

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

August 28, 2022 | *Pernicious Prosperity (Amos)*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Why does prosperity sometimes make it more challenging to meet the needs of others?

Read Amos.

Ask God to help you use your resources to fulfill His purposes.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The people of Israel falsely believed their prosperity was a sign of God's goodwill toward them.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Prosperity can distract us from God's greater purpose for our lives.

MEDITATE

"He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name" (Amos 5:8).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce Amos and one of the primary themes addressed in his book.

Q: *Hosea and Amos were contemporaries who ministered in the same context, but Hosea focused on how prosperity contributed to the brokenness of the people's*

relationship with God while Amos focused on how prosperity contributed to the brokenness within society. What can we learn from this difference between these prophets?

Q: *Amos was concerned about the wealthy's exploitation of the poor, but instead of addressing the situation directly, he sprinkled this concern throughout his major oracles. Why do you think he approached one of his main concerns in this manner?*

Amos ministered during approximately the same time as Hosea. The major nations surrounding Israel were struggling with internal difficulties, so Israel enjoyed a period relatively free from the dangers of foreign powers. This freedom allowed Israel to regain much of the territory they had lost to these nations and created a time of economic prosperity for the wealthy of the nation. But this economic prosperity also created spiritual challenges for Israel. Hosea focused on the challenge of spiritual adultery. The people's prosperity led them away from God and to idolatry. The book of Amos focuses on the challenge prosperity created between the wealthy and poor in society. The wealthy used their abundant resources to exploit the poor and gain more wealth for themselves (Amos 2:6–7; 5:11; 8:4). No one chapter in Amos explores this theme exclusively or exhaustively. Instead, the prophet consistently mentioned it throughout the book, revealing his understanding that this was a fundamental problem in Israelite society. The exploitation of the poor was at the root of almost every problem facing the nation. At times, Amos's condemnation is quite biting, such as when he called wealthy women a bunch of cows (Amos 4:1). At other times, he simply focused on the excesses the wealthy provided for themselves while leaving the poor destitute (Amos 3:15; 6:4). If Israel were to return to God, it would require reassessing the interaction between the wealthy and poor in its society.

Q: *Why does rebellion against God often coincide with social crises?*

Q: *What are some neglected social consequences of rebellion against God in our society?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos knew his society was rebelling against God, and their rebellion led to the wealthy's exploitation of the poor. This is of course a perpetual problem. Jesus believed poverty was part of life in

a fallen world (Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7). It is just one example of the social ills caused by humanity's rebellion against God. Drug abuse, violence, broken families, and elder neglect are just a few others. Part of the church's responsibility, as God's redeemed community on the earth, is to work against these corruptions of human society with the power of the gospel. The gospel is the key to understanding everything that is wrong with our society. Governments may come up with policies to dampen the effect of these social crises, but believers must remember that because these problems stem from sin, only the gospel will be able to ultimately address them. We must be committed to confronting the effects of sin with the power of the gospel.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The book of Amos contains recognizable parts, such as the oracles against the nations in Amos 1–2, but it lacks much meaningful structure. This lesson will discuss the oracle to the nations, Israel's false sense of security, a short biographical narrative, and Amos's hope for a remnant.

1. ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

2. FALSE SECURITY BLINDS US TO COMING JUDGMENT

3. AMAZIAH'S REBUKE

4. HOPE FOR A REMNANT

GOING DEEPER

+This section will discuss each of the points above in more detail and draw application points from them.

1. ORACLES AGAINST THE NATIONS

■ AMOS 1–2

Q: *Why would oracles against other nations give Israel hope?*

Q: *How did Amos use the oracles against the nations to highlight Israel's moral failures?*

Isaiah (13–23), Jeremiah (46–50), and Ezekiel (25–32) each contain a section made up of oracles against the surrounding nations in their prophetic books that provided some hope for the nation of Israel. If God was going to judge these others nations, it would be for their benefit. Most of the Minor Prophets do not contain oracles against the nations, but Amos does at the beginning of his book. Amos’s goal, however, differed significantly from the other prophets. He proceeded through Israel’s various neighbors but concluded with the sharpest condemnation for the nation of Israel itself. You can imagine the disbelief among his audience. Every time Amos finished with one nation and moved to the next, the crowd cheered louder and louder, but when he turned his attention to them, he was met with silence. Israel condemned themselves. They recognized the failures of other nations but refused to recognize their own.

Amos levied multiple indictments against them (Amos 2:6–8). They exploited the poor, they committed sexual sins, and they defiled God’s temple. What made their sin worse was that they knew better than the nations that surrounded them (Amos 2:9–11). They had seen God defeat their enemies. They knew God had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. They had seen God work in their midst by raising up prophets and Nazirites, but instead of recognizing how God was working in their midst, they worked against Him. So, Amos condemned them along with all the other nations.

❓: *How can you protect yourself from believing you are more godly or righteous than others?*

❓: *In what ways have you seen God act in the past that should lead you to greater faithfulness in the future?*

APPLICATION POINT –Israel had witnessed God work in mighty ways in their past. They naturally believed this entailed God’s enduring favor. But somehow they never made the connection between recognizing what God had done for them and the implications it had for their lives. They believed their history with God somehow made them more righteous in His sight than the surrounding nations. This is a mistake we can never make. Never assume your history with God makes you more righteous than others. Your righteousness does not rest upon anything you have done. It rests only on the declaration God makes on you because of what Christ has accomplished on your behalf. Your righteousness does not stem from anything you accomplished or on how “spiritual” you were in the past.

2. FALSE SECURITY BLINDS US TO COMING JUDGMENT

■ AMOS 3:1–7:9, 8:1–9:10

Q: *How are the questions in Amos 3:3–8 intended to reveal Israel’s need for repentance?*

Q: *What kind of disasters are alluded to in Amos 4:6–11? How are they related to the questions in Amos 3:3–8?*

Israel had a false sense of security concerning their relationship with God. They counted His past actions on their behalf as signs of His present affirmation. Their false security led them to overlook the warning signs of His encroaching judgment. They ignored the warnings of their prophets. This is the point of the questions in Amos 3:3–8. As Amos 3:7 shows, God had revealed His plan to judge Israel to His prophets. The prophets prophesied, but the people failed to hear. Amos’s questions were pleas for them to pay attention. Just as a lion would not roar without having caught its prey, the prophets would not declare Israel’s approaching judgment unless it was so. The people were ignoring the divine authority behind the prophets’ words and ignoring their need for repentance.

They were also ignoring signs from nature of their impending judgment. Amos 4:6–11 alludes to a famine, a drought, and plagues. The Israelites should have recognized these as signs of God’s impending judgment, but instead, they overlooked them. The people consistently overlooked all the signs God was using to call them to repentance.

Q: *What kind of signs does God use to call us to repentance today?*

Q: *In what ways do you see people today ignoring signs of God’s encroaching judgment?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos believed Israel had overlooked the signs of God’s impending judgment. We no longer need prophets to warn of God’s looming judgment. We have the full revelation of God’s Word. The Bible frequently alludes to a future judgment in which God will condemn all those who do not trust in Christ for the

forgiveness of their sins. Today, many people ignore this warning. Our role as Christ's followers is to point people to this coming judgment. Our role is like Amos's in that we take the revelation we have been given, which for us is the Bible, and use it to confront people in their sin and warn them of God's coming judgment. We should not neglect to address people in our churches with the truths of God's Word. We can never assume someone understands the gospel, the depravity of sin, the work of Jesus, and the implications this all has for their lives just because they regularly attend church. This was certainly the case for Amos. He confronted people who thought God was on their side simply because they were Israelites. There are people who attend churches today simply because they think it is the right thing to do, but they have not understood and received the gospel.

❓: *Why would the people desire the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18)? What assumption were they making?*

❓: *Since the Old Testament law commanded offerings and feasts, why did God hate them (Amos 5:21-23)?*

One of the more alarming aspects of Amos is how self-deceived the people to whom Amos ministered had become. Their sin and corruption were visible for all to see, including themselves, yet they were looking forward to the arrival of the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18)! The day of the Lord in the Old Testament refers to a time of Yahweh's unmistakable intervention into human affairs to judge the nations and vindicate the righteous. The people to whom Amos prophesied looked forward to this day thinking they would be among the vindicated. Amos warned them that they were gravely mistaken. He gave a series of analogies illustrating the folly of their behavior (Amos 5:19). Their anticipation of the day of the Lord would be like fleeing from a lion only to run straight into a bear or seeking shelter in a house only to be bitten by a snake within it. Amos's point about the day of the Lord is clear. It will not be what the people think. It will be a day of sorrow, not joy.

Correcting the people's understanding of the day of the Lord also provided an appropriate opportunity to correct their understanding concerning the feasts and offerings they practiced. God had commanded the people to make sacrificial offering to Him and conduct several feasts throughout the year for purposes related to remembering what He had done for them in the past. These offerings and feasts are described in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The people Amos addressed followed these practices faithfully. The problem was that they believed merely following these practices was sufficient to earn God's favor. As long as they went through the rituals, they didn't have to worry about how closely the rest of their lives followed biblical principles. Amos knew that keeping the feasts and sacrifices without concern for the moral and ethical matters of the law was an insult to God. It was

as if they believed God to be as blind as they were. In response to the people's neglect of God, Amos declared, "Let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24).

♀: *In what ways are you in danger of substituting ritual obedience for real obedience?*

♀: *The people found satisfaction in the judgment of the wicked, but they were the ones in danger of being judged by God. How can we avoid the same mistake?*

APPLICATION POINT – Like the Israelites, we often focus on our obedience to the things we want to do and disregard our disobedience to the things we don't want to do. Such an outlook reveals a flawed understanding of God and the gospel. We have no right to compartmentalize God's commands into the things we want to obey and the things we don't. When we do, it reveals that we have replaced what God thinks about these matters with what we think. This is true even for the areas of our lives in which we are obedient! We sometimes obey not because God has said it but because we've decided it is the right thing to do. We think our obedience in one area excuses our disobedience in another. This is nothing more than a disguised form of salvation by our good deeds. We think we are obedient in the things that really matter so He will excuse our disobedience in the things that don't matter as much. God has called us to complete obedience to His will and moral standards. We cannot be content with partial obedience, because partial obedience is a refusal to let God be God in your life.

♀: *In what ways did Amos describe the people's ease in Amos 6:1-7?*

♀: *Why did Amos condemn the people's luxury?*

The people's lifestyle also revealed their false sense of security from God's judgment. In Amos 6, the prophet described a lavish society more concerned with pampering themselves than living in obedience to God's Word. They felt secure in their prosperity (Amos 6:1). They thought their expensive beds and lavish meals meant God was pleased with them (Amos 6:4, 6). They sought entertainment and fine arts (Amos 6:5). Their pursuit and indulgence in these luxuries while they were drowning in sin reveals the callousness of their hearts, both toward God and their fellow man.

Q: *How do you see the condition Amos condemned present in our society?*

Q: *Was it wrong for the people to appreciate the nicer things in life? Why or why not? If not, why did Amos condemn them?*

APPLICATION POINT –The people’s willingness to overlook their sin while pursuing every luxury they could afford shows that they had misdiagnosed their main problem. They thought their biggest problem was hardship and discomfort in this life, but Amos revealed that their biggest problem, and the biggest problem for the rest of us, was sin. When we misdiagnose the problem, we look for the wrong answer. They did not need to be saved from hardship and discomfort. They needed to be saved from their sins. They were looking for the wrong savior. The connection between our time and Amos’s could not be easier to spot. Today, people are also obsessed with comfort and a life of ease. They too are looking for the wrong savior because they have misdiagnosed their biggest problem. They believe their biggest problem is their job or old furniture. Or they worry they will run out of entertainment, so they buy the largest cable package and subscribe to every streaming service available. People today, as in Amos’ day, fail to see that sin is their biggest problem, and so they fail to understand that Jesus can be their only Savior. There is nothing inherently wrong with a nice car, a comfortable couch, or retiring early. The problem comes when we make these things the big solutions to relatively minor problems and fail to recognize our biggest problem is sin and Jesus is our only hope.

3. AMAZIAH’S REBUKE

■ AMOS 7:10–17

Q: *How did Amaziah respond to Amos’s message?*

Q: *How did Amos respond to Amaziah’s rebuke?*

The book of Amos mainly consists of oracles delivered against the nation of Israel. We are reading the words Amos spoke to the people. Amos 7:10–17 breaks from these oracles and describes a biographical episode during the prophet’s ministry. Amos’s message offended a priest named Amaziah, who reported Amos to the king. Amaziah

claimed Amos was conspiring against Israel by proclaiming the king would die and the people would be exiled (Amos 7:10–11). He was referring to the words of Amos 7:9, although adding a few details, perhaps to further enrage the king. Amaziah hoped Amos would be silenced by the king, one way or another. But Amos refused to backdown. He reaffirmed his prophecy and added a judgment against Amaziah and his house (Amos 7:17).

🕒: *Can you describe a time when you resented the truth? What made you respond in this way?*

🕒: *What can we learn from Amos's response to Amaziah?*

APPLICATION POINT – One of the purposes of the church is for believers to hold each other accountable to the Word of God (Galatians 6:1–2). Even after repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Savior, we are still susceptible to sin. Sometimes our sin is so deceptive that we fail to recognize it ourselves. Being part of a local church provides opportunity for other believers to call our attention to our sin and hold us accountable. Amaziah demonstrated two possible responses to being confronted by sin. We can humbly acknowledge it and seek repentance, or we can deny it and respond with hostility. As Amaziah's story reveals, denying sin does not make it go away. Denying sin only increases its destructive power in our lives.

We should also notice that Amos refused to back down from his message even when Amaziah reported him to the king. As we seek to engage the world with the gospel, we must be prepared for the world to react with hostility. Even in the face of hostility, we can never back down from or compromise the message God has given us. Like Amos, we are called to be God's faithful messengers regardless of whether the message is received or not.

3. HOPE FOR A REMNANT

📖 AMOS 9:11–15

🕒: *How did Amos end his message?*

🕒: *How would you put the picture Amos creates of the plowman, the reaper-treader, and the sower into your own words?*

Amos concluded his message with a remarkable shift. Although God's wrath was coming, He would preserve a faithful remnant from His people to fulfill His commitment to David. This remnant will "raise up the booth of David" (Amos 9:11), referring to the promises God made to King David to give him an enduring kingdom (2 Samuel 7:13). This remnant will include a remnant from the other nations as well (Amos 9:12) and will form a kingdom that will be known for its abundance. Fields will be plowed during the spring of the year and reaped during the harvest. But Amos described a future of such abundance that before the reapers can finish, it will already be time to start plowing again. Although God's faithful may now be suffering from the oppression of the wealthy, after the day of the Lord, the faithful remnant will enjoy the abundance only God can provide.

Q: *Who ultimately fulfilled God's promise to the "booth" of David?*

Q: *How would this prophecy comfort the people struggling from the oppression of the wealthy?*

APPLICATION POINT – Amos's concluding vision was ultimately fulfilled in the person and final work of Christ. Jesus is the descendant of David who will restore David's fallen house and fulfill the covenant God made to Him. Christ is the one who will create a kingdom of all nations who will enjoy the abundant blessings of God forever (Revelation 22). In this way, the hope Amos gave to people in his day is the same hope we enjoy. We look forward to the time when Christ will return, fulfill all of God's promises, and reign over a remnant from every nation.

NEXT STEPS

Perhaps the main difficulty Amos faced was addressing a people who were good at keeping up religious appearances but were nevertheless spiritually dead inside. This remains one of the greatest dangers facing Christians today. What religious practices does your faith in Christ lead you to do? How can you maintain the authenticity of these practices and not allow them to cover for a heart that does not want to submit to God? Write down your responses.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, forgive me for ever thinking that keeping up outward appearances is more important than the inward condition of my heart.

Jesus, you are the one who restored David's fallen booth. My hope is in you and in the kingdom you will create when you come again.

Father, help me to keep the gospel central in my life. Never allow me to find false hope in the comforts of this world.

God, help me to faithfully proclaim your Word to those who need it. Help me to remain faithful when I encounter opposition, no matter the cost.

