

**OneBook.**

DAILY - WEEKLY

# The Book of Amos

Jason R. Jackson



AN EIGHT-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

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# WELCOME TO ONEBOOK DAILY-WEEKLY

John Wesley, in a letter to one of his leaders, penned the following:

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not: what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether.

Rarely are our lives most shaped by our biggest ambitions and highest aspirations. Rather, our lives are most shaped, for better or for worse, by those small things we do every single day.

At Seedbed, our biggest ambition and highest aspiration is to resource the followers of Jesus to become lovers and doers of the Word of God every single day, to become people of One Book.

To that end, we have created the OneBook Daily-Weekly. First, it's important to understand what this is not: warm, fuzzy, sentimental devotions. If you engage the Daily-Weekly for any length of time, you will learn the Word of God. You will grow profoundly in your love for God, and you will become a passionate lover of people.

## **How Does the Daily-Weekly Work?**

*Daily.* As the name implies, every day invites a short but substantive engagement with the Bible. Five days a week you will read a passage of Scripture followed by a short segment of teaching and closing with a question for reflection and self-examination. On the sixth day, you will review and reflect on the previous five days.

*Weekly.* Each week, on the seventh day, find a way to gather with at least one other person doing the study. Pursue the weekly guidance for gathering. Share learning, insight, encouragement, and most importantly, how the Holy Spirit is working in your lives.

## Welcome to OneBook Daily-Weekly

That's it. Depending on the length of the study, when the eight or twelve weeks are done, we will be ready with the next study. On an ongoing basis we will release new editions of the Daily-Weekly. Over time, those who pursue this course of learning will develop a rich library of Bible learning resources for the long haul.

OneBook Daily-Weekly will develop eight- and twelve-week studies that cover the entire Old and New Testaments. Seedbed will publish new studies regularly so that an ongoing supply of group lessons will be available. All titles will remain accessible, which means they can be used in any order that fits your needs or the needs of your group.

If you are looking for a substantive study to learn Scripture through a steadfast method, look no further.

# WEEK ONE

Amos 1–3 and 7

## The World of Amos

ONE

### Costly Prosperity

**Amos 1:1 NRSV** *The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*

**2 Kings 14:23–29 NRSV** *In the fifteenth year of King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel began to reign in Samaria; he reigned forty-one years. <sup>24</sup>He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. <sup>25</sup>He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. <sup>26</sup>For the LORD saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. <sup>27</sup>But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash.*

<sup>28</sup>Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? <sup>29</sup>Jeroboam slept with his ancestors, the kings of Israel; his son Zechariah succeeded him.

**Key Observation.** For God's people, prosperity cannot come at the expense of faithfulness to God or justice for others.

**Understanding the Word.** Welcome to Amos! I'm excited and honestly impressed you're studying an Old Testament prophet. These folks can be intimidating, a bit disturbing, and difficult to understand. For starters, it's hard to track the prophets and the kings that they name. The biblical writers certainly didn't make it easy for us. They wrote about Israel's kings in some books and the prophets' words to those kings in different books. For instance, 2 Kings summarizes the reign of the kings that Amos addresses. In this study, we'll read Amos in conversation with other biblical sources to get the whole picture.

To understand a prophet's words, we also have to understand his world. At the time of Amos, God's people were divided into two kingdoms. This split happened two generations after King David. His son Solomon amassed substantial wealth, obtained international fame, and built magnificent buildings, including a temple in Jerusalem. But his achievements came at a price. To solidify his alliances, he married foreign women, who led him to worship other gods. To build his structures, he oppressed those living in the north. His prosperity had spiritual and social ramifications. Political and economic success often does.

After Solomon died, his son Rehoboam became king. The northern tribes begged him to lighten their load, but he refused. So, they split and made Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, their king. The Northern Kingdom kept the name Israel. The Southern Kingdom took the name of its biggest tribe—Judah.

Jeroboam immediately established a new capital in Shechem and alternative worship centers in Dan and Bethel. (Amos has a lot to say about Bethel.) He crafted a golden calf for each sanctuary and directed Israel to offer sacrifices to them. This violated the second commandment not to make idols (Exodus 20:4–6). Jeroboam led Israel to do this for twenty-two years, and the rest of Israel's kings did the same.

About 125 years later, another Jeroboam became Israel's king. Jeroboam, the son of Joash, ruled for forty-one years while Amaziah and Uzziah reigned in Judah. During their tenures, both kingdoms enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. They got along with each other, and neither worried about the region's traditional superpowers. Babylon and Egypt's power had declined. Assyria had started to rebound, but this temporarily benefited Israel.

At the end of the previous century, the Assyrians conquered Damascus, the capital of the Arameans in Syria. This weakened Israel's northern foe and allowed them to regain territory along important trade routes. An economic boom followed. Trade soared. Cities flourished. Everything looked glorious, but Israel's growth benefited some and cost others.

A sizable gap emerged between the rich and the poor as the upper class used their power and resources for personal gain. They oppressed the poor. They perverted justice. They violated God's law and filled their lives with leisure. They prospered, but others paid.

Therefore, God raised up a generation of prophets to address the problem. Amos was the first. He spoke within a particular situation, but his words go beyond his time. God's people have preserved and passed them on for thousands of years. Our task is to understand his words in their historical context and then apply them to ours. As we go along, we'll find Amos's world is not that different from ours.

1. What would make you feel prosperous or successful?
2. Do you feel comfortable asking God for things that would make you prosperous or successful? Why or why not?

## TWO

### An Uninvited Voice

**Amos 1:1 NRSV** *The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*

**Amos 7:12–15 NRSV** *And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; <sup>13</sup>but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."*

<sup>14</sup>*Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, <sup>15</sup>and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"*

**Key Observation.** God calls his people to speak against injustice even when it's not wanted or welcomed.

**Understanding the Word.** These verses contain everything we know about Amos himself. It's not much, but it helps us connect with the man behind the message. He ministered two years before an earthquake in mid-700s BC. Zechariah mentions the same earthquake (14:5), but we're not sure when it happened. Nevertheless, the reference does narrow Amos's unusually short career to a particular, albeit unknown, year during the reigns of Uzziah (783–742 BC) and Jeroboam II (786–746 BC).

Before God called him, Amos was a shepherd, a herdsman, and a tree farmer. In the original language (Hebrew), the word translated “shepherd” is used only one other time, where it describes King Mesha of Moab—a nation east of Judah (2 Kings 3:4). Mesha routinely gave Israel's king a massive number of lambs and a mammoth amount of wool as political tribute. This suggests that Amos oversaw a large-scale herding and breeding operation. Combined with his sycamore business, Amos was probably well off. But unlike Israel's financial elite, Amos earned his wealth ethically.

Amos prophesied in Israel, but he wasn't an Israelite. He was from Judah. Tekoa was a small town a few miles south of Jerusalem. God sent him across the border to Bethel, which housed one of Jeroboam I's golden calves. There Amos butted heads with a priest named Amaziah. Amos challenged Amaziah's worldview, jeopardized his livelihood, and threatened his king. Consequently, Amaziah told Amos to skedaddle. Amos wasn't wanted or welcomed in Israel. Prophets never were.

During this conversation, Amos apparently denied being a prophet. But being the son of a prophet didn't mean you came from a long line of prophets. Instead, it meant that you had completed a prophetic training program and now earned a living speaking for God. (Imagine that for a moment.)

Ancient kings kept professional prophets on their payrolls. To keep their jobs, paid prophets typically said what their kings wanted to hear rather than what the Lord wanted to say. In this light, Amos's statement was more like a declaration of his independence than a denial of his calling. He essentially told Amaziah, “I'm not your run-of-the-mill royal prophet. I've been called by God, not hired by a king.”

This is a huge distinction! True prophets don't tickle the ears of those who pay their bills. They speak God's words regardless of the danger or the cost. True prophets don't cave to power; they oppose it with the power of God. They give voice to the voiceless and call oppressors to repent. Unfortunately, people in power usually resist change, especially when it threatens their way of life. Instead, they squelch the messenger. This is why true prophets are rarely invited, often persecuted, and sometimes killed in action. Persecution isn't the goal, but it is a vocational hazard.

If this has ever happened to you, you're in good company. Jesus experienced this kind of treatment and told us to expect the same. He said, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12 NRSV).

1. What did you previously think a prophet was or a prophet did?
2. Who is someone that you would consider to be a modern-day prophet? How have they challenged you or others?

## THREE

### The Lord's Roar

**Amos 1:2–3a NRSV** *And he said: The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up. <sup>3</sup>Thus says the LORD: . . .*

**Amos 3:3–8 NRSV** *Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment? <sup>4</sup>Does a lion roar in the forest, when it has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from its den, if it has caught nothing? <sup>5</sup>Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? <sup>6</sup>Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster befall a city, unless the LORD has done it? <sup>7</sup>Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. <sup>8</sup>The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?*

**Key Observation.** God's wrath is utterly good; it confronts evil and overturns injustice.

**Understanding the Word.** Verse 2 is Amos's theme verse. It grabs our attention and sets the stage for everything that follows. Here Amos graphically depicts the Lord as a roaring lion. As a lion's roar evokes despair in its prey (Amos 3:4–8), we can anticipate that God's words will do the same in Israel. Throughout Amos, God will confront rather than comfort his people. In the same way, as we read this book together, God will challenge us more often than he'll console us. (Aren't you glad you chose this study?)

Amos 1:2–3 introduces us to two important features of Israelite prophecy. The first is a structure commonly used in biblical Hebrew poetry called *parallelism*. Most of Israel's prophetic literature is poetic in nature, so we'll see this a lot in Amos. English poetry is generally characterized by rhyming. We repeat sounds, as in "Jack and Jill went up the hill." Hebrew poetry rarely rhymes. Instead, it restates, contrasts, or expands ideas or images from one line to the next. For example, in verse 2, "roar" is paralleled by "utters his voice" and "from Zion" by "from Jerusalem." The second line restates the first.

The second feature—"Thus says the LORD"—is known as the *messenger formula*. These words signal that Amos is God's messenger. The words he speaks are not his own; they're the Lord's. Though this book bears the name of Amos, it contains the word of God. These are God's words to God's people—to Israel, to you, and to me.

In Amos, the Lord's voice rises from Jerusalem (a.k.a. Zion). He doesn't speak to the Northern Kingdom from their sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel. Instead, he speaks to them from the capital city of the Southern Kingdom, where Solomon built his temple. Like Amos himself, God's words come to Israel from Judah. All of this suggests that God's indictments against Israel will focus on her worship centers.

When the Lord roars, fire follows. The grass withers, and the mountains dry up. The Bible often represents God's wrath with fire. Amos will liken them often. In tomorrow's reading, he'll portray God's anger burning against several foreign nations (1:3–2:3). Then on Day Five, Amos will envision God setting parts of Judah ablaze. But in Amos 1:2, as well as 5:6 and 7:4, his wrath consumes the entire Northern Kingdom. As we read, we'll encounter God's absolute and final judgment of Israel.

If we're being honest, the subject of God's wrath unsettles us. It seems incompatible with his love and mercy. We typically think that God is either one or the other. But Amos will remind us that God is both/and. He's good *and* great, gracious *and* holy, merciful *and* just. These traits are not mutually exclusive with God, even though they often are with us.

When we judge, our judgments can be biased, self-serving, and vindictive. They can make things worse, rather than set things right. But when God judges, he's fair, just, and good. His judgments are consistent with his character and unbiased. He condemns evil and enacts justice. He does what we cannot. Even though his wrath disturbs us, it is ultimately good for us.

1. What typically comes to mind when you think about God's wrath or judgment? Who does God judge? Why?
2. How does this passage and reflection influence your beliefs about God's judgment?

## FOUR

### All Nations under God

**Amos 1:3–8 NRSV** *Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. <sup>4</sup>So I will send a fire on the house of Hazeal, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. <sup>5</sup>I will break the gate bars of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Aram shall go into exile to Kir, says the LORD.*

*<sup>6</sup>Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom. <sup>7</sup>So I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, fire that shall devour its strongholds. <sup>8</sup>I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, says the Lord God.*

**Key Observation.** The Lord's power and protection encompass *all* nations.

**Understanding the Word.** After Amos's opening image, the Lord pronounces judgment on seven of Israel's neighbors. He begins with the Arameans (Damascus) in the northeast (1:3–5). Then he jumps down to the Philistines (Gaza) in the southwest (1:6–8). Next, he moves up the Mediterranean coast to the Phoenicians (Tyre) in the northwest (1:9–10). His focus then shifts across to Edom (1:11–12), Ammon (1:13–15), and Moab (2:1–3) in the south and east. Eventually, he narrows his gaze on Judah (2:4–5). If you're an Israelite, you probably feel relieved after Amos's roaring lion bit. But the longer he talks, you realize the Lord's judgment is spiraling inward. At some point, you realize you're the bull's-eye.

The seven oracles against the nations all follow a similar pattern. They begin with the messenger formula—"Thus says the LORD"—followed by a number sentence—"for three transgressions of [nation or representative city] and for four, I will not revoke punishment." Amos then names one transgression and delivers the Lord's discipline. He'll burn down their strongholds and go from there. Most of the pronouncements conclude with a second "Thus says the LORD" for emphasis.

Amos denounces the nations for what they've done to other people. They probably committed these acts during war. Nevertheless, the Lord chastises them for what we would call "war crimes": mistreating the vulnerable (e.g., pregnant women) (1:13) and betraying their allies (1:9).

The Arameans and Ammonites brutalized the people of Gilead (1:3, 13). The Philistines and Phoenicians profited from selling captives to Edom (1:6, 9). The Edomites perpetually set themselves against their brother Judah (1:11; Genesis 36:1). The Moabites grossly mistreated the remains of Edom's king (Amos 2:1). Collectively, they used their military strength to commit human atrocities, and they broke their international commitments for national gain.

Therefore, the Lord will destroy their defenses and make them vulnerable to attack. He'll also send the Arameans back to Kir (1:5 and 9:7). He'll eliminate the Philistines (1:8). He'll drive out Amos's leaders (1:15) and destroy the Moab's officials (2:3). In light of each nation's named trespasses, the Lord's judgments are just. His punishments fit their crimes.

Originally, the most startling aspect of these speeches would have been their international dimension. In the ancient world, people believed in many gods. They associated these gods with specific natural forces or geographic

regions. The gods couldn't operate outside of their designated spheres. But according to Amos, Israel's God is sovereign over every nation. The Lord's power and care extend beyond Israel and Judah's borders. He can cause any nation's demise and use any country to do his bidding. Ultimately, he'll judge every state according to universal standards like keeping promises and protecting the weak.

Today, our world is fraught with international tension and conflict. Border disputes, civil wars, economic sanctions, religious extremism, global espionage, election tampering, missile tests, and forced migrations fill our news cycles. Confusion and fear seem to reign in our age. But Amos reminds us it is the Lord who rules over all. He invites us to trust that God can and will enact justice and establish peace on earth.

1. How is God's sovereignty over all nations good news to you today? How does it challenge you?
2. Are there particular nations who you wish were not included in God's care? Would you be willing to pray for them right now?

## FIVE

### The Good King

**Amos 2:4–5 NRSV** *Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. <sup>5</sup>So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.*

**2 Kings 15:1–7 NRSV** *In the twenty-seventh year of King Jeroboam of Israel King Azariah son of Amaziah of Judah began to reign. <sup>2</sup>He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. <sup>4</sup>Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. <sup>5</sup>The LORD struck the king, so that he was leprous to the day of his death, and lived in a*

*separate house. Jotham the king's son was in charge of the palace, governing the people of the land. <sup>6</sup>Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? <sup>7</sup>Azariah slept with his ancestors; they buried him with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jotham succeeded him.*

**Key Observation.** Good leaders do what is right *and* teach others to do the same.

**Understanding the Word.** We generally assume Israel's prophets predicted events in the far-off future. They actually did more forth-telling than fore-telling. The prophets revealed how God felt about the *present*. They called God's people to change and warned them what would happen if they refused. When they did predict the future, it was usually a near future.

Today's passage is the last in the series of oracles against other nations. Yesterday, we saw how with each speech God's judgment drew closer to Israel. But just before he settles in, the Lord somewhat surprisingly confronts Judah and foreshadows her fate.

We know from Day One of this week that all of the Northern Kingdom's kings followed Jeroboam I's example and led Israel to worship idols. The Southern Kingdom's kings were a bit of a mixed bag. Some "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Kings 15:3); others did not. Amos prophesied during the reign of King Uzziah (a.k.a. Azariah). Uzziah was a good king, but he notably failed to remove the "high places" (15:4).

High places were local worship centers where people regularly honored idols. The Lord hated them. He told his people to destroy them as soon as they entered the land he promised to their ancestor Abraham (Numbers 33:52). But they didn't (1 Kings 3:2–4). Solomon even constructed new ones to worship other gods (1 Kings 11:7).

After the kingdoms split, Solomon's son Rehoboam erected even more of them *in Judah* (1 Kings 14:23). This is exactly what Jeroboam I did *in Israel*. Bethel was a high place (1 Kings 12:32)! Only two of Judah's kings tore down the high places—Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:8). These kings did what was right *and* led others to do the same. They're the kind of kings God wants.

Though God sends Amos north to Israel, he's not letting Judah off the hook. Like Israel, the Lord chose Judah to represent him. Their election came with expectations. He judges them for failing to fulfill their obligations to him. They followed their forefathers' folly rather than God's laws. As a result, they'll share the other nations' fate. God's anger will ignite their entire land. His fury will scorch Jerusalem's walls.

Less than two hundred years later, what Amos prophesied came to pass. In 587 BC, the Babylonians conquered Judah's capital. They destroyed its walls and its temple. They deported its king and most of its citizens. Years later, Judah returned and rebuilt the temple, but things were never quite the same. Therefore, God's people began to hope that he would send them a new king to restore their fortunes.

Eventually, God did! His Son Jesus descended from King David (Matthew 1:1). He was the rightful heir to Judah's throne. He proclaimed the return of God's kingdom and called people to renew their allegiance to God (Matthew 4:17). He did what was right *and* taught others to do the same. He obeyed all the way to death on the cross. Therefore, God raised him from the dead, elevated him above all, and called the nations to worship him as the King over all kings (Philippians 2:6–11).

1. Who are the people in your life who did what was right and taught you to do the same?
2. Who are the people that you're leading? Can they say that you both lead by example and teach them to do the same?

## WEEK ONE

# GATHERING DISCUSSION OUTLINE

- A. Open session in prayer.
- B. View this week's video.
- C. What general impressions and thoughts do you have after watching the video and reading the daily writings on these Scriptures? What, specifically, did this week's passages teach you about faith, life, and prayer?
- D. Discuss selected questions from the daily readings. Always invite class members to share key insights or to raise questions that they found to be the most meaningful.
  - 1. **KEY OBSERVATION:** For God's people, prosperity cannot come at the expense of faithfulness to God or justice for others.  
**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Do you feel comfortable asking God for the things that would make you feel prosperous or successful? Why or why not?
  - 2. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God calls his people to speak against injustice even when it's not wanted or welcomed.  
**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Who is someone that you would consider to be a modern-day prophet? How have they challenged you or others?
  - 3. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God's wrath is utterly good; it confronts evil and overturns injustice.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How does this passage and reflection transform your beliefs about God's judgment?

4. **KEY OBSERVATION:** The Lord's power and protection encompass *all* nations.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How is God's sovereignty over all nations good news to you today? How does it challenge you?

5. **KEY OBSERVATION:** Good leaders do what is right *and* teach others to do the same.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Who are the people that you're leading? Can they say that you both lead by example and teach them to do the same?

- E. Close session with prayer.