

Lord of All Nations (Amos)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Amos 1–2; Isaiah 58; Luke 12:47, 48; 1 Kings 8:37–40; Amos 4:12, 13; Obadiah.*

Memory Text: “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (*Amos 3:8, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Acts of inhumanity are sins against God and will be judged accordingly.

A lion in Scripture often represents the king of the animal world. His appearance evokes irresistible strength and majesty as well as ferocity and destructive power. Even when not actively hunting, the lion can be heard, its roar audible for miles. Amos, a shepherd, was sent to the Israelites to warn them that he had heard a lion roar—and the lion was none other than their Lord! Moved by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Amos compared God's way of speaking to the nations, as well as to His special people, with the roaring of a lion (*see Amos 1:2*).

Amos was called to prophesy to the nations who committed crimes against humanity. He also was sent to a society where a privileged and religious people lived in peace and prosperity. Yet, this same people oppressed the poor and allowed for dishonest business and bribery in court. This week we will listen to what the Lord has to say about these despicable actions.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.*

Crimes Against Humanity

Read Amos 1 and 2. Why does the Lord warn that punishment is coming?

The first two chapters in Amos' book contain seven prophecies against neighboring nations, followed by a prophecy against Israel. The foreign nations are not judged because they are Israel's enemies but because of their violations of universal human principles. Two things stand out in Amos's condemnation: the absence of loyalty and the absence of pity.

For instance, Tyre was a leading merchant city located on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel. Because of its almost impregnable island fortress, the city boasted of its security. Moreover, the leaders of Tyre secured peace treaties with several surrounding nations, such as the Philistines. The city was allied with Israel by a "treaty of brotherhood" during the reigns of David and Solomon (*1 Kings 5: 1, 12*) and even of King Ahab (*1 Kings 16:30, 31*). So, it is not surprising to read in *1 Kings 9:13* that Hiram, the king of Tyre, called Solomon "my brother."

Yet, the people of Tyre had violated the "covenant of brothers." Tyre was not condemned for taking away the captives but for handing them over to Israel's enemies, the Edomites. Thus, the people of Tyre were responsible for the cruelties that these captives suffered at the hands of their enemies. From God's perspective, the person who assists and supports a crime is as guilty as the person who commits it.

Because God is all-sovereign, He holds the destiny of all the world in His hands. He has purposes and concerns that reach far beyond Israel's borders. The God of Israel is the Lord of all nations; all human history is His concern. He is the Creator God, who gives life to all, and all are accountable to Him.

Who among us does not bristle in pain at the incredible injustice we see? Were there no God, what hope would we have of justice ever being done? What does the promise, found throughout the Bible, of God bringing justice and judgment to the world mean to you? How can we learn to cling to that promise amid all the injustice that we see now?

Justice for the Oppressed

God’s universal judgment is one of the central teachings found in Amos. In the beginning of his book, the prophet announces God’s judgment on several of Israel’s neighbors because of their crimes against humanity. Then, however, Amos boldly declares that God also will judge Israel. So, the anger of the Lord is directed not only at the nations but also at the people He has chosen. The people of Judah have rejected the Word of the Lord and have not kept His instructions.

At the same time, Amos dealt with Israel much more extensively than even Judah because she had broken God’s covenant and committed so many sins. Israel’s economic prosperity and political stability led to spiritual decay. This spiritual decay displayed itself in social injustice. In Israel, the rich exploited the poor, and the powerful exploited the weak. The rich cared only for themselves and their personal gain, even when it came at the expense and suffering of the poor. (Not much has changed in a few thousand years, has it?)

In his preaching, Amos taught that there is a living God who cares about how we treat others. Justice is more than an idea or a norm. Justice is a divine concern. Thus, the prophet warned that Israel’s stone houses, ivory-inlaid furniture, top-quality food and drink, as well as the best body lotions—all would be destroyed.

Read Isaiah 58. In what ways does this chapter capture aspects of present truth? In what ways, though, is our message to the world much more than this?

The Bible clearly teaches that social justice should be a natural product of the gospel. As the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus, we learn to share God’s concerns. The books of Moses insist on the fair treatment of foreigners, widows, and orphans (*Exod. 22:21–24*). The prophets speak of God’s concern about the just and compassionate treatment of less privileged people (*Isa. 58:6, 7*). The psalmist calls the God who lives in His holy dwelling “a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows” (*Ps. 68:5, NKJV*). Christ shows great concern for those who are rejected by society (*Mark 7:24–30, John 4:7–26*). The Lord’s brother, James, calls on us to put our faith into action and help the needy (*James 2:14–26*). No follower of Christ can do anything less and really be a follower of Christ.

The Peril of Privilege

Amos' prophetic message was not intended to be restricted to the historical situation in Israel but to expand the scope of the message beyond Israel and Judah. In the Old Testament, Israel had a unique, but not exclusive, claim on God.

Read Amos 3:1, 2. The Hebrew verb *yada*, "to know," which is used in verse 2, bears a special sense of intimacy. In Jeremiah 1:5, for example, God says that He "knew" the prophet and set him apart even before his birth. Such was the case with Israel. It was not just another nation among nations. Rather, God set it apart for a sacred, divine purpose. Its people stood in special relationship with Him.

God Himself had chosen Israel and brought it out of slavery to freedom. The exodus from Egypt was the single most important event in the beginning of Israel's history as a nation. It set the stage for God's acts of redemption and the conquest of the land of Canaan. But Israel's strength and prosperity led to pride and complacency in regard to its privileged status as the Lord's chosen people.

Read Christ's statement from Luke 12:47, 48. In what ways can we understand the principle He taught there—that is, when great privileges in life are abused, they will be replaced by great penalties?

Under divine inspiration, the prophet warns that because the people of Israel are the Lord's elect, they particularly will be held accountable for their actions. The Lord is saying that Israel's unique relationship with God carries obligations, and punishment will result if those obligations are not fulfilled. In other words, Israel, as God's chosen people, is all the more liable to His judgments because the privilege entails responsibility. Thus, Israel's election was not just to privileged status; it was called to be witnesses to the world about the Lord who had so blessed it.

“The professed churches of Christ in this generation are exalted to the highest privileges. The Lord has been revealed to us in ever-increasing light. Our privileges are far greater than were the privileges of God's ancient people.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 317. Think about all that we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Why should the responsibilities that come with these privileges make us tremble? Do they, or have we simply gotten used to them? Have we gone so far as to become complacent about all that we have been given? If so, how can we change?

Israel’s Rendezvous With God

“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (*Amos 4:12*).

Chapter 4 of Amos begins with the description of Israel’s sins, and it ends with the announcement of the day of reckoning. God makes His people especially accountable for the ways in which they live and treat others.

Amos lists a series of natural disasters, any one of which should have been enough to turn the nation to God. The list is composed of seven disasters in all, the full measure of punishments for the breaking of God’s covenant (in accordance with the words of Moses from Leviticus 26). Some of the disasters remind one of the plagues God sent against Egypt, while the description of the last calamity explicitly mentions the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

According to Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, what should disasters normally lead people to do? *1 Kings 8: 37–40*.

The people of Israel did not behave like normal people anymore, and God found it impossible to get their attention. Moreover, God’s judgments had resulted in the hardening of the people’s hearts. Because the people failed to return to the Lord, Amos presented one last chance for repentance.

The final judgment is impending, but Amos does not specify what the judgment would be. The haunting uncertainty in Amos’ words makes the threat of judgment even more ominous. Israel has failed to seek God; so, God goes out to meet Israel. If punishment fails, will an encounter with God save Israel?

Amos 4:12 begins with the words “ ‘thus will I do to you’ ” (*NKJV*), which echo the traditional oath formula. This solemn statement calls for a response from Israel to prepare to meet its God as it did prior to God’s appearance at Sinai (*Exod. 19:11, 15*).

Read carefully Amos 4:12, 13. If, suddenly, you were to hear the warning, “Prepare to meet your God, O [your name here]”—what would be your response? What is your only hope? See Rom. 3:19–28.

The Pride That Leads to a Fall

Read the book of Obadiah. What important moral and spiritual truths can we take away from this book?

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and it reports on the prophetic vision of God's judgment upon the land of Edom. The message of the book focuses on three issues: Edom's arrogance (vss. 1–4), Edom's coming humiliation (vss. 5–9), and Edom's violence against Judah (vss. 10–14).

The Edomites were the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. The hostility between the Israelites and the Edomites goes back to the family feud between the twin brothers, who later became the fathers of the two nations. Yet, according to Genesis 33, the two brothers were later reconciled. Thus, the Israelites were commanded by God not to "abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother" (*Deut. 23:7, NKJV*).

In spite of this, the hostilities between the two nations continued for centuries. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took its citizens into captivity, the Edomites not only rejoiced, but they even preyed on the fleeing Israelites and helped to plunder Jerusalem (*Ps. 137:7*). The Edomites did not behave as brothers toward the people of Judah in their worst hour but rather joined the enemy forces (*Lam. 4:21, 22*). For this reason the prophet Obadiah warned that Edom would be judged by its own standard: "As you have done, it shall be done to you" (*Obadiah 15, NKJV*).

The region that was occupied by Edom is located southeast of the Dead Sea. It is a mountainous land filled with high peaks, sharp crags, caves, and clefts in which armies could hide. A number of Edomite cities were located in these nearly inaccessible sites. Sela (also known as Petra) was Edom's capital city. The nation developed an arrogant confidence summed up in the question, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" (*Obadiah 3, NKJV*).

God holds responsible those who take advantage of others in their time of distress. Obadiah warned the proud people of Edom that God would bring humiliation upon their heads. There is no place to escape from the Lord (*Amos 9:2, 3*). The coming day of the Lord will bring both judgment and salvation. Edom will drink God's cup of wrath, while the fortunes of God's people will be restored.

Further Study: Read the following quotations and discuss how they help us to understand the messages from Amos 1–4 and Obadiah in a clearer way.

“From the beginnings of Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out His mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. And yet, the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement. . . .

“Does chosenness mean that God is exclusively concerned with Israel? Does the Exodus from Egypt imply that God is involved only in the history of Israel and is totally oblivious of the fate of other nations?”—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 32, 33.

“With the defenses of the soul broken down, the misguided worshippers had no barrier against sin and yielded themselves to the evil passions of the human heart.

“Against the marked oppression, the flagrant injustice, the unwonted luxury and extravagance, the shameless feasting and drunkenness, the gross licentiousness and debauchery, of their age, the prophets lifted their voices; but in vain were their protests, in vain their denunciation of sin. ‘Him that rebuketh in the gate,’ declared Amos, ‘they hate, . . . and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.’ ‘They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.’ Amos 5:10, 12.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 282.

Discussion Questions:

❶ It is easy to be friendly with someone who has something to offer you. What about those who are in distress and have nothing to offer you but, in fact, have need of what you can give to them? What kind of attitude must we show toward such people? What kind of attitude do you show toward them?

❷ Think about that which we have been given as Seventh-day Adventists. Most Christians have no idea of the blessings of the Sabbath (much less its end-time importance); most think that the dead go either immediately to heaven or to the torments of hell. Many do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus, nor do they believe in a literal Second Coming. What other great truths have we been given that most other people do not know about? What responsibilities come with having these truths?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Amos 3:8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that prophecy is not primarily about future predictions but about one's present decisions.

Feel: Emotionally comprehend that God condemns pride, injustice, and other actions against humanity. He or she will share in Amos' longing for the restoration of justice.

Do: Take seriously God's prophetic Word and prepare himself or herself and others to meet God without leading them to feel depressed or hopelessly condemned.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Power of the Divine Word

A What is the primary objective of God's Word: to inform, instruct, warn, encourage, or empower?

B How do you know that God has spoken in the past and still speaks through His Word today?

C Why does God reveal the future?

II. Feel: God Has Spoken—So, What Does That Mean for Me?

A Why is it so important to listen to God's prophetic voice?

B In what way can we speak about wrong behavior without being judgmental?

III. Do: Importance of the Prophetic Word

A How do we condemn sin in the right spirit and, at the same time, encourage people to do what is right?

B How can you defend those in your community who are oppressed, abused, poor, or without defense?

C How can your church support a prophetic ministry today?

► **Summary:** God's prophetic Word not only contains information about the past and the future, but it also helps us to make correct decisions in the present.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Amos 4:12*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The God of Amos is a God of justice and righteousness. This emphasis is very crucial in our modern society, which is possessed by sentimentalism and the understanding that if it feels good it must be right. Even though emotions play an important role in our lives, we need to be controlled by divine principles that guarantee that our relational life will enjoy true freedom and the right boundaries.

Just for Teachers: God's justice needs to be reemphasized in today's world, because it is often a forgotten commodity. Bring into the spotlight the fact that God's love and truth would be incomplete without justice. God reveals His plans to ultimately reestablish justice (*Amos 3:7*) in order that life without sin can blossom again.

Opening Discussion: We live in a corrupt world in which violence, power, and money reign. Many children, women, and innocent people suffer tremendously and are exploited and abused. Domestic violence has many victims. Bribes silence justice. But when the innocent suffer, people call for justice. When crimes and terrorist acts are performed, we want to act, but revenge does not belong to us. How can we, as individuals or a community of faith, be more engaged in securing harmonious and peaceful relationships in our society, in the workplace, in our neighborhoods, and in our protection of the weak? We are each vulnerable; yet, are we completely helpless and left in the hands of the powerful? Why is revenge by our hands not an act of justice?

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Why is it so important that God announces in advance what He plans to do? Why does He reveal His judgments?
- 2 In a world of conflicting information and misleading discussions, how can we know for sure what main steps God will undertake preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Use the following study to help your class to examine the difference between God’s judgment on the surrounding nations and His judgment on the kingdom of Israel.

Bible Commentary

I. Corruption in Israel *(Review Amos 3:7 with your class.)*

The inhabitants of Israel needed to make dramatic changes in their lives. In His love and justice, God revealed to His servants Amos and Hosea His secrets (*Amos 3:7*) and plans in order to help the people turn back to Him. The hope was that when the people received the full information about the destruction of their home country, they would seek the Lord. Their political, social, and religious lives were in total chaos and decay.

The history of Israel is dark. Not one of the 20 kings in the Northern Kingdom followed God. All of the kings—from the first, Jeroboam, to the last, Hoshea—were wicked. They did things that were wrong in the sight of the Lord. There was not a single exception. Only plots, revolts, exploitation, violence, terror, corruption, tragedy, and desperation prevailed. Just to illustrate: seven of Israel’s kings were assassinated, one committed suicide, and one was “stricken by God.” The Bible uses King Ahab and his wife Jezebel as a symbol of the evil in Israel. Not one was a God-fearing ruler; none repented or undertook reformation. They led the people to destruction. They were leaders of doom. What an unfortunate and evil situation. No wonder God needed to send “strong medicine” to shake the stubborn nation and stop the prevailing wickedness. But unfortunately, as we know from history, not even the voice of a prophet helped.

Consider This: What lessons can your contemporary congregation learn from the struggles, victories, and failures of the Old Testament church? What is especially applicable for us today?

II. God Unfolds and Unmasks Reality *(Review Amos 4:4–11 with your class.)*

Chapters 1 and 2 present a series of judgments against the nations. Amos starts with the nations surrounding Israel: beginning with Aram (Damascus) and Philistia (and its cities, such as Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron). Then shifting to Tyre, he turns next to the related nations of Edom, Ammon, and Moab, ending with the sister nation of Judah. The people of Israel could still

feel comfortable because divine judgments were levied against other people and nations. But then the prophet turns to Israel and addresses its sins. With eloquent words and precision, he speaks against Israel throughout the rest of the book.

In chapter 3, God poses seven rhetorical questions (*vss. 3–6*). But first, He warns the people that, even though He brought them out of Egypt, He will punish them for their sins (*vs. 2*). Because “‘they do not know how to do right’ ” (*vs. 10, NIV*), God warns that “‘an enemy will overrun the land’ ” (*vs. 11, NIV*). Employing colorful language, God shows that this judgment is pending and is inevitable due to Israel’s moral corruption. The judgment cannot be escaped, and the altars of Bethel (the center of false worship in Israel) will be destroyed.

Five times in chapter 4 God cries out and complains that even though He used the ultimate measure of punishment to stop them from doing wrong, the people stubbornly remained in sin. The prophet uses God’s words: “‘Yet you have not returned to me’ ” (*Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, NIV*).

Discussion Question: Our God is a God of relationships. Therefore, He longs to develop close relationships with His people. In what ways can this relationship be cultivated, and, conversely, by what do we destroy it? Ask your class to share practical ways in which one can build up a relationship with God and with others.

III. Prepare to Meet Your God! (*Review Amos 4:12 with your class.*)

In the end, God will confront Israel because He is its Creator (*Amos 4:13*) and the nation is accountable to Him. They are responsible for their decisions. So, God tells His people that they need to “‘prepare to meet’ ” their God (*Amos 4:12, NIV*). To meet their God means, in this context, to be ready for God’s impending judgments. In chapter 5 He calls them to genuine repentance, to return to Him, to seek the Lord in order to live. This repentance also needs to be projected into a change of lifestyle because they turned “‘justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground’ ” (*Amos 5:7, NIV*). Instead, the people need to “‘let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream’ ” (*Amos 5:24, NIV*).

Consider This: Many biblical texts explain the second coming of Jesus as a day of ultimate hope and final restoration. See the beautiful description of this glorious event in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18 and Titus 2:11–14. How is it described in these texts, and what hope does that give you?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Ask the class the following questions in order to ponder the relationship between behavior, righteousness by faith, and justice.

Application Questions:

- 1 How is a change in behavior, coupled with the demands of justice, reflected in the doctrine of righteousness by faith? Why is our just activity not a basis for our salvation? How does this performance reveal the fact that we are saved by grace in Christ Jesus? Why do we not earn access to heaven by our good works, and why do we not gain salvation by our achievements? (Remember that we do not do what is right in order to be saved but because we are saved.)
- 2 What does it mean to let “justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream”? How do we do so in our lives? How can you help your church to do things that are right and just?
- 3 How does the statement of Micah 6:8, to “do justly,” fit into the whole picture of doing what is right? With what does Micah closely connect it?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: *Even though Amos does not use the word **discipline**, it is not hard to see that this is what he really wants to emphasize to God’s people. How can you practice right discipline in your life without being legalistic or judgmental?*

Activities:

- 1 Divide your class into small units of three or four and ask the students to discuss how one can be ready for the second coming of Jesus. How is God preparing us for heaven, and what do we need to do to prepare ourselves for the greatest future event of human history? Ask them to study carefully together, in small groups, Jude 24, 25 and share their conclusions.
- 2 The mission of John the Baptist was to prepare people for the first coming of Jesus (*Luke 1:16, 17*). How did he do it? Discuss with your class how we can help others to be ready to meet their God face-to-face, and endure. How can we stand in the day of judgment (*Rev. 6:17, Isa. 25:9*)?