefore I will punish you," and Jesus echoes it in Luke 12:48, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required."

7. **This is not works-righteousness.** Israel was already chosen, already loved. God disciplined them precisely because they were his. We don't work our way up into God's favour or balance karmic scales. Our lives should look different "not to earn God's favour, but because we have it." Our privilege now is the same kind: the gospel, his presence, the Holy Spirit in us, the completed Scriptures, and the family of God bearing one another's burdens.
8. **Paul runs the exact same trap in Romans 1-3.** Paul sets up the same play: oracles against the culture in Romans 1, then "every one of you who judges is without excuse" in Romans 2:1, then "There is no one righteous, not even one" in Romans 3:10. The whole case is built "so that every mouth may be shut" (Romans 3:19). By the end nobody's left cheering, because all have fallen short.
9. **Our internet tribalism is the high horse in modern costume.** We plonk ourselves somewhere on a spectrum and shout "you idiot" across to the other side, then start punching closer and closer to home, carving smaller and smaller niches "until we are the only holy ones left, just me and everyone who thinks exactly like me." The moral high horse, Don said, just exposes our own hypocrisy. It makes it higher for when the judgment falls.

Scripture Reading

Read together: Amos 1:1-2 and Amos 2:6-16. (If you have time, read all of Amos 1-2 to feel the full sweep of the trap.)

Discussion Questions

The Trap We Walk Into

1. We love justice "generally when it's happening to somebody else." Where do you catch yourself enjoying other people's comeuppance: the news, the comment section, a conversation about someone who "had it coming"? What does that appetite reveal about us?
2. Amos toured the map of Israel's enemies (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab) and the crowd cheered every verdict. Read Amos 1:3-2:3. Why do you think it's so easy to see and name the sins of "those people" out there, and so hard to see our own?
3. Read Amos 2:6. The hammer finally falls on Israel, and they get the longest indictment of all. On Sunday, Don said "the crowd that came to cheer really was the crowd that didn't realise they were in the seat of judgment the whole time." Have you ever been mid-judgment of someone and suddenly realised you do the same thing? What was that like?

Privilege, Not Protection

4. Read Amos 2:6-8. Israel's sins look ordinary next to war crimes: exploiting the poor, sexual sin, and worshipping on top of their injustice. The religious cover is a masterstroke, sinning in a way that looks

righteous. Where do we dress up our own sin so it looks acceptable, even spiritual?

5. Read the grace-list in Amos 2:9-12. God lists everything He'd done for Israel right before the verdict. Don summed it up: "saved from slavery, now enslaving; saved from poverty, now squeezing the poor." Why does grace already received make sin worse rather than excusing it?
6. Read Amos 3:2 ("I have known only you... therefore I will punish you") and Luke 12:48 ("From everyone who has been given much, much will be required"). Being chosen isn't a hall pass; it raises the stakes. How does this land for a church that's heard a lot of grace? Where might we have quietly treated grace as a reason to take sin less seriously?
7. This is not works-righteousness: God disciplines Israel "not to earn God's favour, but because we have it." Why is it so important to keep those two truths together, that we're fully saved by grace and that we still can't presume on grace? What goes wrong if we drop either one?

The Same Trap in Romans

8. Read Romans 2:1 and Romans 3:10, 19, 23. Paul runs Amos' argument again: catalogue the obvious sinners, turn on the judge, then close every mouth. Why does Paul work so hard to leave "nobody left cheering"? What does a shut mouth make possible that an open, self-defending one cannot?
9. Don described modern tribalism: we pick a side, shout "you idiot" across the divide, then punch closer and closer to home until "we are the only holy ones left, just me and everyone who thinks exactly like me." Where do you see this in yourself, online or in person? How does Romans 3:23 ("all have sinned") collapse that whole game?

Off the Horse, Eyes on Jesus

10. Four responses from the sermon... The first is to get off our high horse and "actually look at what the horse is." Be specific: where do you tend to feel morally superior? Is it the older religious horse ("I'm not like that obvious sinner") or the modern one ("I'm not like that judgmental, uncaring person")?
11. The third response is to refuse comfort in other people's sin and stop the comparison game ("at least I'm not like the Edomites"). Don said the only question Amos leaves us with isn't "how do I compare to them" but "what has God given me, and what have I done with it." How would your week change if you genuinely stopped measuring yourself against people worse than you?
12. Read Hebrews 12:1-2. Don's fourth response was to fix our eyes on Jesus as our only comparison, which "flattens us level with everyone and lifts us by his righteousness alone." How does Jesus being our only measure both humble us and free us at the same time?
13. Don tied this straight back to James: "be doers of the word, not hearers only" (James 1:22), and "now that you've heard, you're responsible for what you've heard." After this study, what's one thing you've genuinely heard that you have not yet done?

Personal Reflection

- What is my high horse, specifically? Whose sin do I quietly use to feel safe and superior?
- What has God actually given me (the gospel, his Spirit, his word, this church family), and what have I done with it? Am I treating grace as a gift to live up to, or a discount on responsibility?
- Where am I still comparing myself to people who are worse, instead of fixing my eyes on Jesus? What's one concrete thing I'll do this week that I've heard but never obeyed?

Group Commitments

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to as a group:

1. This week, catch yourself in the moment of moral satisfaction (the news story, the comment thread, the conversation about someone who "had it coming") and name your high horse out loud or in writing. Come back and share what you noticed.
2. Read Amos 1-2 alongside Romans 1-3 before you next meet. Mark where each one turns the spotlight from "them" to "you," and notice how the verdict on everyone opens the door to grace.
3. Audit what you've been given. Each person make an honest list of their gospel privileges (a Bible you can read, years of teaching, this family, grace preached again and again), then bring Amos's question: "what have I done with all of this?"
4. Replace one comparison with one confession. The next time you think "at least I'm not like them," stop and turn it into "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Tell the group how it went.
5. Take the James thread one step further. Pick one thing you have genuinely heard and not yet done, do it this week, and report back to a partner in the group who'll ask you about it.

Closing Exercise

Go around the group and have each person finish this sentence out loud, kept short and honest: "The high horse I tend to ride is ___, **and the thing God has given me that I want to take more seriously is ___.**" Don't fix or comment on each other, just listen. Then read together as a group: "There is no one righteous, not even one... so that every mouth may be shut" (Romans 3:10, 19). Let the silence sit for a moment, then close by praying the prayer Jesus said sent a man home justified: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Worship: praise God that he is the God of every nation, sovereign over Damascus and Babylon and Adelaide, not a local tribal deity who minds his own backyard.
- Confession: name where we've ridden the high horse, taken comfort in other people's sin, and presumed on grace as though it were a licence.
- Thanksgiving: thank Jesus that he closed our mouths so the gospel could open them, that his righteousness is our only claim, and that he took the justice we deserved on himself.
- Commitment: ask the Spirit to make us doers of the word, people who steward our privilege rather than presume on it, and who care about the poor and about justice because he does.
- Mission: pray for courage to step into the next weeks of Amos with open hearts, even when it gets heavier, and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

For Next Week

- Follow through on whatever your group committed to. If you named a high horse, keep watching for it. If you paired up on the James thread, check in midweek.
- Memory verse, Amos 3:2: "I have known only you out of all the clans of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Hold it next to Luke 12:48, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.")
- Prepare for next week. Amos 3-5 is coming and it gets heavier: God's heart for the poor and for justice, and his rejection of worship that masks injustice. God looks at the gift Israel has wrapped up with a bow for Him and says, "I don't like that at all."

Leader Notes

- This passage can curdle two ways. It can flatten people into a guilt-trip, or it can hand the self-righteous a fresh reason to feel righteous about feeling guilty. The aim is to dismantle the high horse so people can stand where they actually stand: on grace, with nothing to presume on and nothing to prove. Keep steering back to the gospel, not the to-do list.
- Watch for the works-righteousness misread, because it's the easiest wrong turn here. Some will hear "privilege means responsibility" as "I'd better earn it." Israel was already chosen, already loved, and disciplined precisely because they were his. Keep saying it with the group: we live differently because we already have God's favour, never to earn it.
- The high horse hides in modern costume too. In a tolerant, Australian room, people quick to say "who am I to judge" have often just relocated the high horse to feeling superior for being open-minded and on the right side of history. If the group only spots the old religious horse, gently surface the modern one too.
- Don't let the comparison game sneak back in as the group discusses it. People can subtly compete over who has the worst high horse, or feel relieved that "at least I'm not as judgmental as that person." Keep returning everyone to the one comparison that matters: Jesus.
- This is week one of a heavier series. Set expectations warmly. Amos gets harder before it gets to hope, and the series runs all the way to Zechariah's promise of a coming King. Encourage your group that the prophet holds up a mirror because God refuses to give up on his people, and every chapter is pointing at Jesus.

Or, if you just want a bunch of discussion prompts:

1. Why do we love justice so much when it lands on someone else, and flinch from it when it might land on us?
2. Amos let the crowd cheer the judgment of their enemies before turning it on them. Why is that a more effective way to expose self-righteousness than just telling people they're sinners?
3. Israel's sins looked ordinary next to war crimes. Why is comfortable, religious, respectable sin often harder to see than the obvious kind?
4. What does it mean to "baptise" your sin into your religion so it looks righteous? Where might we do a version of that?
5. Why does grace already received make sin worse rather than excusing it? Does that sit comfortably or uncomfortably with you?
6. "To whom much is given, much is required." How does that change the way you think about being a long-time Christian with a Bible, a church, and years of teaching?
7. How do you hold together "saved entirely by grace" and "we still can't presume on grace" without tipping into either licence or legalism?
8. Paul built his whole case "so that every mouth may be shut." Why can't you receive grace with your mouth still open, still defending yourself?
9. Where do you see the cancel-culture instinct, carving smaller and smaller circles "until we are the only holy ones left," in the wider culture and in your own heart?
10. If Jesus is your only comparison, how does that both flatten you level with everyone else and lift you up? Which half do you need to hear more today?