

Anchored by God's Justice (Lesson 3)

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Words to Anchor Your Soul

“Justice must flow like water,
right actions like a stream that never dries up.”

[Amos 5:24](#) (NET)

Introduction

As I write this in June of 2006, the apparent designer of the 9-11 attacks is still at large, outside of the reach of justice. When dealing with such clear evil, most people call for justice. We know that Osama Ben Laden deserves punishment for his crimes. It is easy to agree on the need for justice when a dictator has taken advantage of his power. I remember watching the television coverage of the Iraqi people pulling down the statue of their former dictator Saddam Hussein; it was a visual representation of the need to see him come to justice for the crimes he committed against his people.

We have seen that God tempers justice with mercy and that He calls us to do the same. Through the prophet Amos, God reminded His people of the need to provide justice to one another. Justice is a hallmark of the character of God; as His representatives on earth, we should be about dispensing justice in our lives and in our land as well.

Again, the book is too long to study it all in a week. We will look at selected parts of the book as we go through it.

Background of Amos

Although Amos was from Judah, he preached in the northern kingdom of Israel during the days of the divided kingdom, about 750 B.C. or so. Approximately thirty years later, in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom would fall and the people would be taken captive into Assyria. As we saw in our last two lessons, God loves even His disloyal people enough to warn them about coming punishment. We will see in the message of Amos that they deserved the justice that He was bringing.

James Montgomery Boice says this about Amos: “The Book of Amos is one of the most readable, relevant, and moving portions of the Word of God. But in much of church history (until very recent times) little or no attention has been paid to it. Why? It is because the book speaks powerfully against social injustices and religious formalism”¹³

It was apparently a time of prosperity in the northern kingdom, which allowed the rich to treat the poor callously. It seems to parallel the situation in the United States here at the beginning of the 21st century.

Day One Study

Read [Amos 1:1-2:16](#).

Diamonds in the Word: If you want to develop a book chart, you can spend your time this week on that. I will give you daily assignments in case you prefer another type of research. Today, study in your commentaries or Bible encyclopedias for information about the times of Amos in Israel. Use the list of kings in [Amos 1:1](#) to do your research, or use a commentary to read about the background of the book of Amos. Leave the rest of the commentary on the book itself until you have completed the week's study.

1. What do you learn about the prophet Amos from 1:1 and 7:10-17? Use a map in the back of your Bible or a Bible atlas to identify his home in Judah.

Dr. Boice finds the order of the oracles here significant:

Chapters 1 and 2 contain eight oracles: one against each of the six nations that surrounded Judah and Israel . . . and one each against Judah and Israel themselves. These are not a random collection. The list is carefully constructed so that the judgment net slowly and inexorably closes around the very people to whom Amos was speaking.¹⁴

The NET Bible explains the wording of these oracles:

The three . . . four style introduces each of the judgment oracles of chaps. 1-2. Based on the use of a similar formula in wisdom literature (see [Prov. 30:18-19](#), 29-31), one expects to find in each case a list of four specific violations. However, only in the eighth oracle (against Israel) does one find the expected fourfold list. Through this adaptation and alteration of the normal pattern the LORD indicates that his focus is Israel (he is too bent on judging Israel to dwell very long on her neighbors) and he emphasizes Israel's guilt with respect to the other nations. (Israel's list fills up before the others' lists do.)¹⁵

2. **Responding to God:** Do you ever focus on another person's relationship with God instead of listening for what God is saying to you? Maybe you listen to a sermon and think about how he/she should be there. Write a prayer of confession to God and ask Him to convict you when you begin to focus on the sins of others rather than your own.

3. What countries did God warn about coming judgment? (You may want to look at a Bible map or Bible atlas to locate each one.) What was the major charge against each?

4. What can one learn about God from both the judgments and the fact that God warned them in advance?

5. *Sharing Question:* Maybe God has tried to warn you of the consequences of your actions. Perhaps He used the Scriptures or another person to do so. If that has happened to you, share the story with your group. Into what area of your life is God trying to speak right now?

6. *Responding to God:* Spend some time before God. Thank Him that He loves you enough to show you where you are wrong. Ask Him to make you more sensitive to His voice and more eager to hear! Write down your thoughts.

Day Two Study

Read [Amos 3:1-8](#).

7. How does [Amos 3:1](#) relate to the cause and effect questions that follow it in these verses? In other words, why would Amos put these questions here? (This does require you to think and there is no right answer!) Also, consider the order of the situations used in the questions. Do you have any insights into the prophet's choice of order?

Read [Amos 3:9--4:3](#). (If you have any problem understanding these prophecies, go to the NET Bible at bible.org and read that translation.)

FYI—Samaria (v.9) was the capital of the northern kingdom, and the term sometimes refers to the entire nation.

In case you were wondering about the “cows” in 4:1, the NET Bible may help:

The expression you ‘*cows of Bashan*’ is used by the prophet to address the wealthy women of Samaria, who demand that their husbands satisfy their cravings. The derogatory language perhaps suggests that they, like the livestock of Bashan, were well fed, ironically in preparation for the coming slaughter.¹⁶

The significance of the “horns of the altar” is also explained by the NET Bible: “Fugitives could seek asylum by grabbing hold of these corners When the altar’s horns were cut off, there would be no place of asylum left for the LORD’s enemies.”¹⁷

8. What examples of injustice in the actions of God’s people do you see in these verses?

Read [Amos 4:4-13](#).

The NET Bible says:

Bethel and *Gilgal* were important formal worship centers because of their importance in Israel’s history. Here the Lord ironically urges the people to visit these places so they can increase their sins against him. Their formal worship, because it was not accompanied by social justice, only made them guiltier in God’s sight by adding hypocrisy to their list of sins.¹⁸

9. How had God been trying to get the attention of His people? How had they responded?
10. Compare [Jeremiah 2:29-32](#) to this passage. Record your insights.

Diamonds in the Word: Compare God's attitude toward worship in [Amos 4](#) and [Psalm 50](#).

11. *Sharing question:* Share about a time in your life when God used your circumstances to get your attention. How did you respond?
12. *Responding to God:* Thank God that in His love and mercy He continues to call you to come back to Him, even using difficult circumstances, when necessary. Thank Him for that specific situation that you shared in the last question. Ask for the discernment to recognize the times when He is bringing hard times into your life to get your attention. Write down your prayer or thoughts.

Day Three Study

Read [Amos 5:1-17](#).

13. Of what injustices did God charge the Israelites in these verses?
14. Put yourself in the place of the poor, the uneducated, the physically challenged, the immigrant, the refugee, etc. What injustices do you see happening today in your neighborhood, schools, workplace, city, country, and world against them or any other groups? How would you feel about it if you were where they are?
15. What things did God call the people to do to remedy the evil?

Read [Amos 5:18-27](#).

16. Compare this passage with [Isaiah 1:11-20](#). Why was God upset when they went to the temple to worship?
17. *Sharing question:* In what ways have you been guilty of looking religious and yet been far from obeying the heart of God? Maybe it is true today. Confess your hypocrisy to your group. (See [Jam. 5:16](#).)
18. *Responding to God:* Pray from your heart for [Amos 5:24](#) to really happen in our world today. Be sure to work on memorizing it as the week's **Words to Anchor Your Soul**. Write your thoughts below.

Diamonds in the Word: Find other biblical references to God's desire for worship to be from the heart.

Day Four Study

Read [Amos 6:1-8](#).

19. Describe the attitudes of the rich according to these verses. What similar attitudes do you see prevalent today?

20. How can you, as a “rich” American (knowing we are all rich compared to most of the world) protect your heart from becoming calloused instead of being compassionate and merciful?

21. *Sharing question:* Meditate before God considering whether you are guilty of similar attitudes. Write down a specific way you can reach out to show love and bring justice to your world.

Read [Amos 9:8-15](#).

Although Amos’ message was hard on those who were not living their lives in alignment with God’s heart, he ended his message with hope.

22. What promises did God make to Israel that would bring hope to those who really listened to Amos’ message?

23. *Sharing question:* If you have favorite Bible verses that bring you hope when things look impossible or hopeless, share them with your group. Share the story behind the verses. What was happening at the point that the verse(s) became so special to you?

24. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer of thanks for His promises that give you hope even today.

Diamonds in the Word: Read the parts of Amos that you have not read so far (6:9--9:7) and write down your thoughts about how they relate to the rest of the book.

Day Five Study

Read [Psalm 33](#), a psalm of praise.

Diamonds in the Word: Go through the psalm, looking at the way the Hebraic poetry parallels the meaning in a pair of lines or uses the second line to extend the understanding of the first. Do you receive any insights from carefully reading it that way?

25. The psalmist praises God for His sovereignty (meaning His rule over all things). Write down his specific illustrations of God’s sovereignty.

26. *Sharing question:* How can focusing on God’s sovereignty help you anchor your life in His justice when the world is so unjust? How can it help you be more just in your treatment of others?

27. In what ways are we to respond to God, according to this psalm?

28. *Sharing question:* How does this psalm help you trust God more with your circumstances, even when they are unjust or difficult? What particular verse(s) increases your faith in such situations?

29. *Responding to God:* Take this psalm and make it a prayer to God. Insert your name and your situations in place of words such as “ones”, “you”, “people”, etc. Do as the psalmist says and sing His praises! Choose a song that praises God as Creator or Ruler of the world.

We are quick to call for justice when we have been treated unfairly, even in the small things! Mary shares her story of what happened when she felt wronged.

Mary's Story

I am 68 years old and have been a widow for 14 years. I have no children or grandchildren so I have basically lived alone for all these years. I work part time for a church which employs young seminary students who have no money. They live with families in the church or buddy up 4 to 6 in a one-bedroom apartment.

Six weeks ago my boss asked me if I would allow one of these young men to live with me, and feeling that this would be a way that I could serve the King, I said yes. I was assured that he was clean, made his bed, was engaged and wouldn't be around much, etc. Right!

His first promise was that he would store my suitcases and boxes which I moved into the garage to make room for him in the attic. They are still sitting in the garage. His second promise was that he would nail up a fence post that had fallen down. His cleanliness includes (a) not making his bed 50% of the time (b) piling my very nice bath towels on the floor to mildew (c) never taking out the trash, etc. You get the picture, he's not that tidy.

The crowning blow came last Thursday. I took the day off to take my aunt to visit her brother who is terminally ill. Not an exciting prospect. However, I had prayed with my friend from San Antonio for 30 minutes and then spent an hour with my accountability partner so I was ready for the day. I rushed home from meeting with her to hang out my new tee shirts I had bought to wear with my new suits. I opened the washer and there was one of his wet tee shirts which he had washed in 10 gallons of water. I opened the dryer and there were my very short shrunk tee shirts which have washing instructions that read “wash in cold water and line dry.” I lost it. I called him on his cell phone and shrieked, “You shrunk my tee shirts!” I was blowing enough steam to propel a freight train from Dallas to St. Louis. Fortunately, he was in a car with my boss when he got my screaming call so I got to yell at him as well. He kept saying he did it to help me. I thought about that and somehow I did not think that he woke up thinking “what can I do to help Mary today?” and then threw my laundry in a hot dryer. He did it because he wanted the washing machine to wash one tee shirt in ten gallons of water.

All day Friday, I rehearsed how I was going to handle this situation. I was torn between sitting him down and having a “revival meeting” and going to my boss and telling him to have the meeting since he started this debacle. Saturday morning I began to pray about everything and I told God about everything that he had done in six weeks to irritate me. God just would not let me end my quiet time. I finally realized that what he wanted me to do was “nothing.” He convicted me that [Psalm 55:22](#) “Cast your burdens on the Lord” did not just mean my grief or financial burdens. He wanted me to give Him this and say nothing to anyone. I tried to tell Him there should be consequences for all the injustices I had suffered but He reminded me that He is more than able to convict the young man of his iniquities without any help from me. It is so plain that I am to just “be still and quiet” about this matter and let God handle it. I am watching things carefully. The fence post has been nailed up so there is one step of progress. This has been an interesting journey for me and an interesting lesson. If you are reading this, pray for me as the wedding is still 5 months away.