

Community Groups |

Growing UP | Growing WITH | Growing OUT



"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

Why Community Groups?

Because God created us to live life in the context of relationships! This is an opportunity for you to connect with others as your experience real life-change in your Christian walk.

What is a Community Group?

A group of 6-10 people who "do life" together as they grow in their love for God, His word, and others. Community Groups encourage folks to take their "next step" in three areas: (1) **Spiritual Growth – UP** towards God, (2) **Relational Growth – WITH** Group members, and (3) **Missional Growth – OUT** to those in the church and world.

Thus, a Community Group is an environment where we are conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:29-30*). Our conviction is that "real life-change only happens in the context of biblical community."

Not to be left out is the fact that a Community Group is also a place for folks to have fun as they celebrate and share life together! Come join us!

Our journey begins with a nine-week study of the book of Amos. The following Study Guide is intended to immerse you into God's word while you grow closer to Him in the context of relationships.

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Study One | Amos 1:1-15

Background

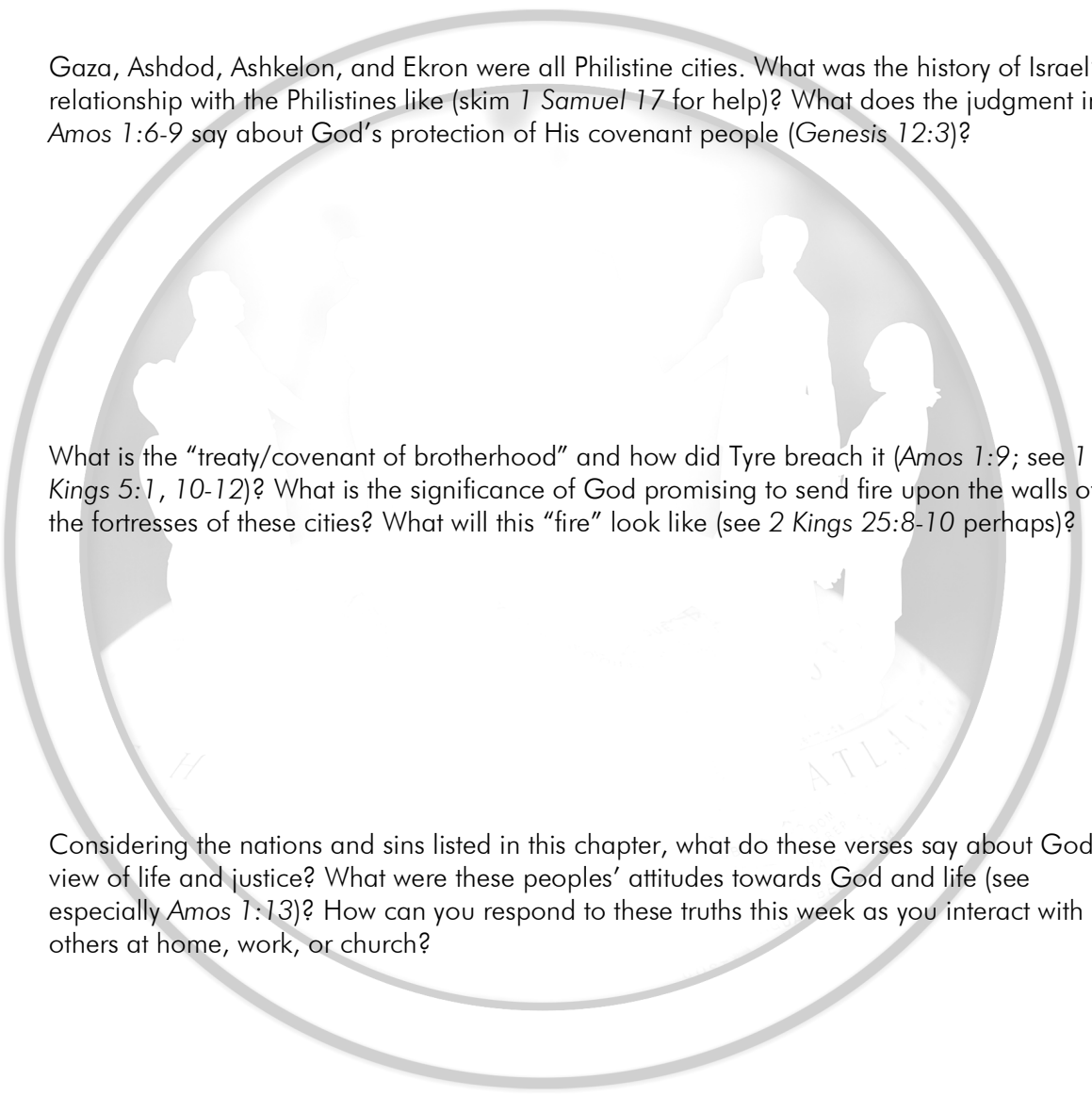
Author: Amos (“burden-bearer”), a farmer-shepherd from Tekoa in Judah.

Date written: Circa 760 B.C. Contemporaries were Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The earthquake in 1:1 (see also *Zechariah 14:5*) may have taken place on June 15, 763 B.C.

Written to: The Northern Kingdom of Israel in order to warn the leadership of God’s impending judgment as a result of their social injustice and religious hypocrisy.

The book of Amos begins with God’s pronouncement of judgment upon Israel’s neighbors for their injustice. Some of this judgment language is strong and not for the faint of heart!

1. Why would God choose a shepherd from Judah to serve as a prophet to Israel (notice the language of *Amos 1:2b*)? What might this say about God’s choice of people in carrying out His work (*1 Samuel 16:7*)? Would you be ready to serve God if He called you to a task?
2. If Israel was the primary recipient/focus of these prophecies, then why would God also pronounce judgment on the other nations listed from *Amos 1:3* through *2:16*? What does this say about how Israel’s sin compares to that of its pagan neighbors?
3. Notice the formula “For three sins/transgressions ... and/even for four ...” What does this mean? What does this say about God’s patience as well as His judgment (cf. *Genesis 15:16*)? How does this impact you as you think about God’s patience with your sinful choices?

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4. What was the specific sin of Damascus that merited God's judgment (*Amos 1:3-5*)? Does similar sinful activity take place today? Why does God not bring His obvious judgment on nations today (see *2 Peter 3:7-12* for a possible answer)?

 5. Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron were all Philistine cities. What was the history of Israel's relationship with the Philistines like (skim *1 Samuel 17* for help)? What does the judgment in *Amos 1:6-9* say about God's protection of His covenant people (*Genesis 12:3*)?

 6. What is the "treaty/covenant of brotherhood" and how did Tyre breach it (*Amos 1:9*; see *1 Kings 5:1, 10-12*)? What is the significance of God promising to send fire upon the walls of the fortresses of these cities? What will this "fire" look like (see *2 Kings 25:8-10* perhaps)?

 7. Considering the nations and sins listed in this chapter, what do these verses say about God's view of life and justice? What were these peoples' attitudes towards God and life (see especially *Amos 1:13*)? How can you respond to these truths this week as you interact with others at home, work, or church?

Memory verse:

Amos 1:2 – *He said: "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers."* (NIV)

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Study Two | Amos 2:1-16

Our study of Amos continues with a description of God's judgment. The attention, however, turns from other Gentile nations to God's people – the nation of Israel.

1. What did the people of Moab do to deserve God's judgment (Amos 2:1b)? What might you expect the attitude of the people of Moab to be (see *Isaiah 16:6*)? What's the big deal with burning bones to lime (*Isaiah 33:12*)? Does this make cremation wrong?
2. What irony do we see between the burning of the King of Edom's bones and God's judgment upon Moab in Amos 2:2? Read *Jeremiah 48:20-26* for another graphic picture of God's judgment upon Moab.
3. What was the sin for which Judah was guilty (Amos 2:4)? How did Judah's judgment compare to that of Moab's (Amos 2:5)? What does this tell us about God's expectations for His people who have been given His clearly revealed desires for their lives (2 Kings 22:13)?

4. What do you notice about the number of verses Amos uses to describe Israel's judgment? What does this say about God's concern about Israel's disobedience? Why would He be this concerned about their disobedience (see *Exodus 19:5-6* and *Psalms 98:2-3*)?
5. What were some of Israel's specific sins in *Amos 2:6-8* and *12*? What was God's desire for them regarding the poor (*Deuteronomy 15:11*)? How should we respond as the church today (*Galatians 2:10*; *James 1:27*)? What can your Community Group do to help the helpless?
6. Why did God remind the Israelites of His redemptive acts from history in *Amos 2:9-11* (see *Numbers 21:25* and *Exodus 14:30*)? How might His mentioning of this contribute to His declaration of judgment? How certain is God's judgment in *Amos 2:14-16*?
7. How might the prophets (*Deuteronomy 18:19*) and Nazirites (*Numbers 6:2-3*) have kept the Israelites on the path to obedience? Who does God use in your lives today to keep us on that path (*Proverbs 18:1*; *27:17*; *Hebrews 10:23-25*)? Are you willing to heed their advice?

Memory verse:

Amos 2:6 – “Thus says the LORD, “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals.” (NASB)

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Study Three | Amos 3:1-15

God's judgment upon the people of Israel continues here in Chapter 3. Notice the reasons for God's judgment: greed, materialism and the oppression of the poor.

1. Why did God choose the people of Israel to be His special possession (Amos 3:2; Deuteronomy 7:6; Nehemiah 9:8)? Why is God so quick to punish those whom He has chosen as His own (Hebrews 12:6-8, 11)?
2. What is the expected answer to the questions that Amos asks in 3:3-5? What is the expected answer to the questions that he asks in 3:6-7? Why does Amos ask these questions (Amos 3:7-8)? Do you notice any connection between Amos 1:2 and these questions?
3. Do you believe that God brings about calamity and disaster (Amos 3:6b; Isaiah 45:7)? Why would He do such a thing? Doesn't this go against God's nature as a good and loving God? Does this affect your view of God at all?
4. What does it mean to "hoard up violence/plunder and devastation/loot" (Amos 3:10)? How do we do the same in our own lives (Ezekiel 22:29; James 2:3, 9)? Why do we do this naturally and how can we respond differently?

5. What is the irony of Amos 3:11 (compare it to 3:10)? What is Amos referring to in verses 11 and 12 (2 Kings 16:9; 17:6-7)? What is the significance of these events happening at night? Why is the graphic shepherd imagery appropriate for this book (see also Exodus 22:13)?

6. What's with the altars at Bethel and why would God destroy them (Amos 3:14; see 1 Kings 12:27-29)? What was the significance of the "horns of the altar" (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28)? What does the destruction of the altar and its horns say about God's judgment?

7. What do the various types of houses in Amos 3:15 indicate ("winter," "summer," "ivory," "great/mansions")? What does this verse tell us about the fleeting significance of worldly wealth? How should we respond to this reality today (Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19)?

Memory verse:

Amos 3:2 – "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (NASB)

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Study Four | Amos 4:1-13

Notice how the severity of God's judgment language increases. God was (and still is) serious about the sin of His people. He longs to see His people "return" to Him in repentance.

1. Who are these "cows of Bashan" and why are they described in this way (Amos 4:1; Ezekiel 39:18)? What did these "cows" do and why was their behavior such a big deal to God (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)?
2. What is the basis for God's action on these "cows" (Amos 4:2; Psalm 89:35-36)? Why would this serve as the basis for His action? What does this imagery of "meat hooks" and "fish hooks" communicate (2 Kings 19:28; 2 Chronicles 33:9-11)?
3. What tone is Amos (speaking on behalf of God) taking in Amos 4:4-5? What is God most interested in, their sacrifices or something else (1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51:16-17)? How do you focus more on external "performance" rather than a "contrite (or crushed) heart?"
4. What was God's purpose in His actions from Amos 4:6-11 (see also Deuteronomy 11:16-17; 28:22; Haggai 1:6)? What phrase is repeated throughout Amos 4:6-11 and what does this say about God's people (Isaiah 9:13)?

5. How are we like the people of Israel, not “returning” to the Lord? What does this “returning” look like for us as members of the body of Christ (*Acts 17:30; Titus 2:11-13; 1 John 1:9*)? Where do you need to “return” to God in your life?

6. Read *Amos 4:12*. What is this verse saying? Imagine you were an Israelite hearing the words of *Amos 4:12*, what would you think? What does this verse say about God’s justice and His view towards sin? How does His holiness (*Amos 4:2*) relate to His justice?

7. God promises that He will judge His people for their sinful actions and attitudes. He also promises that He will be gracious. How are we to reconcile these two ideas (*Psalms 86:15; Romans 5:8*)? How does He want you to respond to this truth this week (*2 Corinthians 7:1*)?

Memory verse:

Amos 4:12 – *“Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.”* (NIV)

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Study Five | **Amos 5:1-27**

God condemns both the actions (social injustice and oppression of the poor) and attitudes (empty religious practices) of His people. His desire from them is justice and righteousness.

1. What might the significance be of referring to Israel as a “virgin” (*Amos 5:2; Jeremiah 14:17*)? Will Israel never rise again? What about God’s faithful promise to preserve and protect His people (*Genesis 17:7-9*)? Did God forget His promise?
2. What is the solution for Israel’s predicted fate (*Amos 5:4b and 6a*)? What did this solution look like for the nation of Israel (*Ezekiel 18:9*) and what might it look like for us as the body of Christ (*Philippians 4:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*)?
3. How do you view God when you read *Amos 5:8* (see also *Job 9:8-10*)? Why does He remind His people of His name in this verse? What have God’s people done and what will He do in response (*Amos 5:11-12*)?
4. Are the commands in *Amos 5:14-15* the same or different than those in *Amos 5:4a and 6b*? Why is God so concerned about justice (*Leviticus 19:15*)? As Christians how can we respond to God’s command to “seek good” (*Romans 12:9-10; James 1:27*)?

5. What is the “day of the Lord” (*Amos 5:18; Isaiah 2:12; Joel 1:15*)? Is this a future day or has it already happened? Why is this day one of darkness and not light (*Amos 5:20*)? How does the use of animals in *Amos 5:19* help describe this day?

6. Why does God reject Israel’s worship “festivals” and “assemblies” (*Amos 5:21-23*; see also *Isaiah 1:13*)? How does our disobedience impact our worship of God? What does God truly desire from His people (*Psalms 51:16-17*)?

7. Read *Amos 5:24*. Where else have you heard this verse quoted? What is the connection between “justice” and “righteousness” (*Psalms 33:5; 1 Kings 10:9*)? How might idolatry (*Amos 5:26*) contributed to their judgment of exile to Assyria in 722 B.C. (*Amos 5:27*)?

Memory verse:

Amos 5:24 – “But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (NASB)

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Study Six | **Amos 6:1-14**

Here we see that the arrogant attitudes of the Israelites were at the root of their social injustice. God has some very strong words against this arrogance!

1. How were the people of Zion (Israel) “at ease” or “complacent” (Amos 6:1)? Why is this such an offensive thing to God (Zephaniah 1:12)? In what ways are you like the people of Zion?
2. What point is Amos trying to make in Amos 6:2-3? What is the fate that awaits not only these Gentile cities (Calneh, Hamath, and Gath), but also Israel? In addition to complacency, what other attitudes summarize the people of Israel at this point?
3. What was the lifestyle of the Israelites like (Amos 6:4-6)? What was God’s opinion of this lifestyle (Amos 3:12; Isaiah 5:12)? Who was the Israelites’ center of attention and why was this wrong (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:37-40)?
4. How did the lifestyle and center of attention of the Israelites relate to being “at ease” or “complacent?” What did God specifically promise would be the result of their lifestyle and attitudes (Amos 6:7-8)?

5. How can we know that God would carry out what He promised to do in *Amos 6:8* (*Hebrews 6:13*)? Why is pride (or arrogance) such a difficult struggle for us? How should we respond instead (*Proverbs 3:34*; *Philippians 2:3*)?

6. What's the deal with *Amos 6:10*? Why must the "name of the LORD" not be mentioned? Answer the questions that Amos asks in *Amos 6:12*? What is the point Amos is trying to make here? Read *Isaiah 1:21*. Do we see similar things going on in our world today?

7. What is the application for us from this chapter? How do the teachings of Jesus Christ parallel those of *Amos 6* (*Matthew 6:19-21, 24*)? How does our desire for riches relate to our arrogance (*1 Timothy 6:17-19*)?

Memory verse:

Amos 6:8 – "The LORD GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts has declared: "I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, and detest his citadels; Therefore I will deliver up the city and all it contains." (NASB)

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Study Seven | Amos 7:1-17

Amos 7 begins a series of word pictures to describe God's judgment. We will see that no matter how clearly God communicates His truth, people are often unresponsive to it.

1. The "locusts" (Amos 7:1) are the first of several images that Amos uses to describe God's judgment in this chapter. Why are locusts an effective illustration for judgment (Exodus 10:13-15; Joel 1:4)?
2. What is the second image of judgment that God shows Amos in Amos 7:4? What is the third image of judgment (Amos 7:7-8)? What is this third image meant to communicate? How does this image relate to the emphasis on "justice and righteousness" in Amos (Isaiah 28:17)?
3. Why would Amos plead on behalf of Israel (Amos 7:2b and 5)? Did God really change His mind (Amos 7:3 and 6; Psalm 106:44-45)? Does this undermine His sovereignty or omniscience (1 Samuel 15:29)? Why did Amos not plead a third time?
4. Did you notice a shift in the language starting in Amos 7:10? Were Jeroboam (King of Israel) and Amaziah (his priest) receptive to Amos' message (Amos 7:12-13)? Why did Amaziah rebuke Amos?

5. Like Jeroboam and Amaziah, have you ever been confronted with a truth that you didn't want to hear (*Proverbs 27:6*)? What happened and how did you respond? Why is it so difficult to receive truth like this when it's spoken to us?

6. How did Amos respond to Amaziah's threat (*Amos 7:14-15*)? What does this show you about his resolve to do what God called him to do? Is God calling you to take steps of faith and obedience? If so, are you taking these steps?

7. What does God promise to do in response to Jeroboam and Amaziah's pride and disbelief (*Amos 7:17*)? Is this language too strong? Why would God promise such awful things to the leaders of His people Israel (*Ezekiel 34:2*)?

Memory verse:

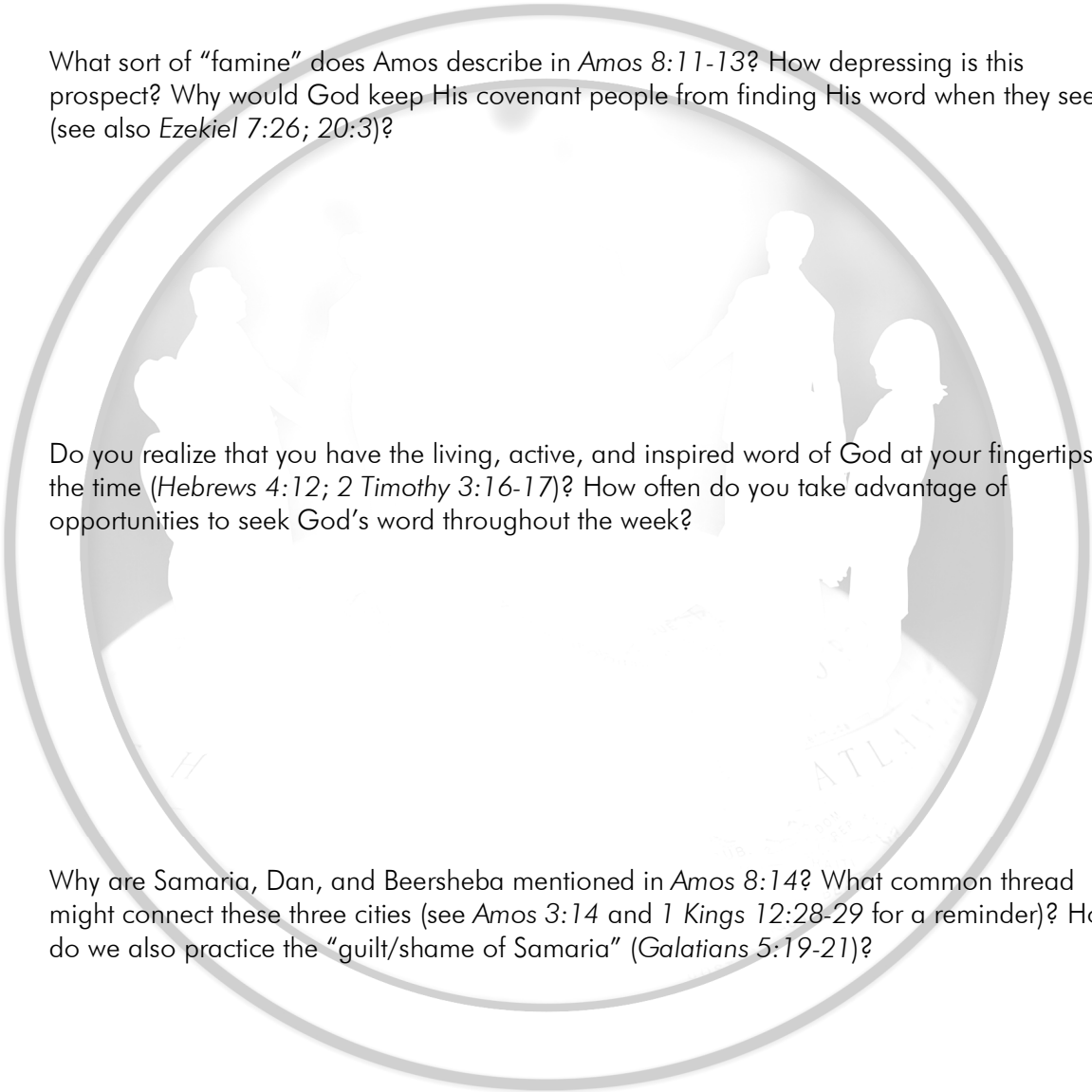
Amos 7:8 – “And the LORD asked me, ‘What do you see, Amos?’ ‘A plumb line,’ I replied. Then the LORD said, ‘Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.’” (NIV)

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Study Eight | **Amos 8:1-14**

Amos' visions continue as God uses more imagery to describe His judgment upon Israel. We see that the people of Israel will not even be able to find the work of the LORD!

1. What's the deal with the "basket of summer fruit" (Amos 8:1-2)? Why would this symbolize the end of God's people (Hint: the term for "summer fruit" is similar to the term "end" in Hebrew. Also, see the NIV, which uses the term "ripe")?
2. Notice through chapter 8 (and the entire book for that matter) that God is referred to as the "Sovereign LORD" (NIV) or the "Lord GOD" (NASB). Why would Amos use these terms together? How would this have gotten Israel's attention (Amos 8:1, 3, 9, and 11)?
3. Look closely at Amos 8:4-6. What specifically had the leaders of Israel done? Why was this behavior so offensive to God (Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 11:1)? How are we tempted to do the same thing today?

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4. How is this day of calamity described in *Amos 8:7-10*? What opposites or ironies do you observe (see *Isaiah 13:9-10* and *Lamentations 5:15*)? What do sackcloth, baldness (*Jeremiah 48:37*), and an “only son” have to do with mourning?

 5. What sort of “famine” does Amos describe in *Amos 8:11-13*? How depressing is this prospect? Why would God keep His covenant people from finding His word when they seek it (see also *Ezekiel 7:26; 20:3*)?

 6. Do you realize that you have the living, active, and inspired word of God at your fingertips all the time (*Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17*)? How often do you take advantage of opportunities to seek God’s word throughout the week?

 7. Why are Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba mentioned in *Amos 8:14*? What common thread might connect these three cities (see *Amos 3:14* and *1 Kings 12:28-29* for a reminder)? How do we also practice the “guilt/shame of Samaria” (*Galatians 5:19-21*)?

Memory verse:

Amos 8:12 – “Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.” (NIV)

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Study Nine | Amos 9:1-15

While God's fierce judgment is unavoidable for Israel, Amos concludes his book with an incredible promise of blessing and restoration for His people!

1. Is the "altar" in Amos 9:1 located in the temple in Jerusalem? Is it the altar at Bethel (1 Kings 12:29-30)? Is it another "symbolic" altar? Why was God promising to destroy this temple and its altar?
2. Where can sinful Israel go to escape God's judgment (Amos 9:2-4)? Do God's omnipotence and omnipresence frighten you or bring you comfort (Psalm 139:7-10)? Explain how these attributes can produce two opposing reactions.
3. Where is "Sheol" or "the grave" (Amos 9:2; Psalm 16:10)? What is meant by the sea "serpent" (Amos 9:3; Job 41:1-2; Isaiah 27:1)? Why is God described so terribly in these verses (especially Amos 9:5)?
4. Why does Amos liken Israel to other Gentile nations (Cush/Ethiopia, Philistia, etc.; Amos 9:7)? How do these verses highlight the sovereign rule of God (1 Chronicles 29:11-12)?

5. Will God destroy the sinful nation of Israel or not (Amos 9:8)? Is He being inconsistent in His promise? If everyone in Israel is to be “shaken” or judged, will anyone be saved? Who will be killed (Amos 9:10)? How does God distinguish between those who die and those who don’t?

6. What does God promise to do in Amos 9:11? Why does He promise to do this (Amos 9:12)? Why does James quote these verses in Acts 15:15-17? How does Jesus Christ connect to the hope of the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 7:12; Matthew 21:9)?

7. Why does Amos use “vineyard” and planting imagery to describe Israel’s restoration (Amos 9:13-15; Jeremiah 24:6-7; Genesis 13:15-17)? If these verses were written to the people of Israel, what is the message of hope for us (Revelation 21:2-3)?

Memory verse:

Amos 9:14 – *“Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit.”* (NASB)

Resources for Amos | TBC

For further study of the book of Amos, see the following Bible Study Resources:

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/amos.pdf>

<http://net.bible.org/bible.php?book=Amos&chapter>

