

AMOS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if you had only Amos? What does this book teach us about civil rights and social justice? Human cruelty? Of what God wants from us? How were the people of Israel to decide if Amos's message was from God? Are there any important "key texts" in Amos? Where does Amos come from and to whom does he address his messages? What was Amos' profession? (Amos 1:1; Amos 7:14) When did he live and prophesy? Who were his best known contemporaries? (Hosea 1:1; Isaiah 1:1; Is. 6:1; Micah 1:1) What other book(s) are similar to Amos in content and purpose?

"Amos was the first prophet in the Bible whose message was recorded at length. Although he came from a town in Judah, he preached to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, about the middle of the eighth century B.C. [760-750 BC] It was a time of great prosperity, notable religious piety, and apparent security. But Amos saw that prosperity was limited to the wealthy, and that it fed on injustice and on oppression of the poor. Religious observance was insincere, and security more apparent than real. With passion and courage, he preached that God would punish the nation. He called for justice to "flow like a stream," and said, "Perhaps the Lord will be merciful to the people of this nation who are still left alive" (Amos 5:15). (GNB)

"The author's name, given in Amos 1:1, means 'burdened.' Amos's heart was heavily burdened for the cause of YAHWEH and the plight of the people.

"Clearly Amos was not a 'professional' prophet (Amos 7:14) like the more numerous institutional or cultic prophets of his day. From his rustic background in the southern kingdom at Tekoa, six miles south of Bethlehem, Amos insisted that he was a common man, called of God to go to the northern kingdom to be His spokesman (Amos 7:15). The genuineness of the divine call of Amos is clear. The judgment he pronounced upon the wife of Amaziah and his prediction concerning the sons and daughters of Amaziah (Amos 7:14-17) were undoubtedly fulfilled.

"DATE: c.760 B.C.

"Reference in 1:1 to the reigns of Uzziah (of Judah) and Jeroboam II (of Israel), who reigned concurrently from 792 to 753 B.C., gives a general time period. The prophecy in Amos 7:9 concerning the imminence of doom suggests a date ca.760 B.C., toward the end of Jeroboam's reign. The prosperity of Jeroboam predicted by Jonah (2 Kin. 14:25) had ended by that time, making it a reasonable date for Amos's work. The exact time of the earthquake is not known, but it was significant enough to become a point of reference for Amos.

"THEME: The Certainty of Judgment

“Amos, a forerunner of three other outstanding eighth-century prophets—Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah—vigorously spoke messages resounding in the certainty of judgment. Each message of judgment was not only a warning, but also a call to repentance. Amos had a talent for prophetic and tactful oratory. He began by pronouncing judgment on the nations that surrounded Israel geographically. With staggering literary effect, he then focused upon Israel, predicting and interpreting the judgments of YAHWEH which were soon to fall upon her. Although the theme of judgment rings throughout the nine chapters like a recurring refrain, Amos does have brief passages of hope and predictions of restoration. The last two verses clearly predict a return of Israel to the Promised Land, after which there will be no more exile (Amos 9:11-15). The fulfillment of this phenomenal prophecy may have begun already in the twentieth century.” (*Believer’s Study Bible*)

“Amos - The Man

“Amos came from Tekoa, which was a Judahite village located about ten miles south of Jerusalem and six miles south of Bethlehem (Amos 1:1). We can better understand Amos’s preaching about the northern kingdom if we remember that the border of the northern kingdom and the sanctuary at Bethel were only about fifteen miles from Amos’s farm home in Tekoa. Samaria, the northern capital, was only a day’s journey away using the transportation methods of that day. Amos’s profession, according to Amos 1:1, was a shepherd. This title can refer to a keeper of sheep and/or goats. In a later passage, Amos 7:14, Amos calls himself one who ‘took care of sycamore-fig trees.’ Probably a more accurate translation would be one who ‘slits’ or ‘pinches’ figs (Stuart, 377). The sycamore fig tree was a large tree, but the figs were generally of an inferior type. Their quality was greatly enhanced if each fig was pinched or slit on the upper part of the fruit before it matured. The resulting fruit became sweeter and softer.

“The climate of Tekoa was not conducive to sycamore figs, so Amos most likely performed this part of his work in another part of the region. His book does not tell us whether he owned his own flocks and fig orchards or whether he labored as a hired hand for others. Whatever the case, he was itinerant. Both his shepherding and fig-slitting took him to different places. Undoubtedly, the observations he made as he traveled informed and fueled his comments on Israel’s situation before God.” (*The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier - Amos*)

“The word used for “shepherds” in 1:1 is not the usual Hebrew word ro’eh, but the rare word noqe, suggesting instead “sheep breeders.” The only other Old Testament occurrence of noqe is in 2 Kings 3:4 where Mesha, king of Moab, is said to have engaged in sheep-breeding on such a scale that he was able to supply the king of Israel with 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. Amos evidently managed or owned large herds of sheep and goats, and was in charge of other shepherds.” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

“Because of marginal and uncertain yearly rainfall, this area (Tekoa) was suited more for raising sheep and goats than for cultivating crops. Amos specifically calls himself a sheep breeder (Amos 1:1; Amos 7:14-15). The Hebrew term used indicates that Amos was not a hired shepherd, but the owner of one or more flocks of sheep.

“Amos also describes himself as a ‘tender of sycamore fruit’ (Amos 7:14). The sycamore fig tree bears thousands of figs very much like the common fig, but smaller and not as good. Before this fruit could ripen properly, a small hole had to be pierced in the bottom of its skin. This piercing was done by hand and was a tedious and time-consuming task. Why was Amos obliged to tend the sycamore? Western Judah, the oasis of Jericho, and lower Galilee were the regions where sycamore figs grew most abundantly. The shepherds needed to bring their flocks to one of these regions in late summer, after the desert pastures had dried up. Since this was the time for piercing the sycamore fruit, landowners would exchange grazing rights for labor. A shepherd could watch his flock while sitting on the broad limbs of the sycamore, piercing its fruit. Thus Amos was not a wealthy man. Wealthy sheepbreeders hired shepherds to tend their flocks. Amos followed his flock himself (7:15), and when that meant piercing sycamore fruit, he pierced sycamore fruit....

“The main theme of the Book of Amos is God’s passionate concern for justice. Justice is not an abstract issue with God. Instead, justice is relational; it promotes good relations between people and between groups of people. Injustice breaks down good relationships and breeds anger, hostility, and violence. God created the human race to enjoy good relations with Him and with each other; therefore, injustice that breeds alienation in all of its varieties breaks God’s heart.

“The renewed prosperity of Israel based on the successes of Jeroboam II brought new wealth to the upper classes. They used that wealth to enlarge their landholdings and to build great houses for themselves. They violated the rights of the poor and the landed peasants, throwing many off their ancestral lands. Through God’s provisions in the Mosaic covenant, the landed peasant class had been the foundation of Israel’s society. But under Jeroboam’s rule, this class virtually disappeared. As the rich became richer, the poor became poorer and more numerous; many were sold into slavery. Israel’s social structure became thoroughly unstable.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“The rich, in total disregard for God’s Law and for their fellow Jews, dispossessed farmers from their hereditary plots of land to build great personal estates. The poor were further oppressed by merchants who used unjust weights when buying and selling grain, and who mixed husks with the barley kernels. More and more people were forced to sell themselves and their children into slavery. Justice was for sale to the highest bidder. The wives of the rich demanded more and more luxuries. And no one gave a thought to the anguish of those who were defrauded to satisfy their desires.” (*The Bible Reader’s Companion*)

Amos came from the town of Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah and traveled north to prophesy in the northern kingdom of Israel. He speaks out against the evils being practiced in all the nations around. He also suggests that God is responsible for what happens in each of those nations. However, he pictures Israel and Judah as the most guilty because they have had the most light.

Amos was a contemporary of Hosea in the northern kingdom and Isaiah and Micah in the southern kingdom. All of them began their prophesying a short time before the northern kingdom of Israel was completely destroyed by Assyria in 723/722 BC. Their messages

served as a final warning to the northern kingdom. Amos was a simple shepherd and fruit-splitter. He made no special claims to fame. But he knew when the Lord spoke to him and he could not keep quiet about it.

Amos is famous for his statements about prophets. (See Amos 3:7; Amos 7:14) He also spells out clearly the uselessness of insincere worship (Amos 5:18-24; Amos 8:5-6). He clarifies some of the issues that apparently will prevail at the end of time (Compare Daniel 12:3 and Amos 8:11-12).

2. Amos 3:2 suggests that God has “known” only the children of Abraham. After making the other statements he makes about the surrounding nations, how can He make such a statement?

“Only you I have **known** of all families of the land,..” Young’s Literal Translation

“You only have I **known** of all the families of the earth:... (KJV, NKJV, Darby, ASV, RSV; NRSV)

“Of all the nations on earth, you are the only one I have **known and cared for....** (GNB)

“Out of all the families on earth, I have **known** no one else but you...” (God’s Word)

“You only have I **chosen** among all the families of the earth;...” (NASB; NASB, 1995)

“Of all nations on earth, you are the only one I have **chosen...**” (CEV)

“You only have I **chosen** of all the families of the earth;...” The New International Version

“Of all the peoples of the earth, I have **chosen** you alone...” The Living Bible

“I have **chosen** only you out of all the families of the earth,...” The New Century Version

“From among all the families on the earth, I **chose** you alone. New Living Translation

“You alone **have I singled out** Of all the families of the earth”... *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*

“You alone **have I favored**, more than all the families of the earth;...”(NAB)

“You alone **have I intimately known** of all the families of earth, *New Jerusalem Bible*

“you only **have I known [chosen, sympathized with and loved]** of all the families... *Amplified*

“Only you **have I acknowledged,..**” *Rheims*

“You only of all the families of the earth **have I taken care of...**” *Basic English*

This is the use of the word “know” in that special Biblical sense of knowing with intimacy (by experience) (Genesis 4:1; 1 Kings 1:4; compare Matthew 7:22-23) and real friendship. (See John 15:15) It is clear that God makes a direct connection between how we treat our fellow men and how God will treat us. The people of the northern kingdom were abusing the poor and cheating their customers in almost every way they could. (Amos 8:5-6) God had promised a special relationship to them through their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But God is a God of fairness and He cannot continue to bless those who are abusing others.

3. Do you think Amos won any popularity contests by starting out his book condemning the sins of everyone around him? (Amos 1 & 2; Compare Matthew 5-7) Is it ever a good idea to approach someone and immediately begin pointing out their sins? How do people usually

react? How did the people of Israel react? (Amos 7:10-13) Have you ever met anyone who wants to preach the “straight testimony” by pointing out the sins of all around him?

No doubt the Israelites rejoiced to hear him condemn their enemies! But they were not so happy to hear his words about themselves. Amos had a very serious message to bring and he probably felt that he didn't need to win any popularity contests! Many people in our day feel called to point out the sins of all around them. How do we know they are not sent by God? Should we speak up when we see sins in the church and the community? In order to really represent God correctly we must tell the truth, but we must do it in love. This generates a feeling of trust (faith). Those who feel called to point out other's sins are often very obnoxious and even self-righteous. Did they think Amos was like this? Can we speak the truth in love in such a way as to convict hearts but not offend?

4. Is it true that “the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets?” (Amos 3:7, *NIV*; Compare Deuteronomy 29:29; 2 Chronicles 20:20)

Do you think this is a promise from God or an observation made by Amos from his understanding of Scripture? Surely we have enough evidence that God will let us know what we need to know. Many prophecies have been given even covering events down to our day. This is not so we can predict in advance what will be in tomorrow's newspapers but so that when we see these events take place we will have even more reason to trust Him. (John 13:19; 14:29) God knows in advance everything that is going to happen in the entire universe. We call this characteristic of God's knowledge His omniscience. See Psalms 139; Daniel 2, 7-9; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Zechariah 4:10; Isaiah 53; Isaiah 40:13-14,25-28; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Revelation 12-22.

God obviously cannot and should not tell us everything. (See John 21:25) We would not be able to handle that much information, nor would we use it in the best possible way. But it is good for us to know that God is not surprised by events that take place. He knows what is coming. This does not mean that everything is already fixed by predestination, or that God arbitrarily controls everything, but as God He has the ability to step outside of our four dimensions of time and space and apparently look forward and backward. We cannot understand how He does this, but there are many other things that God does that we cannot understand! If we could understand everything He does and all about Him, we might consider ourselves to be somehow on His level and somehow equal to Him.

5. What do you think of Amos' description of the sins of God's people? Had they become irreligious? (Amos 4:4-5; Amos 5:21-24) Can you think of any later groups who might fit these descriptions? What about us? Do we ever boast that we give generous offerings and pay a faithful tithe? (Amos 4:5) Does God cringe as we sing our hymns? (Amos 5:23)

While they were cheating the poor and being dishonest in their business dealings, they were “faithfully” worshiping their “gods” including Yahweh! They were doing almost everything that they could to give the appearance that they were correctly serving Yahweh. But it did not seem to have any effect on their day-to-day lives! They gave extra offerings and attended all the religious ceremonies just as the Pharisees did many years later. (Matthew 23:1-36; Mark 12:38-44; Luke 20:45-21:4)

What is it that really constitutes true worship? Is it the expensive church? Is it the professional musicians or the great choirs or perhaps charismatic preachers? Real worship consists of a humble willingness to learn on the part of God's children who honestly and sincerely are seeking to "know" Him better. (Compare Amos 3:7; Hosea 6:6) God has gone to incredible lengths to make Himself known to all who take His name, but often they have completely misrepresented Him in return. Are we doing that in our day?

6. Why do you think the people of the northern tribes to whom Amos spoke were longing for the day of the Lord? (Amos 5:18) Doesn't even our name (Adventist) suggest that we are longing for the day of the Lord? Notice God's attitude to the people who were religious for the wrong reason. (Amos 5:21-24)

Amos 5:18-20:

- ¹⁸ Alas for those who long for the day of the Lord!
Why long for such a day?
The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness, not a day of light.
- ¹⁹ It will be like a man running from a lion,
Only to find himself clutched by a bear.
Like a man who runs into his own home,
And as he leans his hand against the wall
Is bitten by a snake.
- ²⁰ Is it not true that the day of the Lord
Will be darkness and not light,
Pitch-darkness with no brightening gleam? (*Phillips*)

For a discussion of what the "day of the LORD" might include, see **Joel - A Teacher's Guide** #'s 2, 6, and 7. The citizens of Israel were no doubt looking forward to the day when they believed that their enemies would get what the Israelites felt was coming to them! The Israelis thought that this would result in a glorious day for them when the size of their kingdom would expand and they would become the proud rulers of the "civilized" world. But God cannot bless us if we are not doing His will, and it has never been His primary goal to give His people worldly wealth and power. The only purpose for God putting the children of Israel where they were in the land of Palestine was so they could be witnesses to the world. This was a task and responsibility they never took seriously and may never have accepted! They wanted to conquer their neighbors not win them!

In our day, we proudly proclaim through our very name that we are looking forward to the coming of our LORD. Do all those around us long to get to know our God because of the wonderful examples that we show them in our daily lives? Are we "faithful" Christians because we believe that some day we will be rewarded for our efforts, or so we can better help those around us? Are we ever guilty of dishonest business practices? What are we saying to the world by the way we worship? Do our religious services attract the people of our community?

7. What is the meaning of Amos 5:21-25? (Compare Jeremiah 7:22-23; Isaiah 43:23; Exodus 6:6-9; Acts 7:42-43; Galatians 3:19-25) After reading all the commands and laws in Exodus through Deuteronomy, can you believe this verse? Is this a contradiction in the Bible?

See **Jeremiah Teacher's Guide #9**. In Leviticus, God seems to delight in the smell of offerings that are brought to him. This statement is repeated a number of times: Leviticus 1:9,13,17; Lev. 3:5; etc:

"...qusiā, ojsmh; eujwdiā" twīkuriwī" *Septuagint*

⁹ "...a fire-offering of **sweet fragrance to Jehovah.**" *Young's Literal*

⁹ "...an altar-flame of **a satisfying odour unto Yahweh.**" *Rheims*

⁹ "...an offering made by fire, of **a sweet savour unto the LORD.**" *The King James Version*

⁹ "...an offering made by fire, **a sweet aroma to the Lord.**" *The New King James Version*

⁹ "...an offering made by fire, **of a sweet savor unto Jehovah.**" 1901 ASV

⁹ "...a fire-offering **of soothing savor for Yhwh.**" *The Five Books of Moses*

⁹ "...an offering by fire **to Jehovah of a sweet odour.**" *1890 Darby Bible*

⁹ "...an offering by fire, **a pleasing odor to the Lord.**" *The Revised Standard Version*

⁹ "...an offering by fire **of pleasing odor to the Lord.**" (*NRSV; Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*)

⁹ "...an offering made by fire, **an aroma pleasing to the LORD.**" (*NIV*)

⁹ "...offering by fire, **a soothing aroma to the Lord.**" *God's Word*

⁹ "...an offering by fire of **a soothing aroma to the Lord.**" (*NASB, NASB 1995*)

⁹ "...in smoke with **a smell that pleases me.**" *The Contemporary English Version*

⁹ "...**The smell of this food offering is pleasing to the Lord.**" (*GNB*)

⁹ "...an acceptable burnt offering **with which the Lord is pleased.**" *The Living Bible*

⁹ "...**sweet-smelling oblation to the LORD.**" *The New American Bible*

⁹ "...an offering made by fire, and **its smell is pleasing to the Lord.**" (*NCV*)

⁹ "...food burnt as **a smell pleasing to Yahweh.**" *The New Jerusalem Bible*

⁹ "...a whole burnt offering made by fire, **very pleasing to the Lord.**" (*NLT*)

⁹ "...a food-offering **of soothing odour to the LORD.**" *Revised English Bible*

⁹ "...and **the fragrance of it will appease Yahweh.**" *Jerusalem-RC*

⁹ "...This offering is called the whole burnt offering because it is a sign of a man's total dedication to me. The offering of the animals's head, fat, legs and internal organs are a sign of his giving his whole heart, soul, mind and strength to me. **This kind of dedication pleases me.**" *Clear Word*

But after making these statements in Leviticus, we find what appears to be quite a different sentiment in the prophets:

Amos 5:21-27: ²¹ The LORD says, "I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! ²² When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. ²³ Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. ²⁴ Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.

²⁵ "People of Israel, **I did not demand sacrifices and offerings during those forty years that I led you through the desert.** ²⁶ But now, because you have worshiped images of Sakkuth, your king god, and of Kaiwan, your star god, you will have to carry those

images ²⁷ when I take you into exile in a land beyond Damascus,” says the Lord, whose name is Almighty God. (GNB)

²¹ I loathe and despise your festivals;
Your meetings for sacrifice give me no pleasure.

²² You may bring me your burnt-offerings, your meal-offerings,
Or your thank-offerings of fat cattle,
And I shall not so much as look at them.

²³ Let me have no more of your noisy hymns;
My ears are closed to the music of your harps.

²⁴ Instead, let justice roll on like a mighty river,
And integrity flow like a never-failing stream!

²⁵ Was it sacrifices and gifts that you brought me all those forty years in the desert, you house of Israel? ²⁶But now you must bear the burden of Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god—idols which you have made for yourselves. ²⁷And I will send you away into exile far beyond Damascus. The Lord, whose name is the God of hosts, has spoken. (Phillips)

Acts 7:42-43 (quoting Amos 5:25-27 from the LXX translation): ⁴² “So **God turned away from them and gave them over to worship the stars of heaven**, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

**‘People of Israel! It was not to me
that you slaughtered and sacrificed animals
for forty years in the desert.**

⁴³ **It was the tent of the god Molech that you carried,
and the image of Rephan, your star god;
they were idols that you had made to worship.**

And so I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.” (GNB) [quoted from LXX of Amos 5:25-27]

Jeremiah 7:22-23: ²² **“I gave your ancestors no commands about burnt offerings or any other kinds of sacrifices, when I brought them out of Egypt.** ²³ But I did command them to obey me, so that I would be their God and they would be my people. And I told them to live as I had commanded them, so that things would go well for them.” (GNB)

Isaiah 1:12-15: ¹² Who asked you to bring me all this when you come to worship me? Who asked you to do all this tramping about in my Temple? ¹³ It’s useless to bring your offerings. **I am disgusted with the smell of the incense you burn.** I cannot stand your New Moon Festivals, your Sabbaths, and your religious gatherings; they are all corrupted by your sins.

¹⁴ I hate your New Moon Festivals and holy days; they are a burden that I am tired of bearing.

¹⁵ “When you lift your hands in prayer, I will not look at you. No matter how much you pray, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with blood. (GNB)

Isaiah 43:23: ²³ “You did not bring me your burnt offerings of sheep;
you did not honour me with your sacrifices.

I did not burden you by demanding offerings

or wear you out by asking for incense.” (GNB)

Exodus 6:6-9: ⁶ “So tell the Israelites that I say to them, ‘I am the Lord; I will rescue you and set you free from your slavery to the Egyptians. I will raise my mighty arm to bring terrible punishment upon them, and I will save you. ⁷ I will make you my own people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God when I set you free from slavery in Egypt. ⁸ I will bring you to the land that I solemnly promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as your own possession. I am the Lord.’” ⁹ Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to him, because their spirit had been broken by their cruel slavery.” (GNB)

Galatians 3:19-25:

¹⁹ What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham’s descendant, to whom the promise was made. The Law was handed down by angels, with a man acting as a go-between. ²⁰ But a go-between is not needed when only one person is involved; and God is one.

²¹ Does this mean that the Law is against God’s promises? No, not at all! For if human beings had received a law that could bring life, then everyone could be put right with God by obeying it. ²² But the scripture says that the whole world is under the power of sin; and so the gift which is promised on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ is given to those who believe.

²³ But before the time for faith came, the Law kept us all locked up as prisoners until this coming faith should be revealed. ²⁴ And so the Law was in charge of us until Christ came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith. ²⁵ Now that the time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us. (GNB)

It seems that the burning of offerings was never God’s ideal or even His original plan. What God wants is for us to come to Him with an honest desire to get to know Him and thence love Him. He apparently accepted the burnt offerings because the people had come to regard this as the proper way to approach God.

At the gate of Eden, God apparently gave the sacrificial system to teach us about the seriousness of sin. But by the time of Moses, that original goal had been lost sight of and the offering of sacrifices had become a sort of ritual to appease an offended God. This was never God’s plan. Even in His original appeal to Moses, God made it clear what He wanted. (See Exodus 6:6-9 above) When the plan had lost its original meaning it was of no further value in God’s eyes. He certainly was not looking for a system to appease His “wrath”!

8. How could Amos say, “I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet?” (Amos 7:14, *Phillips*) What did he mean? Why did Ellen White make a similar statement? (1 *Selected Messages* 32) When Paul says, “I am the least of the apostles,” (1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8) was he right? Was he “the worst of all sinners?” (1 Timothy 1:15)

“Early in my youth I was asked several times, Are you a prophet? I have ever responded, I am the Lord’s messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. My Saviour declared me to be His messenger.” (1 *Selected Messages* p. 32)

1 Corinthians 15:9: "For I am the least of all the apostles—I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church." *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

Ephesians 3:8: "I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ,.." (*GNB*)

In this passage Amos is simply stating the fact that he was not a trained "prophet" and had not had the privilege of attending one of the "schools of the prophets." He was also making it clear that he was not on the king's payroll as a paid "prophet." (See 1 Kings 18:19; 1 Kin. 22:6; 2 Chronicles 18:5) Paul felt that he should be considered the lowest of the apostles because he had persecuted the church in his younger days. We know however that he was probably the greatest champion of the truth since Jesus died. Ellen White describes herself as a messenger. These humble statements made by God's friends should not be taken very literally or cause us to look down on them!

9. Weren't the people in Amos' day faithfully keeping the Sabbath? (Amos 8:5) Did it do them any good? (Amos 5:21-24; Amos 8:5-6) Is it possible for a certain kind of Sabbath keeping to turn us against God?

It should be painfully clear from the experience of the Pharisees in New Testament times that even a very faithful "observance of the Sabbath" doesn't make one into a saint. It is only when we understand why we are worshiping God and observing the Sabbath that it can be of value to us. The Pharisees developed more than fifteen hundred separate rules for Sabbath-keeping and thus for many minds turned the Sabbath into perhaps the greatest symbol of legalism. After killing the One who gave them the Sabbath they rushed home to keep another Sabbath/Passover to prove that they were God's true people! Such worship is useless.

In Amos' day it was quite clear from his writings that the Sabbath-keepers did not let their religion get in the way of their business practices! If we follow their example, and then observe the Sabbath as a way of proving that we are God's true people we are no better than they were.

10. In Amos 8:11-12 there is a prediction of a famine of the Word. What kind of a famine would this be? "They shall run to and fro' to seek the word of the Lord." (Other occurrences of this Hebrew word are found in Job 1:7; Job 2:2; Daniel 12:4; and Zechariah 4:10. Compare DA 234,5; GC 356) Could this "famine" be still future? Is there anywhere in the world today where, if a person wants the Word, he cannot find it? Aren't Bibles available almost everywhere in the world? Or is this referring to a "blindness" that prevents people from knowing the Word?

The ultimate famine—the loss of God's Word

¹¹ See, the days are coming, says the Lord God,
when I will send a famine on the land.
It will not be a famine of bread or waters
But of hearing the words of the Lord.

¹² Men shall wander from sea to sea,
They shall run to and fro,
From the north to the east,
Seeking the Word of the Lord,
But they shall not find it. (*Phillips*)

There have been many times in history when God's word was very difficult to obtain and in some cases the only ones who were allowed to read it and interpret it to the masses were the priests. There have been other times when the Scriptures have been quite readily available and yet their teachings were largely ignored. Which of these types of "famines of the Word" would be most likely in our times? Daniel 12:4 suggests that this "famine" will be at the end of time.

How many of the peoples of the world, even of the Christian world, have a correct understanding of God's word and a correct picture of God's character? The millions of people who feel that God must be appeased, and those who believe that God will throw His enemies into an eternally-burning hell, do they have a correct understanding of His character? What kind of understand of God's character do those have who believe that God must be continually pled with to forgive us?

It seems most likely that the "famine of the word" that will take place at the end of time will not be a time when copies of the Bible are not available, but rather a time when copies of the Bible are most readily available but few people take the time to read and understand them correctly.

11. Notice the last words of Amos in 9:11-15. So often God warns His children and then adds words of hope. Israel seemed to think that because they were "children of Abraham" disaster could not touch them. Was God's final promise to Israel in these verses ever fulfilled? Is it possibly still future? Do you think what is happening in Israel in our day fulfills these words?

Amos 9:11-15:¹¹ The Lord says, "A day is coming when I will restore the kingdom of David, which is like a house fallen into ruins. I will repair its walls and restore it. I will rebuild it and make it as it was long ago.¹² And so the people of Israel will conquer what is left of the land of Edom and all the nations that were once mine," says the Lord, who will cause this to happen.

¹³ "The days are coming," says the Lord,
"When corn will grow faster than it can be harvested,
and grapes will grow faster than the wine can be made.
The mountains will drip with sweet wine,
and the hills will flow with it.

¹⁴ I will bring my people back to their land.
They will rebuild their ruined cities and live there;
they will plant vineyards and drink the wine;
they will plant gardens and eat what they grow.

¹⁵ I will plant my people on the land I gave them,
and they will not be pulled up again."

The Lord your God has spoken. *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*

No doubt the faithful of Israel are reading and claiming promises like this one in Amos. And some may indeed be reaping a portion of the blessings that God intended for them. But for the most part, this prophecy was not fulfilled, and certainly not in the way many in Amos's day must have hoped. It is very encouraging however to note that God almost always ends even books where severe warnings are given and where prophets speak very plainly about the sins of the people with words of hope and comfort describing what could happen if the people would follow God's complete will for them. What kind of prophecy might God send to us today? Would it be something like the book of Amos?

12. How does God feel about other nations? Amos 9:7-8:

The Lord sees all nations—

⁷ Are you not the same to me, says the Lord,
As the Ethiopians, you men of Israel?
Was it not I who brought up Israel
Out of the land of Egypt;
And did I not bring the Philistines from Caphtor,
And the Assyrians from Kir?

⁸ See, the eyes of the Lord God
Are watching the sinful kingdom,
And I will wipe it off the face of the earth.
Nevertheless, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob.
It is the Lord who declares this. (*Phillips*)

“**Ethiopia** refers to the region near the southern horizon of Israel's geographical knowledge, south of Egypt. God's rhetorical question told Israel that they were not the only recipients of God's attention and care. God loves all peoples, even **the Philistines** and **Syrians**. **Caphtor** refers to Crete, a large island in the Mediterranean Sea.” (*Nelson Study Bible*)

“**Egypt ... Caphtor ... Kir**. By making Israel's Exodus from Egypt poetically parallel (and hence implicitly equal) to His dealings with other nations, God tells Israel that she has become no better than the pagans.” (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

So much of Scripture seems to talk about Israel and Judah as “God's special people”, or “My own people” etc. Here is a passage that seems to suggest that God takes special care of all nations. This passage even mentions by name some of Israel's worst enemies.

13. Could you pick out one word that describes the “God” of the book of Amos? Would it be A) loving? B) consistent? C) Judgmental? D) Angry? E) Some other word?

This is an opinion question. What do you think?

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