

Lesson 96

God Warns Israel

God called Amos to warn Israel of the coming judgment.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Amos was a shepherd from Judah whom God called to preach to the people of Israel. Amos delivered God's message of coming judgment for the people's sin. God waited patiently for the people to repent, but the time for judgment had come. He promised to send an enemy against them, which came to pass when the Assyrians defeated Israel and took the people into captivity.

Key Passages

Amos 7:14–15, 3:1–2, 3:10–11, 4:6–10, 4:12; Psalm 7:11

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe God's message to Israel through Amos.
- Identify the attribute of God that demands judgment.

Memory Verse

Proverbs 3:11–12 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

In the opening verse of the book that bears his name, Amos is identified as a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town about nine miles south of Jerusalem. Amos was a simple man, caring for sheep and growing sycamore figs (7:14), and God used this humble man to communicate a message of pending judgment to the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos was one of many prophets sent by God who were rejected by the people of Israel.

Amos was faithful to deliver the message from God, which not only warned of coming judgment because of Israel's sin and disobedience (Amos 2:13–16), but also offered forgiveness and grace to the people if they would repent (Amos 5:4, 5:6, 5:14–15). God would finally punish their sinfulness, but he gave Israel decades to repent—revealing his patience.

Ultimately, Amos' message was rejected—even by Amaziah, the priest who accused Amos of conspiring against the king. The priest reported Amos to the

king and told the prophet to flee to the land of Judah and never again prophesy in Israel (Amos 7:10–13). God warned that an army would come against Israel. An adversary would be all around the land, sap their strength, and plunder the palaces (Amos 3:11). Israel did not listen, and this judgment came upon them when the Assyrians captured and deported the people of Israel in 721 BC (2 Kings 17:5–6).

The Old Testament prophets are divided into two groups—major prophets and minor prophets. Amos is considered one of the minor prophets, but that certainly doesn't mean that he was less important or that his message was less significant than any of the other prophets. The classification of "minor" primarily refers to the length of the book in our Bibles.

The books of the minor prophets do NOT appear in chronological order in the Bible. For example, Amos was prophesying long before Ezra and Nehemiah, whose lives are recorded in the Bible before the book of Amos. Likewise, Isaiah prophesied after Amos, yet his writings appear in the canon before the book of Amos. This is something to be aware of as you pursue Bible study. The books of the Bible are not arranged chronologically but are arranged by sections. Knowing this will help you to discern, through careful observation of all of Scripture, what the historical context is—not only of the major and minor prophets but of all biblical history as well.

The prophets of the Old Testament had many roles. Amos fulfilled two of those roles by delivering messages of judgment to God's people and to foreign nations—both Israel and the Gentiles. Chapter 1 confirms this when we read that Amos delivered the message of God's wrath against the Gentile nations of Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Then, using the same language, he focused on Judah and then at length on Israel. God spoke with the same certainty against the Gentile nations as he did against his own chosen people. The Bible tells us that God's justice causes him to feel indignation over sin (Psalm 7:11). But though God's justice knows no partiality, he had mercy on those who turned to him in repentance and faith. And he is still willing to freely pardon all those who repent and place their trust in the Messiah—Jesus Christ (Acts 10:34–38).

Historical/Apologetics Background

The introduction of the book sets Amos during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II in Israel. Interestingly, Amos mentioned that his message was delivered two years before the earthquake. Throughout Scripture, we find that earthquakes often accompanied God's judgment. So what earthquake was Amos referring to? Apparently, he assumed the readers would know which earthquake he was talking about. As we compare scripture with scripture, rightly dividing the Word of truth, we find a similar reference in Zechariah 14:5. And though not specifically recorded in the Bible, the Jewish historian Josephus reported an earthquake accompanying God's judgment on Uzziah when he offered incense to God in the temple. We read in 2 Chronicles 26:16–22 how Uzziah had sinned against God by entering the temple to perform a duty assigned to the priests.

As we read and study the Bible, we need to keep in mind that, although historical information is great confirmation of what the Scriptures tell us, the records of men like Josephus are not inspired by God. Josephus was a reputable historian, and it is a reasonable possibility that the earthquake occurred when God struck Uzziah with leprosy and was the same earthquake mentioned by Amos.

As a prophet, Amos delivered his message as straight from God. Throughout the book, Amos recorded exactly as God directed. The phrase “says/declares the Lord” appears in this small book over 40 times! There is no doubt here that God was the source of the message—as he was the source, through the Holy Spirit, of the writing of all Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16 states that all Scripture is God-breathed (theopnuestos). Amos was speaking to the Israelites, who were in a state of rebellion and idolatry, so it stands to reason that he would be careful to emphasize that this message was from God himself.

As God surely promised in Amos 3:11, Israel did eventually fall to an adversary. That adversary was the nation of Assyria, who under the leadership of Shalmaneser V besieged Israel’s capital city of Samaria (2 Kings 17:1–8). God’s patience with the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom had ended, and his justice was enacted through the destruction of their capital and the deportation of the people. Ten tribes of the 12 were now scattered among the nations. Now only two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained to the south in the nation of Judah. But it would not be long until Jerusalem and Judah would suffer the same fate as the northern nation.

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