

Amos:
Choices Have Consequences, Too
Teacher's Guide
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An Important Note To Students And Teachers

God's desire is to use His character and power to bless us. He refused to "give up" on us when humanity became (by choice) everything God did not create it to be. His creation, including people, was "good" (Genesis 1:31). It was people's choice to become "evil." God's original intent was for us to be and know only good.

When we failed God through rebellion, God did not give up. When people proved it was impossible for them to correct their mistake, God did not give up. God's intent was to rescue people from evil through a Messiah. That was His promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3b). His intent was for Israel to lead people to God (Isaiah 49:6). His purpose from His promise to Abraham was to send His son to serve as our Messiah or Christ (Acts 3:12-26). We are the saved because God sent Jesus to be our Christ.

However, there is a limit to God's patience. God does not anger easily, but He has a "point of anger." Unlike humanity, His anger is just. When His just anger is aroused by human rebellion and indifference, the resources that would have blessed are redirected toward our destruction. Amos' message is an unforgettable example. In the entirety of the Kingdom of Israel's existence, there was not one king who led his subjects to God. Repeatedly, they turned to idolatry. Their religious efforts for generations insulted God. Finally, God could endure no more. He sent Amos to tell them of certain destruction.

Amos' message came at a time of great prosperity and political stability. God's declaration seemed impossible. Amos underlined two offenses that irritated God: (a) their use of prosperity for self-indulgence; (b) their abuse of poor and needy Israelites. Amos made two points that are chilling. Point one: God does not prosper His people for the purpose of self-indulgence. Point two: When God's people exploit the poor and needy, they do so to their own spiritual destruction.

Amos in a basic way deals with the objective of life. Is life to be defined by self-indulgence? Do powerless people exist to be used by powerful people? Amos declared that God's purpose for His people is the opposite of a self-indulgent lifestyle. He also declared the abuse of the poor (either by exploitation or ignorance) is an abuse against Him. The height of deception in any generation is in believing security results from confidence in (a) who we are and (b) what we accomplish. Because of deception and wicked behavior, they who were God's people would no longer exist as a nation. God's people became God's enemy by forsaking God's ways. This is a relevant message for us today!

Lesson One

Important Background

Text: read the Book of Amos (9 chapters)

The purpose of this lesson: To provide some background of the people to whom the message of Amos was sent and to provide some background on the study of the book of Amos.

King David, the second King of Israel, ruled well. Though he made some personal mistakes, there was never a question that he belonged to God. When he became aware of his mistakes, he accepted personal responsibility for the mistakes (rather than resorting to self-justification), and repented. He ruled over a United Kingdom composed of twelve tribes known as Israel.

King David made some horrible mistakes that produced consequences. However, David had resolved (on his most basic level) that he would belong to God no matter what. David made mistakes, but he accepted personal responsibility when he made mistakes (upon realizing his mistakes) and repented.

It is insightful to note that David was more dependent on God before his rule as he ran from Saul than when he was King. His worst personal mistakes were made when he had physical success.

King Solomon was Israel's third king. He began his rule in wonderful fashion with God at the center of what he did. Under his early rule, the United Kingdom (the twelve tribes) was prosperous as Solomon expanded the kingdom's territory and influence.

A wonderful, faith-filled beginning does not guarantee a righteous, faith-filled conclusion. We always remain creatures of choice, creatures who can be tempted.

Often Solomon's expansions were made by treaties. Then treaties among kingdoms were often sealed by the intermarriage of the royal families of the kingdoms. In his success, Solomon accumulated a number of idolatrous wives. Due to the influence of these wives on Solomon, the older Solomon adopted their idolatrous gods (1 Kings 11:3, 4).

In Solomon's time (and long before and after) agreements between two royal families in two kingdoms could involve a marriage between the two families. The seeming rationale: violation of a treaty was less likely if it might result in the suffering (or death) of a family member.

Though God wondrously blessed Solomon, the time came when his wives had more influence over him than did God.

Jehovah God was furious at Solomon for turning to idolatrous gods (1 Kings 11:9-11). He had abundantly blessed Solomon. He told Solomon of His fury. (Read I Kings 11:1-13.) As a consequence of Solomon's idolatrous behavior, Solomon's son would not rule a United Kingdom of twelve tribes when Solomon died.

Evil is the opposite of God and a powerful enemy of God. For people (God's creation) to yield to evil is a grave insult to God. Though Solomon was powerfully blessed by God, he still could turn to other gods. Note that yielding to evil produces consequences.

Ten of the tribes were given by God to Jeroboam. In fact, God promised to bless Jeroboam in the same manner He blessed King David if Jeroboam would follow God with King David's loyalty and obedience (I Kings 11:28-38). However, when Jeroboam became king he feared that he would be deserted by his tribes if these people returned to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish temple (I Kings 12:26-29). In that fear, he made two worship centers in his territory (Dan and Bethel), made a golden calf for each, and announced they were Israel's gods (the ten tribes) that brought them from Egypt.

Because of Solomon's evil, his son (Rehoboam) lost 10 of the 12 tribes when he came to rule after Solomon died.

God would have blessed Jeroboam as He blessed David if Jeroboam committed himself to God as did David.

Personal fear is the enemy of faith in God. Fear can cause one to deny God's acts!

King Jeroboam's decisions began a rule in the breakaway ten tribes (known as Israel) that lasted for just over two hundred years. In these tribes during this period: (a) idolatry was the official religion [though Jehovah God was often included in the gods they worshipped], (b) there was never a reform king or a period of national repentance, and (c) this kingdom maintained its distinction from the Kingdom of Judah. Judah was at times a cooperative neighbor, at times simply there, but was often an enemy.

When people make ungodly choices, their ungodly choices continue to influence lives long after they are dead.

Though Jeroboam did not begin a ruling dynasty (no ruler of the ten tribes produced a perpetual dynasty), he did begin an ungodly influence that refused to die.

Amos was sent by God to prophesy to these people near the end of the two-hundred year period. Though that kingdom was quite successful during Amos' time by a physical standard, Amos declared the kingdom to be a horrible failure because of the ungodly behavior of the people.

Physical success never proves spiritual success.

God warned, but the people refused to listen.

People can pass a "point of no return"—repentance certainly can bless, but consequences certainly will happen. Repentance does not occur as a way to avoid consequences.

Amos was sent to tell the people of Israel that they would endure the consequences of their behavior. Though by all the physical standards around them—a king who had served as king for years, seeming stability, an age of prosperity, and a luxurious lifestyle—declared success, Amos declared things were miserable and the unthinkable was unavoidable.

When we make ungodly choices, we will endure the consequences of our decisions.

Again, physical success does not declare spiritual success.

God had issued numerous calls to repentance, and none of those calls were noted or heeded. The time of responding was past. The full consequences of ungodly behavior would now occur. The blessings of repentance were possible, but the consequences of their continued behavior were a certainty.

We need to note and heed God's warnings. The failure to hear God because we ignorantly do not know God still produces the consequences of ungodly choices.

Consequences are not always immediate.

Amos' message/writing is sobering for numerous reasons. (a) Amos pronounced some serious, major consequences in a society in a period of major accomplishments, major expansion, and major prosperity. Though the period by physical standards was outstanding and significant, Jeroboam II hardly receives anything more than a mention in the biblical record. What to people would be an astounding time under a truly successful king was absolutely unimpressive to God because it was a period of ungodliness.

People's circumstances and situations change. But human greed, selfishness, deafness to poverty and injustice, and love of the material never changes. People's basic weakness and love of the physical never change—those weaknesses and that love exist in every generation.

(b) It was a period of significant ungodliness because it was a period of injustice that exploited the poor. People were more concerned about their standard of living than they were about the suffering and struggles of other people.

One's standard of living is not the meaningful proof of his or her success. People's treatment of people is the ultimate measure.

(c) Many thought they could obtain God's blessings (or at least His silence) by performing what they regarded as basic rituals rather than having the kind of faith that trusted God. Their approach to godliness was to pacify God rather than to serve Him. Obedience to God was a matter of perfunctory rituals, not a matter of faith in the One Who is the Source of Blessings.

God cannot be pacified or controlled. God is served.

It is easier to "tip one's hat" to God than it is to actually belong to Him. Ungodliness is ungodliness in spite of human definitions and priorities.

We do not declare or determine what is ungodly. We learn what is ungodly and why it is ungodly.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Summarize King David's rule over the United Kingdom.

It basically was a good rule. Though David made some (serious) personal mistakes, he unquestionably belonged to God. He accepted responsibility for his mistakes rather than resorting to self-justification, and he repented. For the United Kingdom, it was a time of expansion, stabilization, and prosperity.

2. Summarize King Solomon's rule over the United Kingdom.

It began with God at the center of what Solomon did. It ended with an older Solomon adopting the idolatrous gods of his wives.

3. Explain how his treaties contributed to Solomon's departure from God.

It was not unusual then for a treaty between kingdoms to be sealed with an intermarriage within the royal families. (The thought was this: if a member of one family is a part of the other family, the treaty will be taken seriously because failure to honor the treaty could bring harm to the royal family.)

4. How did God react to Solomon's idolatrous practices?

God was angered by Solomon's idolatrous practices and warned Solomon not to continue them.

5. To whom (after Solomon's death) was leadership over ten tribes given?

Leadership over 10 tribes was given to Jeroboam.

6. Because of personal fear, Jeroboam did what?

He established worship centers in his kingdom's territory at Dan and Bethel, he made golden calves for each, he said the calves delivered Israel from Egypt, and he told the people they did not need to go to Jerusalem.

7. What was Jeroboam's fear?

He feared that if his kingdom went to Jerusalem to worship, the people would return to Rehoboam, his kingdom would be dissolved, and he would be killed.

8. What three things began in these ten tribes with Jeroboam's rule?

- a. *Idolatry was the official religion of the kingdom.*
- b. *There was never a reform king or a period of national repentance.*
- c. *This kingdom remained distinct from the kingdom of Judah.*

9. When did God send Amos to prophesy to these people?

God sent Amos near the end of the two-hundred year period during the rule of Jeroboam II.

10. Physically, how would that kingdom look to people? Why?

To people, the kingdom would look quite successful. The king had ruled for a long time. The situation seemed stable. It was a time of prosperity. Important people had luxurious lifestyles.

11. How did that kingdom look to God? Why?

To God, the kingdom was a failure. There was much injustice, and the poor were exploited. Ungodliness made the kingdom a failure to God.

12. Give three reasons for us to look at Amos' message/writing as sobering.

- a. *Amos' warning came at a time when the kingdom appeared to enjoy physical success.*
- b. *It was a period of ungodliness because it was a period of injustice and exploitation of the poor.*
- c. *Many thought they could pacify (control) God through basic rituals and perfunctory obedience.*

13. Ungodliness is ungodliness in spite of what?

Ungodliness is ungodliness in spite of human definitions and priorities.

Lesson Two

The Power of Human Choice

Text: Jeremiah 18:5-10

The purpose of this lesson: To stress (1) that relationship with God is not simple and (2) God has a purpose for any people who are willing to be God's people.

Among the most difficult biblical topics is the one of God's interaction with people. Among the reasons for it being a difficult topic is the nature of the situation. The situation involves the interaction of an eternal being Who has creative powers with a physical being who deceptively believes he can manipulate the eternal being. It involves the interaction of the eternal being who made the physical being. This interaction includes: (a) a physical being who is accurately "knowable" to the eternal being; (b) an eternal being Who is completely unlike the physical being (Isaiah 55:8, 9); and, (c) a physical being who, at best, is limited to understanding the material. The nature of the situation demands that it be a faith relationship in which the material being trusts the eternal being.

Do not pretend that we possess all the answers in the area of God's (the eternal being) interaction with humans (the physical beings). [Such pretences create problems for your students later when an answer fails to deal with all aspects of the problem. The fact that you do not know THE answer does not mean God's answer does not exist.] Every approach to this problem begins with some basic assumptions.

By revelation, we understand that the physical beings God created as sinless beings were quite different from us. (We cannot even imagine a sinless existence.) We understand that the coming of sin into human physical existence altered physical life in dramatic ways. We understand that restoration of physical life to a positive relationship with God results in a profound change in physical existence. We understand that the full restoration of a sinless state and complete relationship with God results in a state of existence that exceeds physical comprehension, a reversal of the dramatic changes that sin produced in physical existence.

The nature of this interaction/relationship was debated extensively and intensively before you were born, and will continue to be debated long after you die. The physical being will use the material in every way he can to explain the eternal being, but no amount of material understanding is ever enough to fully encompass the eternal.

The question and its answers will continue after generations pass because our answers never fully encompass the realities of the eternal. No generation will eliminate the element of faith in any answer proposed.

Some things are constantly affirmed in scripture. (1) The physical being is continually accountable for his choices. (2) The physical being's repentance has a profound impact on his

relationship with the eternal being. (3) The physical being can progress into the ungodly and anti-godly to the point that it is “too late” for him to escape the consequences of his ungodly choices.

The physical beings are accountable for their decisions, can repent (and must), and can proceed into ungodliness to the point that consequences of choices cannot be reversed. We commonly refer to such moments as “passing the tipping point.” In our ungodly choices/decisions, we humans can pass “the tipping point.” A paradox: relationship with God is always possible even when a physical being’s choices pass “the tipping point.”

Consider today’s text. The location of the revelation is in a potter’s house. While that is an unknown to most of us, it was highly known and understood to Jeremiah’s intended readership. Their eating utensils, many of their food preparation implements, and many of their “necessary for life” utensils were made by a potter. The origin of an exquisite piece or a common piece began in the same way: a lump of clay placed by the potter on his potter’s wheel.

The potter’s house, the potter’s products, and the contribution of a skilled potter to daily life in every circle was well known. Everyone depended on the potter, his skill, and his products—the use of the potter’s products made daily life possible.

It was unthinkable (and impossible) that a lump of clay would suggest to the potter what it wanted to become. The product the lump of clay became was the result of the potter’s intent, not the clay’s request. God was the potter. Judah was the clay.

Everyone understood clay did not tell the potter what to do. In the same sense, God would not be told what to do. Judah was the clay; God was the potter.

The point is not a declaration of predestination. The point was an affirmation that God had an intent for Judah. God’s intent, not Judah’s desire, determined the ultimate outcome. God’s intent, not Judah’s desire, determined Judah’s future.

The point being made was not about predestination. The point focused on (a) the power of God, and (b) that God had an intent He was carrying out. Judah’s objective was not to change God’s intent, but to allow God to use her to achieve His intent.

God’s intent (to bring a blessing to all people) began with His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3b. (See Galatians 3:16.) That intent unfolded in various ways as God worked through Israel, then Judah. In this physical world, God’s intent reached its initial goal in what God did in Jesus’ death and resurrection (consider Acts 3:11-26 and 10:34, 35.) God’s intent will reach its full conclusion when Jesus, as the resurrected Christ, again makes God the “all in all” -- (a) when Jesus Christ defeats all God’s enemies, and (b) gives the people of God to God (consider I Corinthians 15:24-28.)

The problem was seen in the fact that Judah was not willing to allow God to use them as He had long intended. The people who were supposed to belong to God, who existed to devote themselves to God's purposes, had become so ungodly that they were useless to God. God needed to remind them that He was the potter and they were the lump of clay. They did not control God's intent. They existed to serve God's purposes.

The generation of Judah condemned in the book of Jeremiah did not even exist when God expressed His intent in His promise to Abraham. The issue: God would keep His promise—would do what He intended to do with or without that generation of Judah's compliance. Judah's rebellion would not keep God from keeping His promise, from achieving His intent. The question was whether Judah wanted to turn from her ungodliness and assist God's purposes.

Was there nothing they could do? (People always seek a means to defer consequences. Every generation wishes to defer consequences to the next generation.)

No one enjoys enduring the consequences of bad choices.

There was something potent they could do, but the potency of this "doable" thing would not avoid consequences of her ungodly decisions. Judah could repent of her ungodliness. She again could become useful to God's intent rather than arrogantly rebelling against God by selfishly pursuing her own desires and purposes.

When humans pass the "tipping point" in ungodly decisions, avoiding consequences of bad choices is not an option. The option available is becoming what the humans should have been before ungodly rebellion occurred. Repentance is more than saying to God that one is sorry for his bad choices. It is a redirection of one's life away from rebellion and ungodliness even if that means enduring the consequences of past rebellion and ungodliness. Why? Because there is always more to consider than "right now."

While everyone in Judah would admit it was ridiculous for a lump of clay to instruct the potter on what to make it, Judah needed to understand there was something they could do. Judah needed to understand the power of repentance in their relationship with God. They needed to stop trusting in who they were and begin to behave like God's people.

In every generation, people need to understand (honestly) their position in their relationship with God.

As a reminder and an encouragement God gave Judah two affirmations about the power of human repentance in God's relationship with His people. Affirmation one: If God has declared calamity against a nation, and the people repented, God would relent on bringing the calamity. Affirmation two: If God declared He would bring blessings on a nation, and that nation turned to ungodliness, God would withdraw the blessings and replace them with evil.

God is not "locked in" in regard to assurances given or punishment promised. Human repentance allows God to redirect His immediate course (not His ultimate intent). Human

behavior expressed in deeds motivated by repentance has a powerful impact on God in the Eternal One's relationship with the physical one.

Judah could not change God's intent. She could not dictate to God how she wanted Him to use her. Nothing would allow her ungodliness to continue and life be lived as it had been—that was not an option.

The option in every generation: to be available to God to assist in His intent in Jesus Christ.

God's intent had not changed! If there were to be changes, those changes would be in Judah. The option: Repent, and let God use you as a people for His intent.

God's ultimate intent will never change! Repentance will change us, but we will never be in charge of directing God.

For Thought and Discussion:

1. What is among the most difficult biblical topics?

The topic of God's interaction with people is among the most difficult biblical topics.

2. List three things included in the interaction of God (the eternal being) with the human (the physical being).

a. This interaction includes a physical being who is accurately "knowable" to an Eternal Being.

b. It includes an Eternal Being Who is completely unlike the physical being.

c. It includes a physical being who is limited to understanding the material.

3. The nature of the situation demands what?

The situation demands that it be a faith-based relationship in which the physical being trusts the Eternal Being.

4. What does the physical being do? No amount of material understanding will do what?

The physical being uses the material to explain the Eternal Being. No amount of material understanding fully encompasses the eternal.

5. List three things biblically affirmed.

a. The physical being is accountable for his choices.

b. The physical being's repentance has a profound impact on his relationship with the Eternal Being.

c. The physical being can progress into the ungodly and anti-godly to the point that it is "too late" to escape the consequences of ungodly or anti-godly choices.

6. In what location did Jeremiah's revelation occur?

It occurred in a potter's house.

7. What typically occurred in a potter's house?

The making of eating utensils, food preparation implements, and many "necessary for life" utensils occurred.

8. What was unthinkable and impossible?

It was unthinkable and impossible for the lump of clay to tell the potter what the clay wanted to become.

9. The point was not what? What was the point?

The point was not a declaration of predestination. The point was an affirmation that God had an intent for Judah.

10. What was the problem?

The problem was seen in the fact that Judah was not willing to allow God to use them in the way God had long intended.

11. How ungodly had Judah become?

Judah had become so ungodly that they were useless to God.

12. What do people always seek to do?

People always seek a means to defer consequences.

13. What did Judah need to understand? What was it?

Judah needed to understand there was something she could do. Judah needed to repent of her ungodliness—only that would restore Judah's relationship with God.

14. List God's two affirmations.

a. If God declared calamity against a nation and the people repented, God could relent on bringing the calamity.

b. If God declared blessings on a nation and the people turned to ungodliness, God could withdraw His blessings and replace them with His wrath.

15. What was Judah's available option?

Their option was to repent and yield to God's intent.

Lesson Three

“Get them God! ... Uh-Oh!”

Text: Amos 1:1-2:8

The purpose of this lesson: (Begin by noting last week’s text focused on Judah, and this week’s text focuses on the ten tribes know as Israel.) (1) God’s approach is provided in a way that will have full impact. (2) God is deeply concerned about how people treat people.

How frequently have we become the victim of our own attitudes? How often are we guilty of using a double standard to justify ourselves and condemn our enemies? Is it not true that we are guilty of doing what we condemn in others?

We will receive the benefits of Old Testament and New Testament statements when we ask ourselves questions and reply with sober responses.

The author, Amos, gives us three ways to date this prophecy. He spoke this message to Israel during the reign of King Uzziah in Judah (792—740 BC), during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel (793—753 BC), and two years before the earthquake (used as a historical reference point by other writers).

Remember there were no international calendars with common, universal dating systems then (calendars and an international dating systems are something we take for granted today.) Most ancient dating was by what we would regard as local events. Dating ancient events occurs by cross-dating local events.

Amos was not someone who trained to be a prophet. We would likely think of him as a herdsman and a farmer. These were not “glamorous” occupations, but common, essential occupations. Some of the other prophets were apprentices to a recognized prophet or went to schools for prophets (neither were condemned if the people accurately heard and faithfully delivered God’s message to others). Amos was not affirming “the virtue of ignorance” but affirming God’s message is not confined to those who train.

This is not an affirmation of “training versus no training.” In fact, Amos likely would not even understand that “modern” discussion. At best, it probably is an affirmation that God was not limited in granting a prophetic message. The fact that Amos was not trained would not likely have been of any advantage to him. There were those who were thoroughly trained—like Moses who was referred to as a prophet (see Deuteronomy 34:10 and 18:15 along with Acts 3:22 and 7:37).

He was from an area south of Jerusalem. Thus we have a man coming from the Kingdom of Judah to prophecy to the Kingdom of Israel. Unfortunately, people in the Kingdom of Israel would not expect a prophet from the Kingdom of Judah to have something good to say about

the Kingdom of Israel. They would be likely to attribute the prophet's message to prejudice rather than to God.

Depending on the relationship between Samaria (the king's city in the Kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (the king's city in the Kingdom of Judah), a spiritual message from Judah to Israel might not be welcomed.

Amos' message was truly a "hard sell" for the situation then. In both kingdoms, it was a time of prosperity and political stability. Even to this day, times of economic prosperity and political stability are equated with "everything is okay." It is extremely difficult to create an understanding that "danger is upon us" if we are prosperous and our society is stable. Times of danger are associated with economic distress and political instability. Amos's message from God declared, "Nothing is okay!" at a time when prosperity and stability screamed, "Everything is better than fine!" Unless a person is paranoid, he prefers not to see "danger" in the face of "fine"!

A warning of danger in times of prosperity and political stability is a difficult warning to take seriously anywhere at anytime. Conditions of prosperity and political stability never are seen as indicators of danger. Spiritual danger can exist when material signs suggest that all is well.

The danger was real! God Himself was depicted as a hungry lion roaring. God was roaring from Jerusalem (not a place Samaria [the capitol of the Kingdom of Israel] wished to receive a spiritual message). The sheep pastures and the constantly green top of Mount Carmel took God's roar seriously!

A roaring lion, pastures in grief, and a place that was dry when it was always wet were not good signs! God Himself was upset!

Amos had a message from none other than the Lord Himself in verses 1:3-2:8. Note several observations in the messages.

The message was God's, not Amos'. Amos was merely the spokesman.

Observation one: Amos' message began in a way that would put the Kingdom of Israel at ease. Israel would expect Amos to begin by declaring how bad they were. Instead, Amos began by declaring how bad their horrible neighboring nations were. Amos began by declaring how bad Damascus, Gaza (the Philistines), Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah were.

The neighboring nations had caused the Kingdom of Israel a lot of pain in the past. They were the kind of people who deserved "to have things go badly." As far as Israel was concerned, it was time these people "got what they deserved."

One almost can hear the initial response of the Kingdom of Israel. "It is about time! Those people have done terrible things, some of their terrible things were done to us, and some of them have done terrible things for a long time. We were at times bad, but never as bad as they

have been. It is past time for God to punish them for the bad things they did! Go, Lord, go! Lord, Your punishment is just and overdue!”

Israel rejoiced in the punishment and downfall of her past enemies. Her former enemies got what they deserved. We always deserve mercy. Our enemies always deserve justice.

Observation two: the injustices of these nations centered in abuses of people rather than in failures in spiritual rituals. An interesting case could be made for the idolatrous influences in the Kingdom of Israel. While there is some indication that YHWH (the Lord that created and was the God of Abraham) was acknowledged in Jeroboam’s (the II) reign, there is no indication YHWH was honored above their other gods—He was one among the others. In the declarations of Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 6:4, there would be no surprise if the existence of and the influences of idolatry were the core of Amos’s message from God.

Notice consistently the nations were to be punished because of the way they treated people. The frequent consequences were fire and the destruction of military defense systems, or massive devastation when they thought they were secure.

However, the concern of God’s message in Amos focused on the improper treatment of people rather than the improper treatment of God. That combined with Jesus’ statements should make us aware of how important our treatment of others is.

The core of the condemnation/consequences was focused on how they treated people rather than their idolatry.

Observation three: other people’s mistakes do not obscure our mistakes. The fact that Israel’s neighbors treated people badly did not excuse Israel’s bad treatment of people.

The evil of others does not excuse our evil. We are accountable for our actions regardless of the conduct of others.

Observation four: God is concerned with the existence of evil treatment of people even when it exists in people who make no pretense of being His people. Everyone is accountable for their actions even if they do not pretend to belong to God.

God’s concern for evil exists anywhere evil exists and expresses itself.

While God does not pronounce a consequence in Amos 2:6-8, the rest of Amos deals with the consequences Israel would pay. Especially note Amos 6:7, 8.

The unique thing about Israel’s condemnation is this: no consequence is pronounced. The rest of Amos will detail why God is upset and the consequence of exile.

For Thought and Discussion

1. As this lesson began, what does the lesson suggest we ask ourselves?

- a. Are we not often the victim of our own attitudes?*
- b. Do we not use double standards to justify ourselves and condemn our enemies?*
- c. Are we frequently guilty of condemning in others what we do ourselves?*

2. Give three ways Amos provided to date this prophecy.

- a. It was in the rule of King Uzziah of Judah.*
- b. It was in the rule of king Jeroboam II of Israel.*
- c. It was two years before the earthquake.*

3. Amos was not what? He was not affirming what, but what?

Amos was not trained to be a prophet. He was not affirming that it was a blessing to be untrained, but affirming God was not confined in providing His message.

4. To what was the Kingdom of Israel likely to attribute Amos' message?

They were likely to attribute the message to prejudice.

5. What about the "then" situation made Amos' message a "hard sell"?

It was a time of prosperity and political stability.

6. How did Amos depict God?

He depicted God as a roaring lion.

7. Give four observations about today's text.

- a. It began in a way that would put the Kingdom of Israel at ease.*
- b. The injustices of the nations centered in their abuse of people.*
- c. Other people's mistakes do not obscure our mistakes.*
- d. God is concerned with the existence of evil wherever it exists.*

8. What consequence does Amos 6:7, 8 declare on the Kingdom of Israel?

It declares the consequence of exile.

9. In today's text, what do you find to be the most insightful? (What should provoke in us some sober thinking?)

The answer to this question depends on the individual.

Lesson Four

An Offended God

Text: Amos 2:9-16

The purpose of this lesson: To stress that the way we treat people is taken by God as the way we feel about Him. The way we treat other people should be shaped by the way God has treated us.

Few happenings distress us as much as (1) doing something thoughtful and significant for someone in dire need, and (2) the one in need receiving the kindness without being appreciative.

Even before Christianity, the blessing of being a help to those in need was understood to be a righteous thing cherished by God. Read Deuteronomy 15:1-18.

This distress did not arise from the arrogance of an insecure benefactor who must have another's uttered praise in order to feel a sense of significance. Instead, it arises from the crushed spirit of a benefactor who cares deeply. This benefactor mourns because the helped does not know he was helped. The helped feels no appreciation because he is unaware of his needs. The helped seems to be "without a clue" as to what life would be without the benefactor's help.

There is a distinct difference between a deed of kindness done for the benefit of the giver (benefactor) and a deed of kindness done for the benefit of the needy. The difference is not seen in what the gift accomplished, but in the motivation behind the gift. See Matthew 6:1-4.

Amos did not depict an insecure, arrogant God who needed human praise. Amos depicted a grieved God mourning because Israel was "without a clue" of the many helps God provided them. The behavior of the helped became intolerable to the God Who helped.

God had not helped Israel for a selfish motive, but because He cared for Israel in her needs. God's concern for Israel did not proceed from arrogance but from a concern for Israel.

Much of Amos' message to Israel could be summarized in this statement: "He who in his need received help should show compassion to others in need."

The response of a caring God should make those blessed by God sensitive to the needs of other needy humans.

The Amorite people had a lengthy history in the area that dated all the way back to Abraham's times. In their early days they were a nomadic people who lived in the area Israel was to later inhabit. Numbers 21:21-32 spoke of a time when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, and

they (Israel) asked the Amorites for permission to peacefully, nondestructively pass through their territory. The Amorites refused that right to Israel, and a battle ensued. The end result was that Israel defeated these strong, now settled people, and Israel took the Amorite cities in the conquered area for their own. These were the places across the Jordan that were settled by Gad, Reuben, and half of Manasseh. Though the men of these tribes settled their families in this area, they were a part of Israel's army that conquered the area east of the Jordan River (see Numbers 32).

The Amorites began as a nomadic people in the region in Abraham's time and became a settled people prior to Israel entering Canaan as a united people. When the united Israel conquered Canaan, the Amorites were a part of the Canaanite nations that Israel (with God's help) conquered.

Amos cited five occasions when God was unquestionably helpful to the Kingdom of Israel. (These are not the only times God was with them.) The five occasions Amos cites are: (1) the defeat of the Amorites; (2) the deliverance from Egypt; (3) caring for them in the experience of the wilderness wanderings for forty years; (4) the conquest of the land they inhabit; and (5) the use of their sons as prophets and Nazarites.

Amos' point was that God was active in Israel's blessings from their beginning as a nation. They could trace all their blessings to God's help at essential times.

Note that we might summarize what Amos emphasized concerning God's help in this way: "You exist, you are what you are, and you have what you have because of what I did for you." Without God's help, they would not even exist.

There seems to be a prevailing temptation among an accomplished people to credit themselves for their accomplishments. The attitude seems to be, "Look at what we have done." God's involvement and role is insignificant. It seems the less aware a people become of God's help, the more selfish the people become.

Whereas God had helped them at critical moments, they resisted God's influence. God made their sons prophets (which was considered honorable in a society based on religion), but they would not permit their sons to prophesy things they did not wish to hear. Consider 2 Chronicles 18:1-27. In devotion to God, some of their sons took the Nazarite vow (which forbade drinking during the course of the vow), and they encouraged those under the Nazarite vow to drink. To read about the conditions of the Nazarite vow, read Numbers 6:1-21. It basically was an optional vow of individuals who (for a period of time) devoted themselves to the Lord by separating themselves from typical existence. Amos' point is this: "When people among you devote themselves to the Lord, you resist such devotion."

The more a people credit themselves with their achievements, the more they resist God's influence in their midst.

To illustrate the depth of God's frustration, Amos used several images. He basically said two things: (1) "You are too burdensome for the Lord to endure. (2) Escape from God's frustration with you is impossible."

#1 is not about God's power, but about Israel's selfishness and wickedness as a society. They had become so selfish and wicked that they were insensitive to God and to the people in need among them. # 2 declares that the things ordinarily looked to as guarantors of security were useless in the face of the danger that would devour them. Israel could not escape the consequences of her decisions and the behavior those decisions promoted.

Image #1

"I am exhausted trying to bear you—you are like a loaded wagon bringing in the bound sheaves at harvest." At harvest, people made sure a wagon was fully loaded with the bound sheaves—they did not wish to make any unnecessary hauls. The heavy wagon would settle down in the soft soil, and the wagon would be difficult to pull. The point: "You are too heavy a load for Me to pull!"

This is the image of an overloaded wagon bringing the harvest out of a field. Workers tend to overload carts or wagons (thus making the cart or wagon difficult to pull) during harvest because they do not wish to make another load. They increase work to decrease work.

Image #2

Israel's consequences are certain.

1. No matter how fast you are, you cannot run away.

The swift cannot run fast enough to escape.

2. No matter how strong you are, you are not strong enough to escape.

The strong man cannot save his life.

3. No matter how skilled you are in battle, you cannot defend yourself.

The accomplished Bowman or skilled rider of horses cannot escape or deliver.

4. No matter how brave you are, you will hastily flee in full retreat.

The bravest warrior will flee (he will regard it useless to stand and fight).

Those images are frightening! Though Israel was prosperous and the situation seemed stable, an inescapable danger was coming from which there was no escape and no deliverance. The ultimate consequence must be faced!

It is frightening because the security they trusted in the past (and they thought served them well) would prove itself ineffective in the danger that was coming. The consequences of danger produced by evil priorities, selfish decisions, and self-centered lifestyles were inescapable because they ignored God.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Few happenings distress us as much as what?

Doing something thoughtful and significant for someone in dire need, and having the person in need not be appreciative.

2. The distress does not arise from what? Instead, it arises from what?

The distress does not arise from an insecure benefactor. Instead it arises from the crushed spirit of a benefactor who cared deeply.

3. Why does the benefactor mourn? Why is the helped unappreciative?

The benefactor mourns because the helped does not know he was helped. The helped is unappreciative because he is unaware of his needs.

4. Much of Amos' message to Israel could be summarized in what statement?

"He who in his need received help should show compassion to others in need."

5. What does Numbers 21:21-32 speak of? Who eventually settled there?

It speaks of the conquest of a part of the Amorite territory. Gad, Rueben, and half of Manasseh eventually settled there.

6. What were the five occasions Amos cited when God unquestionably helped Israel?

- a. *The defeat of the Amorites.*
- b. *The deliverance from Egypt.*
- c. *God's caring for Israel in the wilderness wandering.*
- d. *The conquest of their territory.*

e. *God's use of their children.*

7. What statement summarizes Amos' emphasis?

"You exist, you are what you are, and you have what you have because of what God did for you."

8. How did Israel resist God's influence?

They discouraged their children from prophesying or keeping Nazarite vows.

9. How did Amos illustrate the depth of God's frustration? Give Amos' five images.

Amos used images.

a. *The heavily loaded wagon at harvest*

b. *The swift runner*

c. *The strong person*

d. *The person skilled in the military*

e. *The brave person*

10. Why are those images frightening?

Though the people were prosperous and the situation seemed politically stable, the danger (consequences) they would face was inescapable. The security they trusted would be ineffective in the face of the danger that would devour them.

Lesson Five

Spiritual Maturity

Text: Amos 3:9-15

The purpose of this lesson: To stress it takes a lot to make the God of grace angry, but when He is angry He has a just reason to be angry.

There are a few people that “it takes a lot to make them angry.” These are the people who are not easily provoked. Their tolerance of others is astounding! However, some get angry very quickly. They are easily provoked and quickly react with hot, negative emotions. There are still others who get angry and keep a sense of resentment for a long time—their anger (which may have been a just provocation) poisons their future because they cannot forget what happened in the past. They simply cannot “get past” an injustice that occurred years before to see the present for what it is.

Anger is not an ungodly emotion if it is (1) just, (2) short-lived, and (3) not allowed to fester into ungodly emotions/reactions. Read Ephesians 4:26, 27 and James 1:19, 20. Human anger is often not godly because (1) it is not just but an emotional reaction, and (2) it lingers to produce forms of ungodly behavior or emotion. It is not the anger that is ungodly, but either the basis of the anger or the product of the anger that is ungodly.

One of the major injustices against God usually involves God’s anger. Those who misunderstand God and have little understanding of scripture often portray God as an angry, intolerant being who quickly, emotionally reacted to any human provocation or perceived injustice.

God’s anger often produces problems for unbelieving people. Commonly, the problem is the result of (1) assuming God’s anger was an unjust response, (2) failing to understand the human wickedness that surrounded the divine response, or (3) both.

Consider the situation Amos addressed as an illustration. Begin with the understanding that Israel started as a United Kingdom which included all the Israelite tribes. That United Kingdom ended with Solomon’s death because of Solomon’s idolatrous acts. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, made some critical mistakes in seeking to become King of the United Kingdom, ten of the Israelite tribes made Jeroboam king, established a new kingdom known as the Kingdom of Israel, and permanently separated themselves from the Kingdom of Judah.

Amos’ prophecy can serve as a good illustration. There were likely godly people who were victims of the wickedness of the majority. Undoubtedly, there were children and infants who were victims. Even until this day, the innocent suffer when people endure the consequences of the decisions and behavior of the wicked.

In this new kingdom that appointed Jeroboam as king, several things were true. (1) God promised to bless Jeroboam and establish his dynasty in that breakaway kingdom if he wholeheartedly followed God [1 Kings 11:30-40]. (2) Jeroboam, in fear, turned to idolatry and refused to trust God [1 Kings 12:25-33]. (3) From the time this kingdom began, there is no scriptural record of it ever instituting a religious reform to return to God. (4) In the kingdom's 200 plus year history as a kingdom, there is repeated declarations of the wickedness of the kings of this nation [as examples, 1 Kings 15:25, 26; 15:34; 16:7; 16:13; 16:25, 26; 16:30, 31; 22:52, 53; 2 Kings 10:29-31; 13:2, 11; 14:24.] (5) If it is assumed that Amos prophesied around 760 B.C., the wickedness and rebellion of the Kingdom of Israel lasted just over 160 years before Amos declared God would exact the consequences of the Kingdom of Israel's wickedness. Though there were many past provocations in the Kingdom of Israel, never in those past provocations did God react as Amos declared was to come. God's promised reaction was hardly a quick outburst of anger over a minor incident of injustice and rebellion!

The long-term wickedness of the Kingdom of Israel illustrates many things including (1) unrepentant wickedness can endure for so long that the consequences of evil are inescapable, (2) when the consequences of evil decisions/behavior occur, all suffer, and (3) evil can include self-indulgent neglect as well as ungodly behavior.

God had been patient for generations, and the Kingdom of Israel was not even aware of God's patience. The Kingdom of Israel exploited God's patience like someone who is delivered from an impossible indebtedness only to use their deliverance to produce a new impossible indebtedness. There was no appreciation of God's patience, only an arrogance that increased the Kingdom of Israel's self-indulgence.

God's patience is not endless with a people who refuse to repent. Wickedness can persist to the point that even repentance will not eliminate consequences. The objective of repentance is improvement in the attitude and behavior of the person or people, not merely a declaration of "I am sorry" when the person sees consequences coming. Repentance is not a running from consequences, but a redirection of life.

Amos, in chapter 3, began to detail the reasons for God being infuriated. Chapter 3 only begins the reasons for God's deep frustration with the Kingdom of Israel. This frustration does not mean there were no godly people in that kingdom (see 1 Kings 18:3, 4 and 19:18 as examples). It means the Kingdom of Israel was wicked as a kingdom in spite of the presence of some godly people. (Is it not frightening to understand that godly people can suffer as the result of the wickedness of the majority?)

The subject of this lesson is not intended to suggest these were the only things that frustrated God in regard to the Kingdom of Israel. Many things in Amos' prophecy could be placed (properly) in a continuous examination of things they did to offend God. It is especially insightful to note that both self-indulgence and the neglect/exploitation of others are offensive to God.

Chapter 3 began with a series of rhetorical questions with obvious, predictable answers. The point: “With an unusual relationship with God also comes unusual responsibilities.” The fact these people in the past had a unique relationship with God meant they also had unique responsibilities. The fact such unusual responsibilities existed for them should be obvious! As a person had reason to fear when he heard a lion roar, the Kingdom of Israel had reason to be afraid when God was frustrated with them!

The objective of the rhetorical questions was to focus their attention on the undeniable truth of what Amos said. Self-justification was useless. “If you acknowledge this is true, surely you have to admit that is also true.” Amos was comparing the obvious to the obvious. Amos wanted the Kingdom of Israel’s offenses to be so obvious that they would not attempt to justify their behavior.

Thus God gave an invitation to the Philistines and the Egyptians to come watch what happens to those who offend God by (1) ignoring the needs of others and (2) trusting in the security they built.

This may have been done for one of two reasons. (1) God may have simply invited them to be witnesses. (2) Since each had a history that involved abusing and exploiting people, God was declaring this is what eventually happens to people who act in this manner.

God also could be saying to the Kingdom of Israel, “Do not count on any other nation to rescue you.”

God’s message to the Kingdom of Israel is this:

Note in these how “unthinkable” Amos’ warnings were in their situation of prosperity and political stability. In prosperous, stable times, a people facing danger usually are convinced they can “buy their way out of danger” or “some divine or human force will come to our rescue.” Amos declared neither would happen.

1. A superior enemy will surround you and make you powerless.
2. What you trust in as your protection and strength will not protect you—you will be looted as you powerlessly watch.
3. As a shepherd rescues pieces of a dead sheep to prove he did not steal the sheep, there will be nothing alive among you to rescue.
4. Your idolatry frustrates Me endlessly, and your false gods cannot protect their altars or you.
5. Your prosperous indulgence will not and cannot deliver you—your prosperity cannot buy your way out of My fury!
6. I, God, am telling you it is over!

This is a chilling rebuke for those who trust in themselves instead of the Creator God!

It is chilling to know that trust in "us" offends God. It is amazing to note that we become so acclimated to expressions of evil that we actually consider expressions of evil as expressions of good.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Give three reactions to anger found in groups of people.

- a. *People who do not get angry easily.*
- b. *People who get angry quickly.*
- c. *People who allow anger to become lingering resentment.*

2. What does one of the major injustices against God usually involve?

It often involves God's anger.

3. When did the United Kingdom that included all the tribes of Israel end? Why?

The United Kingdom of the Jewish people ended at Solomon's death. It ended because of Solomon's idolatrous activity.

4. State five things that were true of the Kingdom of Israel.

- 1) *God said if certain conditions of obedience were met He would be with Jeroboam and establish Jeroboam's dynasty.*
- 2) *Jeroboam, in fear as King, turned to idolatry and refused to trust God.*
- 3) *There is no scriptural indication of a religious reform in the Kingdom of Israel declaring a desire to return to God.*
- 4) *There are repeated declarations of the wickedness of the kings of that kingdom.*
- 5) *It was around 160 years before their wickedness provoked God enough to deliver Amos' message.*

5. How long was God patient, not destroying the Kingdom of Israel?

God's patience endured for generations.

6. Did God's frustration mean there were not godly people in the Kingdom of Israel?

Explain your answer.

There is scriptural reason to believe there were godly people in the Kingdom of Israel. Add to the evidences cited the work of Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah (1 Kings 22).

7. What should we today find frightening?

It should be frightening to understand that godly people can suffer as the result of the wickedness of the majority.

8. What was the point of the rhetorical questions in the opening of chapter 3?

Unusual relationship with God comes with unusual responsibility.

9. Give possible reasons the Philistines and Egyptians were invited to be witnesses.

- a) They were simply invited to be witnesses.*
- b) They needed to learn (see) that ignoring the needs of others offended God and produced consequences.*
- c) They needed to learn (see) that trusting in the security they built offended God and produced consequences.*
- d) Perhaps, a declaration to Israel that their rescue would not come from other nations.*

10. Give six statements of God's message to the Kingdom of Israel.

- 1) A superior enemy would surround them and make them powerless.*
- 2) When they trusted in their own protection and strength, they were actually powerless.*
- 3) There would be nothing alive among them to rescue.*
- 4) Their powerless idolatry frustrated God.*
- 5) Their prosperous indulgence could not deliver them.*
- 6) God said it was over!*

11. Why should all find this rebuke chilling?

It is chilling to realize that trust in self instead of God offends God.

Lesson Six

Why Was God So Angry?

Text: Amos 4:1-13

The purpose of this lesson is to stress indirect oppression of the poor and to note when religious solutions are ineffective.

No one can imagine going back. Each generation imagines only going forward. The older adults commonly shake their heads at the younger adults because of all the experiences the younger adults have not had. The older adults like to speculate on “what if ...” The younger adults commonly regard the older adults as irrelevant because they are so easily confused by today’s newer ways. They regard the “what ifs ...” of the older adults as concerns that have no meaning in today’s world. The older question the values of the younger, and the younger question the lack of flexibility in the older. Nothing is new in any of this—it has happened generation after generation.

This clash between the older adults and the younger adults has existed in most generations. New advances always make the “tried and true methods” obsolete. Ways of life and occupations disappear with advances.

Real crisis comes for everyone (old and young) when a new, unanticipated danger redirects existence into ways and experiences no one has had. In dramatic fashion, life cannot continue as it has been, and no experience in the past equates to the “new now.” No one knows what to do. These disastrous conditions have never existed. Nothing works. Everything gets worse as the “living nightmare” continues and unfolds into more dreadful events and conditions. No one—old or young—has answers.

A new crisis that has not been experienced by anyone distresses the world of everyone—regardless of age or experience. The tension of the disaster increases because neither the experience of the past nor the innovations of the present can manage the new circumstances. Life is changed for old and young.

Amos chapter 4 is not the only discussion of the reasons for God’s intense anger with the Kingdom of Israel. Many situations that contributed to God’s anger occur throughout the book of Amos. Reasons for the divine anger begin in the last of chapter 3 with God’s reaction to their false gods and their luxurious lifestyle. However, chapter 4 deals with reasons for God’s anger in unexpected ways—in passive contributors and in commonly recognized solutions.

There is no desire to make students think only Amos 4 deals with God’s anger. For examples, consider 6:1-8 or 8:4-10.

Begin with a simple understanding. That world in the Kingdom of Israel and our American world have little in common. In our American world, women earn incomes by being a part of the work force. It seems in most instances to be necessary for a wife to work in order to provide the level of necessary income to make possible the things that the family unit wants. (Single adult women are expected to work to provide their own needs.) There are very few things that men can do work-wise that women cannot do, and some things women do better than men. Even women in higher social levels have jobs with an income when they are in families that make such jobs unnecessary financially. (This is not at all the suggestion that women who are not in the work force and do not “earn an income” do not work and work hard.)

Discuss and consider the numerous reasons for women seeking income-providing jobs in 21st century America.

What Americans consider “job opportunities” for women hardly existed in the Kingdom of Israel in Amos’ time. To enable themselves and the family to exist, women did hard, difficult, demanding labor.

Note (perhaps discuss) the fact that honorable job opportunities did not exist for women in the Kingdom of Israel in Amos’ time. Do not let the discussion pursue the matter of women’s rights. The focus of the discussion is not on women’s rights then and now, but their view of success.

If you would like to read in scripture some of the things wives could do, read Proverbs 31:10-31. A woman’s dream in the Kingdom of Israel was to have a husband who was so financially successful that she would not have to engage in demanding, difficult work.

Women worked hard then, and some of their work generated income. However, women’s “job opportunities” were limited.

Success was viewed in terms of a lifestyle, not in terms of productive work. For a woman, “having it made” was having a husband who made a luxurious lifestyle possible. The cows of Bashan are the wives of financially successful men who lived in the royal city of Samaria.

For women then, the success objective was not to do hard work rather than finding a fulfilling job opportunity that provided a significant financial reward.

Important question: How did these women oppress the poor and crush the needy? Shocking answer: They did so by urging their husbands to make more (regardless of who was hurt in the husbands’ commitment to success), so the wives could continue and increase their indulgent lifestyle.

Emphasize their “non-direct” role in the problem of exploiting people in need. Discuss which is worse: (1) to have no income, or (2) to have an exploited income. Neither is justification for exploitation.

Shockingly, God was angered by a passive oppressing of the poor and crushing of the needy. These women were not indicted for any direct actions against the poor and needy. They angered God because their passion for a self-indulgent lifestyle pressured their husbands to “use” the poor and needy rather than to “help” the poor and needy. The poor and needy were opportunity, not people. These women were indicted because they were only concerned about their self-indulgence, not struggling people.

Please note this was at its foundation a spiritual problem, not an economic problem. The distinction between secular and spiritual is an artificial means of seeking to avoid the problem. Social problems are spiritual problems when the core of the issue is examined.

We are accustomed to thinking that only a direct action of behaving evilly results in any sense of accountability. Here accountability is incurred by pressures that encourage and become the motivations for evil acts. It was accountability through indirect pressure.

With God, providing the need/motivation for wickedness is engaging in the wickedness. It is not just “their fault” when our lifestyle/habits motivate them to do it. Righteousness is concerned with the impact of its acts, not merely the immediate result of its acts.

Often people regard the solution to evil’s consequences to be religious acts. As an example, think of common reactions in America after the twin towers were destroyed in the September attack of 2001. In the aftermath of the attack, God was invoked and acts of worship were profuse. The religious outpouring was astounding!

Performing a religious act of worship is not the same as genuine repentance. God does not exist to be manipulated for human purposes, but to be served.

God declared He would regard their religious acts as transgressions—sacrifices, tithes, thank offerings, and freewill offerings are declared to be transgressions. God would be offended by their religious acts!

It is possible to offend God through correct religious acts. While functioning correctly is important, the motive for functioning correctly is equally important. Honestly examine much of the first two-thirds of Matthew 6.

God previously tried to gain their attention through starvation (cleanness of teeth), a withholding of rain, major inconvenience, a destruction of gardens and orchards, plagues, and military disasters. They refused to listen, connect events with conduct, or understand. God tried to gain their attention before this ultimate disaster, but they would not listen. Their wickedness left God no choice!

Note two things: (1) God seeks to gain the attention of the wicked; (2) wickedness can go so far that God must act against it. That is especially true when the wicked should be righteous.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What can no one imagine?

No one can imagine going back.

2. When does real crisis come for everyone?

Crises come for everyone when a new, unanticipated danger redirects existence.

3. Amos chapter 4 discusses what? Name two things that make chapter 4 unique.

Amos 4 discusses some reasons for God's intense anger. It discusses (1) passive contributors to wickedness and (2) a common solution to an angry deity.

4. What simple understanding should begin your thinking? Contrast views of women.

The world of the Kingdom of Israel and the world of America today were quite different. The contrast should include many American women's pursuit of job opportunities versus their women's desire to escape hard work.

5. What does Proverbs 31:10-31 provide?

This scripture provides a picture of acceptable hard work for women in roughly that time period.

6. Women in the Kingdom of Israel then viewed success in life how?

They viewed success in terms of lifestyle.

7. Give the important question asked, and give the shocking answer.

The important question: How did these women oppress the poor and crush the needy?

The shocking answer: They did so by urging their husbands to make more so they could increase personal indulgence.

8. Shockingly, why was God angered?

God was angered by their passive oppression.

9. How are we accustomed to thinking?

We are accustomed to thinking only direct actions of behaving wickedly result in accountability.

10. What is the second way we are accustomed to thinking? How was God influenced by their religious acts?

We think the solution to evil's consequences is religious acts. God regarded their religious acts as transgression.

11. How had God tried to gain their attention?

God had tried to get their attention through starvation, withholding rain, major inconvenience, a destruction of gardens and orchards, plagues, and military disasters.

Lesson Seven

The Need

Text: Amos 5:1-17

The purpose of this lesson: To emphasize that people need God even when they do not realize it.

In all generations, people fail to grasp the destructive power of evil. It robs a person and a people of time, of physical strength, and of quality of life. It creates the illusion that “we are free and in control” when in fact, we are enslaved to our desires and out of control. Though the fact that we are enslaved and out of control many cost us our health, “cost is insignificant.” It may rob us of much or all of what we produce, but “it is worth what it costs.” It often causes those we say we love the most to suffer terribly, but “it is not our fault that they hurt.” Life is needlessly shortened, but we are deceived into believing we are lengthening life “by making living worthwhile.”

Evil hurts all of life in all of its expressions. Evil is not just a spiritual problem with spiritual significance expressed in spiritual consequences. Evil has destructive consequences on all of physical life.

No matter what happens as a result of our attitudes and actions, it is always others' fault. Later, people will analyze the reasons for our failures, but we never see nor recognize those reasons. In our eyes, we are never accountable for our mistakes. Though our ethics and morals are horrible, what happens is never a matter of ethics or morals. Our society crumbles around us as justice dies, the righteous are opposed, and the good are treated as enemies. Yet, if someone seriously asks, “How are things?” we seriously reply, “Everything is fine!”

People commonly have two reactions to consequences caused by evil. (1) Someone else is to blame for the consequences caused by evil. (2) Evil itself has no consequences if it is deemed helpful—things are fine even if evil is rampant.

It is amazing how rotten a society can be as its people pronounce it good! What commonly are the criteria used to measure people's attitudes and conduct? Is it a matter of finances? A matter of fulfillment of desires? A matter of standard of living? Or is it a matter of justice? A matter of respect for people? A matter of commitment to right and good? What determines when a people are successful? What determines when a society is beneficial and worthwhile?

Commonly, people do not associate social ills with expressions of evil. Those who make that association often do it in a manner that destroys their credibility. The result: people react to the presenters rather than reacting to the message or the concerns. Establishing the connection between the consequences of evil and social ills is often more complex than righteous people realize. More is involved than pronouncement or condemnation.

Often what people view as evidences of success are viewed by God as indicators of failure. People often in some way couple concepts of social success with financial success expressed in improvement of physical lifestyle. In societies, God defines success in the way people treat people. It is quite possible for a society to be successful in its own eyes while (at the same moment) it is seen as a failure in God's eyes.

The values of God and the values of people who are not concerned with God commonly are quite different.

In the book of Amos, the Kingdom of Israel would have said they were quite successful. The elite of society had an incredible lifestyle. The nation enjoyed a lengthy period of national prosperity. Jeroboam II had a lengthy reign, so the society enjoyed political stability. If people were in the right levels of their society, existence was incredibly good.

Success as defined by society and success as defined by God often are different. It is simple for godly people to accept society's definition of success instead of God's definition of success.

However, if you were stuck in the lower levels of society, people struggled to exist and endured continual injustice. Your level in society actually determined if life was good or life was terrible.

If things are going well for us in our level of society, it is easy for us to ignore how things are going for people in social levels beneath us.

God speaking through Amos said your condition is terrible. You need Me whether you know it or not. The pronouncement that matters is not yours ("All is great!") but Mine ("All is terrible").

Conditions as seen by God were quite different to the views of those who enjoyed material success. The successful thought they were doing quite well without "the interference" of the God who cared about the conditions of everyone.

First, consider your need (5:1-3). You have fallen, and you will not get up again. You are like a helpless virgin who has fallen in a field outside of the city. She is defenseless, and there is no one who will come to protect her in her vulnerable condition. Whether you know it or not, you also are defenseless, and no one will come to protect you. Though you think you are strong, soon you will have reason to mourn how few remain.

No one then would want to be as vulnerable as was the virgin. She was opportunity, not a person in distress. God said, even if you do not know it, that is how vulnerable you are. Do not be deceived by your present numbers!

Second, realize Who I am. Do not trust in your cities, your territory, or your defenses. Your security does not lie in any of those. Your security lies in Me. If My protection is lost, you will be consumed as if a fire devoured you. Do not think your strength is in yourselves. You will not make yourselves strong by making justice weak and holding righteousness in contempt!

It is easy to measure our strength by the wrong criteria. When we do that, we deceive only ourselves—not those who would exploit us. Never do people build strength by doing evil. It is never short-term results, but long-term stability.

I am the One Who made the stars you worship, Who changes the darkness of night into the light of morning, and Who takes water from the sea and puts it on the earth. I am the One who destroys the physically strong.

Strength is found by trusting in God and living by His values. That is always an investment, not a “right now” reward.

Third, contrast what I can do with what you have done. You hate the man who judges with integrity (you want a justice that can be bought and sold rather than a justice that is concerned with what is right). You charge the poor impossible rent and tax them unfairly (you make poor people’s existence impossibly difficult). While you do that to those who have little or no choice, you live in expensive houses.

People do not see their weaknesses until they see God’s strengths.

Here is what will happen to you. You will plant vineyards, but you will not own the vineyards when they produce. I know every wrong you have done, and your wrongs are huge! (You made the righteous miserable, you made justice a matter of economics, and you refused to listen to cases of poor people.) It is all going to come crashing down upon you. If you are smart, you will keep quiet instead of making matters worse by trying to justify yourselves.

We always view our enterprises with long-term views and plans in mind. Few are the people who understand just how fragile they are! We rarely look at evil as having consequences. People often consider the ways of good as too uncertain and too slow.

Fourth, it is time for you to repent! I, God, am the only hope you have! Saying, “I am sorry!” is not enough. It is time to search for good instead of following evil. You will do so because you despise evil and love good! It is time to stop making justice a matter of money—bribes are evil!

Repentance involves seeing (recognizing) the evil we have done and directing our lives away from the evil. That means we recognize good and pursue it.

Then—and only then—maybe I will listen to you and be gracious.

God’s favorable response to our dilemmas commonly involves our repentance. We cannot continue to pursue evil and expect God to bless our efforts.

Our mistakes are always small in our eyes. That is not the issue! The real issue is what size our mistakes are in God’s eyes. This text suggests there is a connection between (1) Our mistakes bringing us physical prosperity, and (2) The size of our mistakes in God’s eyes.

Often we refuse to recognize the connection. With God, there has always been a distinction between mistakes made in ignorance and mistakes produced by rebellion. See Numbers 15:27-31 and Hebrews 10:26-31.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What have people always failed to grasp?

People have always failed to grasp the destructive power of evil.

2. No matter what happens as a result of our attitudes and actions, what do we commonly do?

We commonly blame others (and refuse to accept personal responsibility).

3. Regardless of how rotten a society is, what do people in that society often do?

People commonly declare how good their society is.

4. Often what people see as evidences of social success are seen by God as what?

Often people's evidences are seen by God as indicators of failure.

5. In Amos, the elite of the Kingdom of Israel had what? What about the poor?

For the elite, life was good with an incredible lifestyle. For the poor, life was a struggle with lots of injustice.

6. People in the Kingdom of Israel were like what?

You are like a helpless virgin who has fallen in a field outside a city.

7. What did they need to realize?

They needed to realize who God is.

8. What had they done?

They hated people who judged with integrity, people who refused bribes, and people who were unconcerned about how well they lived.

9. Why would they plant vineyards but not own the vineyards when they produced?

This would happen because they were guilty of huge injustice.

10. What was it time to do?

It was time to repent.

11. What connection does Amos suggest?

A connection was made between the size of mistakes in God's eyes and their prospering from their mistakes.

Lesson Eight

“Your Hope Is No Solution”

Text: Amos 5:18-27

No matter what religious people do, they always are certain “God would approve.” (The contrast the writer is making is between religious people and righteous people. In this context, religious people know there are gods or a god, but do not depend on biblical revelation to determine the nature and character of deity. Righteous people use all of biblical revelation to consider and determine the nature and character of deity. Religious people commonly assume the nature and character of deity OR they absorb [with little question] the views of deity their culture reflects. Righteous people know deity exists by observing the world and life, but they also understand they cannot determine deity’s nature or character unless deity reveals itself. Religious people are not bound by the Bible and revelations in it. Righteous people are.)

Discuss the fact that “God likes what I Am doing,” or “Will ignore what I am doing,” no matter what it is. The discussion should include the human tendency to make God like we choose for Him to be AND the common willingness to be religious rather than to seek righteousness. Perhaps discuss the difference in RELIGIOUS and RIGHTEOUS.

Consider as an example people in today’s American culture. The example considers only people who are personally convinced that God exists (there are quite a number that reject any form of deity). How often do you hear people who believe that a god exists say, “My God does not think that way.” Or, “My God would not do that.” Or, “That is not the value of my God.” Or, “My God wants me to be happy (or have fun)”. Or, “That would never upset my God.”

Use common attitudes often heard today to illustrate the previous discussion.

If that person is shown biblical declarations that contradict his or her view, he or she says to you, or murmurs under his or her breath, or says to self after you leave, “That is not my God!” Here, one holds a view of God formed by revelation from the Bible. The other holds a view of God determined by something other than the Bible OR some statements from the Bible plus something else.

A person’s view of God may actually have little to do with the Bible. That view may be a reflection of the view of the family or of the culture.

In Amos 5:18, the people who received Amos’ message counted on ‘the day of the Lord’ for vindication that would make everything okay. We could focus for several lessons on their concept of ‘the day of the Lord’ and never note the point Amos made.

A popular view of God is this: "God is not disturbed with what is happening in my life because (a) God likes me and (b) God understands." Discuss BOTH the strengths and weaknesses of that view. When is it (appropriately) an encouraging view, and when is it a deceiving view?

A way of ignoring Amos' warning and reassuring themselves that everything would be fine was by "trumping" Amos' warning through an appeal to 'the day of the Lord.' It was similar to a Christian saying, "When God's final judgment comes, you will know I am correct! I am right and you are wrong, and God will prove it!"

We often treat views of God as if we were playing a card game involving trumps. If the people of the Kingdom of Israel thought their concept of God was superior, they could ignore Amos' warning. Their concept of God was correct, and Amos was wrong—so they could ignore Amos' warning.

To the people of the Kingdom of Israel, 'the day of the Lord' was a good event, not an event to be feared. They did not have anything to fear from God, and the 'day of the Lord' would prove they had no reason to fear.

They deceived themselves by making an event of undesirable consequences to be (in their thinking) a good event that would produce vindication.

God was not upset with them! Terrible times were not about to come! There was no danger on the horizon because God was upset with them! They were a religious people! 'The day of the Lord' would show Amos how mistaken he was!

If we deceive ourselves we can convince ourselves that spiritually everything will be okay. If we think it will be okay, it is okay.

Amos said to them, "You think 'the day of the Lord' will deliver you! You think for you it will be a wonderful event! You could not be more mistaken! For people like you, 'the day of the Lord' is not a deliverance event! You will be like the person who flees from a lion and runs into a bear. You will be like the man who goes to the security of his home, only to lean on the wall of his home and be bitten by a snake. 'The day of the Lord' will not bring you light or brightness. Instead, it will bring you darkness and gloom."

Amos said they had deceived themselves. Their thinking was backwards and wrong. They were not looking at themselves or God honestly.

Why were they so sure that 'the day of the Lord' would be an event that would deliver them from danger? Why did they think it would be an event that would prove that God was not upset with them? Why—because they were a religious people who did the 'right things' to keep God from being upset with them.

The reasons that led them to self-deception that were based on dishonest thinking are chilling! (a) They exchanged being 'religious' for being 'righteous' by putting being 'religious' in the place

of being 'righteous' and (b) they were convinced that keeping God happy was just a matter of doing correct acts of worship.

Hundreds of years previously they had come from idolatrous Egypt, who worshipped many different gods. Though God sent Moses, worked through the miraculous wonders of the plagues, delivered them from slavery, rescued them by a path through the Red Sea, and gave them Canaan as their homeland, still they never got idolatry out of their system.

These people grew from a large family to a nation of slaves in an environment that stressed idolatry. All God did for them did not uproot the idolatry.

YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah, often translated the LORD) to the Kingdom of Israel was one of many gods to be acknowledged or honored. Speaking simplistically, divinity in general was unconcerned with human affairs, but divinity could hurt humanity. Thus humanity must do 'the right things' to keep a god content. Humanity did not dare do the 'wrong things' and upset a god.

Two common concepts in that world were (a) there are many gods who exist in families, and (b) gods are not interested in the affairs of humans. Therefore they are more likely to hurt people than help people. The concept of there being One God who created and who was close to people because He cared was not a common concept. If you would like to see this One God contrasted with idolatrous concepts of gods (hundreds of years later), read Paul's sermon in Acts 17:22-31. Common views of deity were likely very different to your view of deity.

The Kingdom of Israel was certain they had 'done the right things'—from their perspective God had no reason to be upset with them. God said, "I hate your religious festivals, your solemn assemblies, your burnt offerings, your grain offerings, your fat sacrifices, and your songs to Me." Why? Were these not the 'right things' to do? They worshipped God. Why should He be upset?

It is easy to produce and believe in a view of God that is basically an extension of human thinking. Such views typically demand that God functions as humans want Him to function. It is easy to define God in terms of physical needs. Humans prefer for God to depend on them rather than they depend on God. If we produce deity, then deity approves of our desires and flaws.

God was upset because honoring Him in worshipful acts did not affect their daily acts. They failed to understand worship was meaningless if honoring God did not express itself in just, righteous daily acts.

We show that we honor God (a) in genuine acts of praise and (b) in the way we treat other people. Because people were created in the image of God, they were intended to be an extension of God. One of the important ways we show respect for God is by respecting people.

Amos made a profound accusation (also examine Acts 7:43). They took idolatry with them when they left Egypt (Amos 5:26), and never abandoned it! In spite of all God did for them, they never understood what it meant for God to be One, the only God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Exodus 20:1-6). The result: exile awaited them.

Instead of leaving idolatry behind, they took idolatry with them. It always has been difficult to change people's concepts.

Acts of worship are not a substitute for godly behavior. There is more to being righteous than keeping God happy.

A basic understanding of Christianity: the objective is not 'to keep God happy.' The objective is to serve God.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Give (in this lesson) the contrast between religious people and righteous people.

Religious people hold a view of god that comes from many sources. Righteous people look only to the Bible for their view of God.

2. Illustrate this in American culture. For what basic reason does the difference exist?

The illustrations are reflected in American people's statements that begin with "My God does ..." or "My God does not ..." The statements usually reflect a god that approves of what the person thinks or does.

3. For what did the Kingdom of Israel rely on 'the day of the Lord' to produce? Why?

They relied on the 'day of the Lord' to produce vindication.

It was a way of ignoring Amos' warning and refusing to repent.

4. To the Kingdom of Israel 'the day of the Lord' would be what? Amos said what?

To them, that day would be a good event. Amos said that they were terribly mistaken.

5. Why were they sure 'the day of the Lord' would be a day of deliverance?

(a) *They were a religious people.*

(b) *They did the 'right things' to keep God happy.*

6. What was Egypt religiously?

Egypt was idolatrous.

7. Why was the Kingdom of Israel certain God was not upset with them?

They were sure because they did 'the right things.'

8. Why was God upset with them?

God was upset with them because their worshipful acts did not affect their daily acts.

9. What was Amos' profound accusation?

They took idolatry with them when they left Egypt.

10. Acts of worship are not a substitute for what?

Acts of worship are not a substitute for godly behavior.

Lesson Nine

Do You Realize How Pitiful You Are?

Text: Amos 6:1-14

It is simple to be sold on our own goodness. All we have to do is to compare ourselves to someone near us. In fact, the comparison is better if we can make a comparison to several people. In our comparison, “I” am better (at least less offensive) than “they” are. Our comparison is human-to-human, not human-to-God. Thus, “I” am good because “you” (in “my” opinion) are worse than “I” am. “Your” ‘awfulness’ makes “me” good simply because “I” am not as ‘awful’ as “you” are. So no matter how bad “I” am, “I” am okay because “I” am not as bad as “you” are.

In the churches of Christ nothing is worse than “being wrong.” We have created the impression that we can be 100% right by doing the things we can justify. There are at least two problems that come with that view: (a) we build a ready-made, prefabricated situation for constantly feeling guilty or (b) we build a ready-made, prefabricated motivation for self-justification.

We can be 100% forgiven (through Jesus’ blood and God’s grace), but we are never 100% correct in our choices or behavior. We are not pure because we are 100% correct, but because we are 100% a recipient of God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ.

A result of the “100% correct” view is the deceitful practice of thinking “I’ am okay because ‘I’ am better than someone else. ” Repentance for a mistake, not self-justification, is the God-approved way of dealing with mistakes.

Many of us (Christian and non-Christian) use this reasoning often. If society is obviously more evil than I am, then I am okay because I am not as bad as society.

Self-justification achieved by proving “I” am better than “you” is a common way of declaring personal goodness in this society. Being better than other humans is irrelevant in Christianity. The only meaningful comparison is to God the Father or Jesus Christ.

One of the frightening but impressive things about Amos and his message to the Kingdom of Israel is this: “Compare yourself to God’s expectation, not to those around you.” In today’s lesson, Amos dealt with self-indulgence—an extremely difficult matter! “What ‘you’ do in your lifestyle is self-indulgent! What ‘I’ do in mine is necessary!” It seems common to view what “you” do as excessive and what “I” do as reasonable.

God had a purpose for all of Israel (as well as for Christians). The purposeful comparison is to God’s expectation. The question: “What does God wish to do through us?” Not, “How do we want to live?”

It is simple to be excessive when we live in a society filled with excess. “I” want to define what is excessive for “you,” but “I” want everybody to leave me and my lifestyle alone—“your” lifestyle is “on limits” to “me”, but “my” lifestyle is “off limits” to “you” and everyone else.

It is easy to be excessive in our lifestyle when people around us are excessive in theirs. That makes excessiveness feel normal.

It is also easy for us to expect others to live by standards that we refuse to live by. We like to criticize the way others use their resources, but we do not like for others to criticize us (they never understand us).

All of us see excess differently if we see what we have and use through the eyes of a deprived culture. Just to stimulate our thinking, carpeting looks different to people who live on dirt floors. Or, personal telephones look different to people who live in a town of thousands with few business phones. Or, having multiple cars for one family looks different to people in a city where only the extremely rich have one car.

What is excessive to you may not be excessive to me at all. It always depends on how things are seen. What is necessary to me may not be necessary to you.

Yet, we amazingly become accustomed to that which is commonplace. To grandpas or older people carpet, multiple cars in a family, and anything more than a “party-line” of 4 or more was excessive. To many of today, carpet, multiple cars in a family, and a cell phone are essentials. Carpet is everywhere in our society, and so are multiple cars in a family, and cell phones. Amazingly, if something is common, it quickly becomes essential. ‘Want’ becomes ‘need,’ and ‘need’ becomes ‘must have.’ Every parent of a teen understands this progression. However, the progression is not limited to teens.

The “want-need-must-have” progression is an interesting concept people urgently need to understand. The concept of being “entitled” to things or situations does not serve people in this (or any) society well. “Wanting” something does not mean a person is “entitled” to it when he/she makes no investment or effort. The fact that someone else has something does not mean I am entitled to have what he/she has.

Amos felt sorry for those who deceived themselves into thinking a lifestyle of ease declared the existence of security. He said they should examine other prominent cities near them. Would they say that nation was invincible because the elite had an incredible lifestyle?

“Woe” is not to be seen as merely a threat, but a sympathetic declaration that “you will have to endure the consequences.” The lifestyle of the Kingdom of Israel would result in horrible consequences, and Amos was sorry they would suffer those consequences. Self-deception can extract a terrible price!

In those societies, would the fact that the elite lived well postpone invasion and the violence it brought? If their answer was no, then why did they think an incredible lifestyle for the elite meant something different for them?

They would not expect an invincible security for anyone else in their circumstances. Why should they expect that security for themselves?

Amos described the lifestyle of the elite—ivory beds, leisurely furniture, the best of foods, entertaining music (and they had no electricity or technology gadgets), exquisite wines served in exquisite containers, and the latest in skin care. The problem: they were not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. They were so wrapped up in their lifestyle of excess that they did not even notice the suffering of their brothers living in dire poverty. In fact, their excessive lifestyle contributed to the suffering of their brothers. They forgot God had a purpose for all of them, and it was not reflected in their excessive lifestyle.

Then, an incredible lifestyle lived by the elite invited invasion. Their lifestyle screamed they were a people of wealth who were worth invading. Whereas their lifestyle might not sound wonderful to Americans, it was an incredible lifestyle for almost 3000 years ago.

They were so concerned about maintaining and advancing their lifestyle that they were unconcerned for the suffering all around them. How they treated their suffering brothers was more important than any expectation of an exceptional lifestyle. They thought only of themselves and their pleasures, not of God's purposes.

The result: their excessive lifestyle would be but a dim memory when they were defeated exiles.

Their excessive lifestyle would become a victim of their exile.

How upset was God with their fixation on lifestyle instead of the suffering of their brothers? God swore by Himself (there was none higher to whom He could appeal) the situation would not continue. When their strength disappeared, the best they could hope for was to be unnoticed when they hid. They would be that helpless! All they valued in their excess would be hopelessly destroyed.

Note the three consequences they would endure for their selfishness. (a) God would act against them. (b) They would have no strength as they helplessly hid. (c) Everything they had valued would be hopelessly destroyed.

It would happen! Exile was certain! Why? They turned justice into poison (no justice existed), righteousness to bitterness (righteousness and their lifestyle could not co-exist), and they trusted in themselves instead of God.

Nothing could avert their exile! Exile would happen because: (a) justice did not exist, (b) righteousness had no place in their society, and (c) they failed to trust in God.

People are never as strong as they think they are. People believe in themselves instead of God's purpose, and they never realize this is weakness until it is too late.

When the biggest thing we trust in is ourselves, we are in huge trouble—even if we deny trouble exists.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is it simple to be sold on? How do people do that?

It is simple to be sold on our own goodness. It can be done by human-to-human comparisons.

2. If society is obviously more evil than "I," then how do "I" reason?

"I" reason "I" am okay because "I" am better than society is.

3. What is one of the frightening but impressive things about Amos' message?

It was to their failure to compare themselves to God's expectation.

4. In chapter 6, what does Amos address?

Amos dealt with self-indulgence.

5. It is simple to be excessive when what is true?

It is simple to be excessive when we live in a society filled with excess.

6. Who looks at what we consider normal differently?

Those who live in a deprived culture look at those who have more as being excessive.

7. What do we become accustomed to?

We become accustomed to things or situations that are commonplace.

8. Who did Amos feel sorry for?

Amos felt sorry for those who were deceived by thinking a lifestyle of ease meant security was certain.

9. Would the lifestyle of the elite postpone invasion and the violence it brought?

No, it would not.

10. Describe the lifestyle of the elite. What did they not notice?

They had beds made of ivory, leisure furniture, the best foods, entertaining music, fine wines served in exquisite vessels, and the latest in skin care. They did not notice the suffering of their brothers living in poverty.

11. What was the result?

Their excessive lifestyle would be a dim memory when they were exiles.

12. How upset with them was God?

He (using Himself for the basis of His oath, since He could appeal to nothing higher) swore they would go into exile.

13. Why was exile certain?

(a) There was no justice, (b) there was no place for righteousness in their society, and (c) they trusted in themselves instead of God.

Lesson Ten

It Is Too Late!

Text: Amos 7:1-8:3

We all have had the experience of knowing we made a serious mistake when it is too late to correct the mistake. Once in graduate school, the final examination allowed the students to select one of several questions. The examination was to fully answer the question selected. After writing furiously for over two hours, I suddenly realized that I had begun my answer at the wrong place. With only 15 minutes left, I tried to connect my answer to the correct beginning. I knew I was not successful, and my examination grade proved it. I realized my mistake much too late.

Perhaps let students (who wish) share “too late” experiences. You are looking for “too late” experiences that have obvious consequences to illustrate this: “too late” experiences have consequences that are more than inconvenience. Perhaps you can discuss the difference between a depressing situation and a “too late” situation.

The mistake may be made in a project, in a situation, or in a relationship. It may be job-centered, family-centered, friend-centered, or congregation-centered. Ask a divorced person when the “killing” mistake occurred in the non-existent marriage, or former close business partners who became alienated, or former good friends who are no longer acquaintances, and all of them will likely be able to identify the “too late” moment.

The point you wish to make: “too late” situations can occur in a number of ways. Those situations typically produce consequences that have a basic impact on your life and cannot be avoided. We are not talking about a depressed attitude or outlook. We are talking about definite happenings that cannot be prevented—the loss of a job, the loss of a house, the loss of a relationship, etc.

It is chilling to know that even in the closest relationship, a “too late” moment can come. To me, the most horrifying thing regarding such moments is that always we seem to know when those moments occurred looking back. Rarely do we see such moments coming. In fact, we are often surprised when they occur.

Typically, we identify “too late” moments when we begin experiencing the consequences of those moments.

The more we realize that “too late” consequences happen, the more (a) we take nothing for granted, (b) we invest caring and awareness in that which is important, and (c) we factor in the “too late” awareness when we make our choices and decisions. We refuse to neglect people and relationships.

We need to understand that we can produce such moments in our relationship with God through our attitudes, our behavior, and our priorities. God is incredibly patient. He is incredibly kind, forgiving, and merciful. However, we can heap such abuse on our relationship with God that we drive God from us. There is a difference between ignorance resulting from a lack of exposure to knowledge and rebellion that proceeds from an “I don’t care” attitude. One did not know any better, but the other acted out of a defiant attitude. Even people often are sympathetic to those who did not know, but have a different attitude regarding those who are defiant.

We definitely need to be constantly aware that we can abuse God and our relationship with Him. While we must depend on His mercy and grace, we must not abuse His mercy and grace. Assuming divine mercy and grace always will be there even if we direct our lives by a “don’t care” attitude is abusing His mercy and grace.

Generations before, their forefathers knew the attitudes and lifestyle of the Kingdom of Israel were ungodly. Though there had been a time of knowledge and understanding, their forefathers failed miserably to pass that knowledge and understanding on to their children. Instead, following generations cultivated a “do not care” attitude toward God that was communicated well. The result: abuses of God constantly multiplied and grew increasingly serious.

Early generations of all 12 tribes of Israel clearly understood the dire consequences of (a) neglecting poor Israelites [Deuteronomy 15] and (b) the selfishness of greed [consider Deuteronomy 24:19-22]. The time came (for generations) that the Kingdom of Israel lost complete touch with “who God wanted them to be.” Losing touch with God’s expectations for His people always is destructive to His people. It always results in people abusing God’s love and care.

God tried to call their attention to what was happening, but God’s efforts failed. God told their forefathers prior to entering Canaan the consequences that disobedience would produce (read Deuteronomy 28).

It is amazing to note things we “never saw” until we begin to pay the consequences of “too late” moments. Things we failed to note while we were in the midst of those moments have a striking clarity when we pay the consequences of a “too late” moment.

God planned to send a locust swarm to eat the vegetation just as the seed sprouted. Amos saw how horrible the consequences would be. He pled with God not to destroy the Kingdom of Israel, and God changed His mind. Yet, the Kingdom of Israel neither heard nor learned anything. Nothing changed.

Often the harm God brings to us through the consequences of our choices is delayed through the pleas of a righteous person. However, eventually what we are measures us for the consequences we pay.

The Lord intended to send a fire that would produce major destruction. Amos saw God's intent, and he pled with God not to destroy the Kingdom of Israel. God did not follow through with His intent. The people did not change their attitudes or behavior.

See the above comment. Illustrate the power of a righteous person's pleas.

Then God measured them with a plumb line. What they were would determine God's actions. Amos was silent. It was "too late" to plead with God. The wickedness of Israel was beyond the pleas of a righteous man.

See the above comment. Illustrate that the time comes when we are measured by what we are.

The Kingdom of Israel's reaction was the opposite of repentance. The high priest of Bethel told the king that the words of Amos were undermining the confidence of the nation. The high priest even told Amos to return to his own kingdom and prophesy. He was neither wanted nor needed in Bethel (a worship center in the Kingdom of Israel).

Amos told the high priest (Amaziah) that Amos was doing only what God told him to do. The day would come when the high priest's wife would be a prostitute, his children would be killed, his land would be sold, and he would die in a gentile country as an exile.

We do not have to repent even in the face of the obvious. Repentance is a choice.

Also note there are numerous motives for maintaining ungodliness. Our justifications for being ungodly are many.

We rarely enjoy people pointing out our flaws or making us look at the consequences of our behavior.

Just as ripe fruit marked summer's end, the Kingdom of Israel was facing her end.

This is a striking illustration for them that declares the period of good and ease (summertime) is over. The "unchangeable" is about to change—what "is" was not indefinite. The point would be more striking to a society in which there was no form of preservation of "summer fruits" by canning or freezing. What a profound way to say to them, "It is over! The end of 'the good life' is here!"

Desperate times were surely upon the Kingdom of Israel! Their wickedness brought those days upon them! They, not God, were responsible for what would happen!

Denial would not change their future. The consequences of choices were certain.

Among the lessons to be learned, three are chillingly obvious: (a) A "too late" moment in our relationship with God can come because of our abuse of God. (b) If it arises, all God has to do

is to let us face the consequences of our attitudes and behavior. (c) God is under no obligation to protect the people He loves if those people reject Him.

As Christians, we should pay close attention to all three lessons.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What experience do many of us have in common?

The experience of knowing we made a serious mistake when it is too late to correct the mistake.

2. In what ways can this mistake be made?

The mistake can occur in many ways—on the job, in family relationships, with a friend, in a congregation, with a project, etc.

3. Most people can recognize the “too late” moment when?

They often identify the moment after it has passed, when they look back.

4. Christians need to understand what about the “too late” moment?

Christians need to understand that we can produce such moments in our relationship with God through attitudes, behavior, and priorities.

5. Discuss the difference between the ignorance from lack of exposure and the ignorance of rebellion.

Included in the discussion should be the difference between ignorant sins (unintentional sins) and sins of rebellion. This ancient distinction can be seen in Leviticus 4:2, 22, 27, 5:14-19, and 22:14. The distinction is between a person who seeks to obey God and did something wrong that he did not know was wrong, and the person who rebels against God in the knowledge that he is defying God.

6. In what way did the Kingdom of Israel’s forefathers fail miserably?

They failed miserably to pass to the next generation the knowledge and understanding that neglecting the poor among them and the greed of a self-centered lifestyle were ungodly.

7. Discuss Deuteronomy 28.

The discussion should include that God was quite plain about the consequences of rebellion against His ways.

8. God planned to bring enormous destruction on the Kingdom of Israel how? Why did God change His mind?

He planned to bring destruction by a locust swarm and by fire. God changed His mind because Amos asked God not to do what He intended.

9. Discuss God's use of the plumb line.

The discussion should include the awareness that it is a simple way to measure if something is straight or not. The object's straightness is measured. The people would be measured. The fact that the consequences were deserved would be beyond question. They would pay for what they were.

10. What did the high priest of the kingdom of Israel tell the king?

Amos is undermining the stability of the kingdom and the king.

11. What did the high priest tell Amos?

Go prophesy in your own country—you are not wanted here!

12. State five things Amos told the high priest.

(a) I am doing what I do because God told me to do it.

(b) Your wife will become a prostitute (she will be forced to that life in an attempt to survive).

(c) Your children will be killed at the invasion (by the sword).

(d) Your land will be divided and sold.

(e) You will die as an exile in a gentile country.

13. State three lessons we should learn from today's lesson.

(a) A "too late" moment can come in our relationship with God if we abuse God.

(b) If that moment comes, all God needs to do is to allow us to endure the consequences of our attitudes and behavior.

(c) God is under no obligation to protect the people He loves if those people reject Him.

Lesson Eleven

You Will Be Victimized by Your Transgression

Text: Amos 8:4-14

To go from bad to worse is demoralizing. To expect things to get better only to witness things get increasingly dire crushes the human spirit. It is simple to expect good days to become better days (that is what people always expect). We never think good days cannot be improved so that the future is filled with even better days.

Discuss the fact that many adults have only experienced the “good” getting “better” and have never experienced the “bad.”

However, we always expect bad days to come to an end. There is always a bottom to the bad but “the sky is the limit” with the good. If it is bad, it can only get so bad—there is always a limit to how bad it can get. “Badness” is limited by human expectation. But “good,” “good” is a different story. There is no ceiling on “good.” “Good” is unlimited.

Talk about this view: “The ‘bad’ can get only so bad, but the ‘good’ will always improve and become better.” Talk about those who never ever experience the “good.”

Have you noticed that if we have experienced the “good” we can never go back to the bad? Take the “good ole days” as an example. We long for the simplicity of those days, but not with the expense of enduring the bad. Anyone for outhouses? Or no in-house running water? Or no water heaters? Or no electronics? Or limited medications? Or no air conditioning? Or lower life expectancy? “Oh, we could never ‘go back to THAT.’ Those days are long gone and could never come again.” Really! Do you realize that is current existence for many people alive right now?

Talk about: “Why do people generally think we cannot return to really tough times?”

Amos addressed those who trampled the needy and regarded the humble as an unwanted handicap to their society. This time Amos addressed a problem that should make our blood run cold. Amos factors religious attitude into the motivation that resulted in trampling the poor and rejecting the humble.

Note that we rarely connect honoring God with honoring the poor. Discuss this: Do we think the poor are less in God’s image than the middle class or the rich? You may wish to look at passages like Deuteronomy 15:1-18 and James 2:1-9.

When religion is reduced to “a necessary evil,” religious people are in trouble! These people had to be religious; they did not dare make God angry by not worshipping and honoring “correct” religious expectations.

Compare to Nehemiah 13:15-22, Ezra 9:5-15, and Matthew 6:1-18. Consider that it is a

combination of the acts and the motives.

However, these people could not wait for religious occasions to be over. They did what they were supposed to do by being at the correct place. However, they did not think about God. That was a waste of time! They thought about how they could take advantage of people—how they could cheat people in the wheat market by using dishonest scales, or taking advantage of the helpless, or by selling an inferior product.

It is easy for the opportunity to make money to be more important to us than thinking about and serving God. Ask, "Why?"

After all, it was just business! And business was business! Everyone did it! That was just the way the game was played! If you were going to do business, you had to play the game, and play it better than others. If someone was hurt as people played the game, it was too bad—that was simply the reality of the situation.

It seems to be simple to justify a behavior without considering the impact of the behavior. If the act is not wrong, many think no consideration needs to be given to the result of the act.

If you could make "God time" profitable time (instead of wasted time) by thinking of ways to take advantage of the helpless and needy, good. Turning wasted time in a money-making direction was good, not bad.

In this mindset, time spent thinking about God was wasteful IF that time could have been used making (or planning on how to make) money.

Amos said they needed to consider the impact of their thoughts on God (whom they were seeking to pacify and manipulate). God said He knew what they were doing and would never forget it. (What human wants his ungodly acts to live always in God's memory?)

As we consider the impact of our acts and thoughts, it is important (essential) to think of the ways our acts or thoughts impact God's purposes. That means we need to understand God's purposes as well as His directions. Directions can be misunderstood when purposes are unknown.

The consequences defied human understanding. Their land would quake, the people would mourn, and things would happen as mysteriously as the Nile's rise and fall. The predictable would become unpredictable—it would be dark at noon, their festivals would sound like funerals instead of celebrations, and there would be no occasions of happiness, only occasions of sorrow and bitterness.

Commonly, the unthinkable happens when we ignore God.

"I, God, tried to talk to you, and you would not listen. I will try no more. It will be so

obvious I am not among you that you will travel everywhere in your attempt to find Me. There will be a famine, but it will be a famine of My words. Your choice people will die, and all will know it is because I am not with you.”

Enormous suffering resulted from not hearing God. Remember that they had no print. Enormous suffering still results when we are ignorant of God’s ways and values.

The other gods you worshipped will be powerless to help you. Their powerlessness will be obvious. You will have nothing but your wicked selves to turn to: I am gone and your false gods cannot help. What a pitiful situation! All you will have is your wickedness!

It is a pitiful tragedy when people depend on powerless things to benefit them.

The lessons: (a) “God time” is for honoring God. (b) To be at the correct event and fail to think about God offends God. (c) Honoring God includes respecting the helpless. (d) For our evil deeds to live in God’s memory is a horrible thing. (e) For God to withdraw His presence from people is destructive to the people. (f) It is possible to trust in something that has no power to help us with our greatest needs.

These lessons are as relevant to us as they were then.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is demoralizing? What crushes the human spirit?

It is demoralizing to witness things go from bad to worse. It crushes the human spirit when situations become increasingly dire.

2. What do we expect to end? There is always a bottom to what?

We expect the “bad” to end. There is always a bottom to a “bad” situation.

3. When we have experienced the “good,” what cannot happen (we think)?

We can not go back to the “bad”—that cannot happen.

4. What did Amos address in this lesson?

He addressed those who trampled the needy and regarded the humble as unwanted in their society.

5. When religion is reduced to a “necessary evil,” what is the result?

Religious people are in trouble.

6. These people could not wait for what? Why?

They could not wait for religious days and occasions to be over. They wanted to get back to making money, and using dishonest means to acquire money.

7. In this way of thinking, when a person turns “God time” into money making time, it is good and not bad.

That seems to be the common way of thinking.

8. What did Amos say they needed to consider?

He said they needed to consider the impact of their thoughts on God.

9. Describe the consequences of their desires.

The land quaked, people mourned, mysterious things happened, and the predictable became unpredictable.

10. Since God tried to talk to them and they would not listen, what would happen?

God would make no effort to communicate with them any more.

11. What lessons should we consider?

- a. *“God time” is for God; to honor God.*
- b. *To be at a correct event (religiously) and fail to think about God offends God.*
- c. *Honoring God includes respecting the helpless.*
- d. *For our evil deeds to live in God’s memory is a horrible thing.*
- e. *For God to withdraw His presence from a people is destructive to the people.*
- f. *it is possible for us to trust in that which has no power to help us with our greatest needs.*

Lesson Twelve

No Place To Hide

Text: Amos 9:1-6

Even when the worst of circumstances come, we figure at least a few will escape. **Perhaps** some will be away from home and will escape by being absent. **Perhaps** there will be some fluke happenings and some will escape. After all, even in the worst tornado there always is a living infant cradled in a treetop or an uninjured person in the rubble! People always marvel at the few who escape when destruction is everywhere. **Perhaps** someone will successfully hide and escape by being unnoticed. **Perhaps** some will just be sneaky enough to figure out how to get away or hide.

We are accustomed to thinking the best will happen for a few even in the most destructive circumstances.

Total destruction rarely means all people were destroyed. Maybe all buildings were destroyed. Maybe all animal life died. Maybe there were no signs of life at first glance. Maybe outsiders say, “No one could live through this much destruction!”—yet, someone always does.

People tend to think two things before a disastrous situation occurs: (a) “That could not happen to me!” (b) “If that did happen, not everyone would be destroyed—at least a few would escape that horrible event.”

There are always survivors! No matter how bad the event was, there are always survivors! We always hope for survival by an incredible, unexplainable escape. After all, who invented the statement, “We are hoping against hope”? So no matter how bad an event is—from plane crash to hurricane—we always look for survivors, and we expect to find them.

A part of our culture is to expect there to be survivors. Not matter how bad the event is, those in charge always approach disaster with recovery or rescue efforts. In our culture, we do not expect everyone to be killed, and we expect to be able to successfully treat the injured.

A true story: A woman brought a sick infant to our mobile clinic. The child did not have a life-threatening problem. The nurses explained carefully to the mother how to restore the child’s health. They instructed the mother to bring the child back when the clinic returned the following week. The mother did not return for weeks. The anxious nurses asked her (upon her return) about the child. The mother shrugged and answered, “When an animal gets sick, it dies; when a child gets sick, it dies.” Death was expected when sickness occurred. There was little you could do about it where this woman lived.

We are unaccustomed to thinking that “total destruction” means a complete loss of human life. “There will always be the exception, and that exception will be me. Everyone else may die, but I will survive!”

We are taught to expect the best “for us” in every dire situation.

Amos neared the close of his short written prophecy by declaring the unthinkable: There will be no survivors! Why? “You have made a very patient God justly angry. In His just anger, He declared no one shall escape the consequences of the offenses.”

It would be easy for people in the Northern Kingdom to dismiss everything Amos said. (a) They were sure Amos was wrong. (b) They were confident they had not angered God. The thought that they would experience a disaster in which there would be no survivors was a preposterous thought!

Amos revealed his vision by declaring that the Lord God was standing by the altar. Ordinarily, that was good! The Lord God by the altar often meant that the Lord God accepted the human gifts presented at the altar. The Lord God speaking by the altar brought words of blessing as He spoke in truth.

The opening imagery of God standing beside the altar was encouraging. (Nothing could heighten the truthfulness of God’s message as could God standing by the altar.) They would expect this scene to produce good news.

Not this time! The Lord God would speak in truth, but it would not be words of blessing. Instead of truthful words of blessing, He spoke truthful words of destruction.

This time God’s news was not good!

What did He say?

He, the Lord God, would break the unbreakable! Their impressive structures would not protect them! The Lord God would strike the tops of the columns with such force that the bottoms of the doorways would shake. (That would be a force beyond imagination! Imagine fleeing to your strongest building only to have it fall on you.)

It always has been easy for people to put their confidence in that which they produced. (We still do!) That which profoundly impresses us produces our sense of security. They thought their strong structures could and would protect them from anything. That the top of the columns could be struck with such force that the thresholds would shake was beyond imagination! (Remember, some of the ancient columns still stand today.)

Not everyone would be successful in fleeing to their strongest buildings. The ones who did not make it would be killed with the sword.

People who could, would flee for a sense of safety to their strong buildings. However, not everyone would have opportunity to do that. For them it was immediate death.

Whether by the collapse of their strongest buildings or by violent acts of war, none would escape. If it were possible to dig a hole (to hide in) in Sheol, there would be no escape. (Sheol was the undefined world of the dead, here pictured as the lowest possible realm.) If a person were to ascend to heaven, the Lord God would pull him down. They could hide on the highest mountain accessible to them, and God would find them. They could go to the bottom of the sea, and God would send a serpent to bite them. They could even go as captives to their enemies, and God would direct a sword to them.

There would be a lot of death, and a lot of captivity. There would be no place to hide; no place would be ignored. The imagery was “from the highest high to the lowest low,” there is no escape from this disaster. If they could do the impossible, there would still be no escape. Why? God devised the disaster!

All of this said something simple: “There will be absolutely, positively no escape from My just anger. Were it possible to do anything imaginable, it would not work. When you make God justly angry, you will face His anger. If I say you will be destroyed, you will be destroyed—there is no escaping and no place to hide. When I say it will happen, it will happen.”

“Think the unthinkable—there will be no escape! Nothing can rescue you! God’s anger is inescapable!”

“Do you understand who I am? Do you understand the power I have? I can make the earth melt and give people reason to mourn. I am the mysterious one Who is beyond explanation. There is nowhere that I am not. I do things you cannot explain. I am the Lord!”

They needed a better understanding and grasp of Who God is! He cannot be controlled or manipulated by humans! He is as serious about your destruction as He was about your blessings! Do not think you are dealing with another human! You have made Him justly angry by your attitude and behavior, and He will act against you in His anger!

God has great power to do us good, and does us good. That is His preference! However, if we reject Him and refuse to learn His purposes or live by His values, we give Him no alternative. The power that He wished to use for our good is turned to be used for our destruction. See Jeremiah 18:5-10.

God has incredible power! He prefers to use His power to bless you, but He will use it to destroy you if you insist.

For Thought and Discussion:

1. Even when the worst of circumstances come, we figure what?

We figure at least a few will escape.

2. How can escape occur?

Perhaps by absence, perhaps by a fluke happening, perhaps by hiding, perhaps by the sneakiness of the person.

3. Total destruction rarely means what?

It rarely means all people are destroyed.

4. There are always what?

There are always survivors.

5. In most people's thinking, who will be the exception?

"I" will be the exception.

6. As Amos neared the close of his written prophecy, he declared the unthinkable. What was the unthinkable?

The unthinkable: There will be no survivors (no one who escapes) because you made the patient God justly angry with you.

7. In Amos' vision, discuss the fact that the Lord God was by the altar.

The discussion should include that this ordinarily would be a good thing, and always it is authoritative. The power for good God would have used to bless you will be used to destroy you.

8. The Lord God would strike the top of the columns with such force that what happened?

The thresholds would shake.

9. What happened to those who could not reach their strongest buildings?

They would be killed by the sword.

10. Discuss the hopelessness of escaping.

The discussion should include that no matter what they did, their act would not result in escape.

11. State the simple thing Amos said.

This discussion should include that it is impossible to escape from God's anger.

12. Discuss God's use of His great power.

The discussion should include that God preferred to use His power to bless them, but if they refused to learn His purposes and live in His values, He would use it to destroy them.

Lesson Thirteen

Hope Even in Despair

Text: Amos 9:7-15

Humans are very creative when a situation must be confronted by an explanation of “why this could not happen to us.” Recently, I listened to a discussion based on this premise: “Things happen not because of what you can do but because of who you know.” Thus, something bad cannot happen to “us” because of who “we” are, and “we” know the “right” people.

Humans too often think they even will escape just divine wrath because of who they think themselves to be, or because of who they know.

As an example, consider the confidence of many Christian individuals and congregations who would declare today, “Nothing bad could happen to us American Christians or our American congregations because of who we are. What would God do without us? Who would do . . .?” When people feel indispensable to their perception of God’s purposes, they enter grave peril. God’s resources are never confined to the actions of a single person or a single group.

It is easy to place our confidence in “who we are” and/or “who we know” instead of in God and His purpose.

While time is a huge factor to humans, time is not a factor to God. Remember Numbers 14: 11, 12? In spite of all God invested in getting Abraham’s descendants through Isaac out of Egypt, in spite of what God did in rescuing these people at the Red Sea, and in spite of all God did for these people for almost a year in the wilderness, God was more than willing to begin again with one man of faith. To God it was a viable option to begin to construct a nation with Moses.

Israel at their entrance into Canaan the first time (Numbers 13, 14) is an excellent example of the fact that time and investment are meaningless to God in achieving His purpose.

God’s options are never limited to the “group at hand.” God is never forced to do “the best He can with what He has.” God could fulfill His promise to Abraham and accomplish His intent by *rejecting these Israelite mourners He first brought to Canaan!* Time is of human concern, not of divine concern! God’s options never struggle with the limitations humans confront in the limitations of being physical beings.

It is simply too easy for humans to put their confidence in their imagined worth and to limit God’s choices in His objectives. God is never limited to us no matter what we think of ourselves or what the situation is at the moment. Consider Esther 4:14. Esther’s decision was only if she would serve God’s purpose. She was not God’s only solution. God would act to save His people no matter what she decided.

Consider Amos' last recorded words to the Kingdom of Israel as Amos closed his prophetic message.

Amos may have said other words not recorded.

First, "My work and purposes involve much more than just you. Because the Kingdom of Israel disappears forever from maps does not mean My intent disappears. Simply because you are gone does not mean that My work (God's work) is out of options. That truth should be self-evident to you as you look at the nations around you. My purpose is accomplished in spite of the acts of nations. I am always at work. Of all nations, you should understand that."

God worked through other nations to achieve His objectives. All His work was not done just in Israel.

Second, "Of all people, you should know that I, God, will not tolerate prolonged, unrepentant evil. I know how wicked you have been. I know how long you have been wicked. I know both your rebellion and your refusal to repent that characterize you as a people. You are a sinful kingdom. You have been an unrepentant, sinful kingdom for generations. As God, I declare to you that you will no longer exist as a kingdom."

The genuine repentance of people has a profound effect on God, and so does people's refusal to repent. God's patience in the sinfulness of humans exists because of the divine hope for human repentance to occur. Remember 2 Peter 3:8, 9?

"What I am about to do to you could be compared to a sifting process I will not lose one kernel of grain, but every sinful person will be killed in the violence I am sending. The time of accountability has come for you! I have had enough of your wickedness!"

God has the power to save and destroy in the same act -- and make no mistake doing that!

Third, "I know some will say, 'This cannot happen! God cannot do this to us! He has forgotten who we are! All we have to do is remind Him of who we are!'"

We often think "who we are" restricts "what God can do" even if we deliberately act wickedly.

"I am not dependent on you! Despite what you think of yourselves, there is more to the descendants of Abraham through Isaac than the Kingdom of Israel. I will take the tattered, seemingly worn out tabernacle based on King David, resurrect it from its ruins, and function through the remnant of those who still belong to Me (those who are not involved in the rebellion and evil. Remember, not all in the Kingdom of Israel were involved in the idolatrous rebellion against God. See 1 Kings 18:3, 4 and 19:18.).

Never am I or "my group" God's only option. God can and will function with or without us. God always will achieve His objective.

“When I, God, finish restoring what I intend, incredible success will occur. There will be successful days! I, God, promise it! However, you people will not see those days. You people will hardly be a memory when My success comes.”

God will not alter His objective due to the attitudes or behavior of several generations. His people may resort to wickedness, but God will persist and prevail.

(My understanding of God’s intent is this. God’s promise to achieve His intent was announced to Abraham in Genesis 12:3b when God promised a universal blessing to all nations through Abraham’s descendants. [See passages like Acts 3:19-26 and Galatians 3:8, 16.] Jesus was often referred to as “the son of David.” [See passages such as Matthew 1:1, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30, 21:9, Mark 10:47, 12:35-37, Luke 18:38, etc.] The intent of God will be accomplished in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and the return of all things to God [see 1 Corinthians 15:20-28].)

(The Bible does not include all the acts of God, but the acts of God that resulted in the crucified, resurrected Jesus and the coming of God’s kingdom. Christians base their existence on the rule of God.)

The choice confronting all in every age: will we with understanding cooperate with God in achieving His intent, will we rebel against God’s intent, or will we see ourselves as God’s intent to the exclusion of all others (thereby granting us the “right” to live as we please)? We can rebel against God’s intent, or we can help God achieve His intent. The Kingdom of Israel made the wrong choice.

Our choice is basically this: will we allow God to use our lives to achieve His intent, or will we use our lives for other purposes?

For Thought and Discussion

1. Humans are very creative when? Give a scriptural example.

We are very creative when we must explain why something could never happen to us. The example is based on a common attitude of American Christians which declares, “God could not do without us.”

2. God’s resources are never confined to what?

God’s resources are never confined to one human or one human group.

3. What is a huge factor to humans but no factor to God?

Time is a huge factor to humans, but no factor to God.

4. God’s options are never limited to what?

God's options are never limited to "the group at hand."

5. In Amos' last recorded words to the Kingdom of Israel

a. What is his first emphasis?

God's work and purposes involved much more than the Kingdom of Israel.

b. What is his second emphasis? What comparison did Amos make?

God would not tolerate prolonged, unrepentant evil. The illustration was based on the sifting process. The good would be saved; the wicked would be punished.

c. What is his third emphasis?

You will not escape because you think, "This could not happen to us!"

6. Amos told the Kingdom of Israel that God was not what?

God was not dependent on them.

7. When God finished restoring what He intended, what would be the result?

The result would be incredible success.

8. Discuss God's intent.

God's intent was to produce the Christ. Thus Jesus' death, Jesus' resurrection, and the re-establishment of God as the all in all are the fulfillment of God's intent.

9. What are the choices confronting people in every age?

a. *An understanding cooperation with God in achieving His intent.*

b. *A rebellion against God's intent.*

c. *Seeing ourselves as the complete fulfillment of God's intent.*