

JOEL & AMOS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

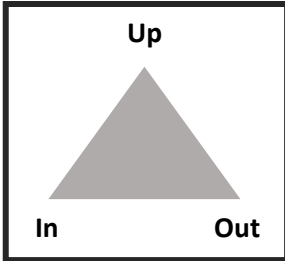
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO JOEL

We know little of the prophet Joel beyond a few personal details. He identifies himself as the son of Pethuel. He preached to the people of Judah, and expressed a great deal of interest in Jerusalem. Joel tells us his father's name, but says nothing about himself. Dating the book of Joel remains one of the most difficult tasks for Old Testament scholars because unlike most prophetic writers, Joel gives no explicit indication of his time period. Some students think he wrote his book around 850 years before the birth of Jesus. Joel refrained from mentioning the current ruling kings, and one of the most compelling arguments for dating the writing of the book of Joel explains this omission by suggesting the prophecy occurred in the aftermath of Judah's only ruling queen, Athaliah (835 BC). Her young grandson Joash succeeded Athaliah upon her death but because Joash was too young to rule, the priest Jehoida ruled in his place until Joash came of age. So, if Joel prophesied during this caretaking period, it would make sense that he mentioned no official king.

The book focuses its prophetic judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah with frequent references to Zion and temple worship. Joel's familiarity with this area and the worship in the temple suggests that he lived in Judah, possibly even in the city of Jerusalem itself. The importance of the book of Joel to the canon of Scripture stems from its being the first to develop an oft-mentioned biblical idea – the Day of the Lord. Joel capitalised on a recent tragedy, a locust plague in Judah, to dispense the Lord's message of judgment and the hope of repentance. In referring to the terrible locust plague, Joel was able to speak into the lives of his listeners and imprint the message of judgment into their minds, like a hot brand sears the flesh of an animal. One commentator notes that the *“Day of the Lord”*, a reference not to a single day but to a period of judgment and restoration, consists of three basic features: the judgment of God's people, the judgment of foreign nations, and the restoration of God's people through intense suffering.

All in all, a pretty intriguing little book. So, get the kettle on, grab your Bible, journal and pen, and off we go.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

Joel uses a recent drought and locust plague as object lessons to warn of a future invasion of Israel in the Day of the Lord. If the nation will repent, God will restore His relationship with her and bless her. Joel calls for recognition that the calamity is the result of God dealing with the nation of Israel.

In Hebrew, there are at least nine different names of locust to indicate different species and stages of maturity. Verse 4 shows the devastation and thoroughness of the locust swarm as Joel uses four different names: cutting, swarming, hopping, destroying. Some commentators have tried to make something significant out of the different names, but it is probably just a poetic way to emphasise how complete the devastation was.

The nation is so disconnected from God it brings grief. Verse 8 talks about a virgin mourning for her bridegroom. I had a vast loss in my life in 2006 when my wife Jill died unexpectedly, so the graphic picture Joel uses here gives pain. At one time or another every individual is affected by loss, and mourns. One result of the devastation was that there was no grain to make offerings to the Lord; consequently, their sacrifices had to stop and their relationship with God was severed. Perhaps that was part of God's plan. Perhaps God didn't want their sacrifice; He wanted their hearts.

Some take the command for everyone to come to the house of the Lord as a clue that Joel is a post exile prophet, a time when the nation was small enough to actually gather like this. I don't know if even the post exilic community could do this. It may just be a way of saying everyone needed to repent and go to God with their hearts. All of creation cries out to God. Joel says, "*The Day of the Lord is near.*" He introduces the concept of the Day of the Lord, and goes on to elaborate on how bad the suffering will be. The destruction by the locusts is only a shadow of what is to come.

Pray

Father, forgive me for giving more power to what others say about me in public than what You say about me in heaven. Forgive me for being too busy to behold Your beauty in Your Word. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prophet now moves on to a description of the coming army. He draws on the imagery of locusts from chapter 1 to describe the invading army in the Day of the Lord. The soldiers will be as methodical and thorough as locusts. Some commentators think this refers to actual locusts because of the similarities. For example, in verse 4 it says their appearance is *“like the appearance of horses”* and verse 5 says *“with a noise as of chariots”*. If these were actual horses and chariots why would Joel say *“like”* or *“as”*? Verse 20 says the army comes from the north. Typically, locusts invade from the south, and human armies almost always invaded Israel from the north.

Joel concludes the section with the statement, *“The Day of the Lord is indeed great and awesome, and who can endure it?”* No one can endure it. So, what are they to do? Repent and pray that God will have mercy on them. God wants the nation to corporately return to Him, but that begins with internal repentance of individual hearts, according to verse 13. It is in this verse that the motivation to repent is seen. It is positive motivation: God is gracious, compassionate, and slow to anger. Time and time again God didn't destroy the children of Israel even though they deserved it.

Notice that Joel does not presume on God's sovereignty and mercy. In verse 14 he says, *“Who knows whether God will turn and relent?”* Sometimes things have become so bad that God must still judge. I think the people did repent at Joel's pleading because in this section we see the results of repentance: restoration of crops, cessation of shame, invasion averted, praise and exhortation, the effects of locust invasion reversed. Peter quotes from the final section of this chapter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Many believe these are the final days before the return of Christ for His bride, the Church. Pretty powerful stuff in this little prophetic book.

Pray

Father, You didn't spare Your own Son, but gave Him up for us all. You've justified me and now there is no condemnation or guilt, no fear of dying or living. Nothing will ever separate me from Your love! In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

When you read this chapter, you can't help but notice that several things have not yet happened. God has not restored the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem (according to verse 1) and He has not judged all the nations (verse 2). With all the political chaos in Jerusalem today, there is no way anyone could think verse 17 has been fulfilled. When it says, "*strangers will pass through no more*", it means there will be no more invasions on Jerusalem, and we cannot be assured of that yet. The reference to beating ploughshares into swords (verse 10) implies that there is a peace in the land that is temporary and they will resort back to war. We have a description of life in the millennial kingdom; it will be a utopia. We also have another promise to the Jews when it says, "*Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem for all generations.*" Again, we have to look to our future for this fulfilment.

As we finish this little but powerful book, we can't really look at it, see the sins of the people, and evaluate our lives to see if we are doing the same things (for Joel does not elaborate on their sins). But we can see that God does not ignore sin; He will punish it. We do know that the repentance Joel called for was internal, heartfelt repentance, not just social reform. We need to be sure our repentance is genuine. Joel also gives us an assurance that God does have a future for His people. The book reaffirms our concept of a literal future tribulation when God will judge the nations and restore His people to the land. I think the book shows that God is in control. Prophecy is not designed just so we can build our timelines and figure out what is going to happen and when. Prophecy is designed to show us the character of God – His justice, mercy, sovereignty, love, grace – and cause us to turn to Him.

Pray

Father, as I meditate through this portion of Your Word today, my heart is filled with praise for the hyper-abundance of grace which You've given me in Your Son, Jesus. My 'found-ness' in Christ is a million times greater in degree than my lostness in sin! You are immeasurably, irrepressibly generous with me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

INTRODUCTION TO AMOS

Amos was an older contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah and was active in 760-755 BC during the rule of kings Jeroboam II and Uzziah. He was from the southern kingdom of Judah but preached in the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos wrote at a time of relative peace and prosperity but also at a time of neglect of God's laws.

Do people make the times or do the times make the people? It may be difficult to know for sure, but we could probably agree that some men are right for the time in which they lived; they were the right person for the job. Among the Old Testament prophets, Amos certainly fits this description. The opening verse gives us some details of this unique prophet. *“The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”*

Amos was unique as he was not born a prophet. God called him from the role of lowly shepherd to preach to His people. In defending his peaching to Amaziah the priest, Amos says, *“I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel.’”* (7:14,15). Amos was a common man from common stock; a blue-collar prophet from among the people! This background is reflected in his preaching. He speaks forthrightly and uses illustrations from the common life of a shepherd; from rescuing the legs of a lamb from a hungry lion (chapter 3) to studying the constellations in the night sky (chapter 5). He sees the sins of Israel from the objective perspective of the common man, seeing the mistreatment of the poor and the corruption of leaders.

Another minor prophet that is great to study! Grab your brew, Bible, journal and pen, and let's get started.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

The name Amos means ‘burden’ or ‘burden bearer’. Most of the prophecies of Amos concern coming judgment on either the nations surrounding Israel or on Israel itself. He was a man with a burden, living up to his name as God laid upon him the task of proclaiming judgment on an apostate nation. A southerner sent to preach to the north, Amos was from the town of Tekoa, a rugged town about 12 miles south of Jerusalem in the nation of Judah. God did not call him to preach to the nation of Judah, but rather to its northern neighbour, Israel. He is unique in this regard. This must have increased the difficulty of his task, but Amos did not back down.

Amos faced the rejection and ridicule of the people. It is difficult to be the one who brings bad news to those who do not want to hear it. He is a local man who brings a word against sin. The strange way he delivers this message, *“For three transgressions ... and for four...”*, is not saying they only did three or four things wrong, but rather highlights the repetitive style of sin. God hates sins that are repetitive in nature. Now there’s a challenge right there.

The Old Testament prophets, especially the written prophets (of which Amos is the beginning), are known as the historians of Israelite history. They spoke to tell the future and lead people back to God, but also to help them make sense of their past. It was important for future generations to know why things happened, and who made them happen. You will notice that the first chapter in Amos accounts God’s condemnation of Israel’s neighbours and enemies. The point is forcefully made that God holds all nations accountable and He is the sovereign judge of each one. God is the Lord of every nation on earth. He is their sovereign judge. Amos begins with the Gentiles but then moves quickly to the accountability of God’s own people.

Pray

Father, I am challenged about my lifestyle today. Sin often knocks at my heart’s door and all too often I open to it. The things that so easily beset me destroy my communion with You. Help me to be ruthless with this enemy of my soul. Holy Spirit, help me to weed these impostors from my heart so that I may become fully Yours. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Moab was located south of Judah. This is the sixth judgment Amos pronounces against the Gentile nations. God promises judgment against Moab because of their cruelty to Edom and her king. Then Amos turns his attention to Judah. I can understand the six previous judgments against heathen nations, but here we have the chosen people of God getting the same judgment for their sin. Amos tells us they despised the law of God. As Amos then moves on to Israel, we see how they mistreated the poor and made class distinctions, and on top of all that there was sexual immorality. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”* How careful we need to be lest we fall to the same plight of those without Christ. How we need to keep ourselves close to Him.

The exposing of Israel's sin is given in words that may sound quaint to us, but they are graphic and speak to the heart as well as to the mind. The language paints a picture which involves emotion and conscience, and calls us to behold the horror of the evil. It is possible to see evil without it touching the heart or the conscience. God makes sin visible and makes the evil abhorrent by using vivid language. Righteous people being sold for silver, needy people sold for gain, the poor deprived of justice ... all of this is described so vividly that it is impossible not to see how evil this culture is. God graciously exposes sin in all its horrible nature in order to turn people to repentance.

The tragic thing in this revelation of sin is that it paints a picture which almost exactly mirrors the society in which we live. How the world today needs to heed the prophecy of Amos. God's complaint against Israel is that they sinned against wondrous love and grace. In spite of all that God had done for them, Israel had departed from the Lord and gone their own way in complete disregard not only of His holiness, but also of His loving action towards them.

Pray

Father, You know all the details of my broken stories and aching heart. What I know is that You are good, that You can be trusted, and that hope is the order of this day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Amos 3

Live

In the Old Testament, everything centres around Israel's exodus from Egypt. Throughout the Old Testament books, God calls Israel to look back and remember Him as the One who freed them from Egypt. In the New Testament, it is the work of Jesus on the cross which is the centre. We are called to constantly look back and remember what Jesus did on the cross and to live in light of that great fact.

It is sad to read these prophetic announcements in Amos and, in light of history, know that they came to pass. Notice the privileges that God expresses to the people, *"I brought you up out of the land of Egypt... You only have I known of all the families of the earth."* Amos tells them, 'You were the chosen people of God. You saw God work to redeem and deliver you. You were the only people to have this covenant relationship with God.' Their chosen status did not mean they were protected from judgment. Their chosen status meant they had greater accountability to God. They knew what God required. They were to be to the Lord a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, according to Exodus 19:6. With the privilege of knowing God came the responsibility of acting like the people of God.

The same accountability is described to us in the New Testament. Consider the message found in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). Everyone was given a degree of wealth from the master and each were accountable for what they were given. Israel was the one-talent man who had taken the blessings and privileges of God and did nothing with them. Listen to the words of the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9, *"You are the chosen people of God, a holy nation."* He called us out of darkness. Christ is the light who is shining in the darkness. We proclaim Him because we were blind, and without the light of Christ, we would continue to be blind. Challenging stuff!!

Pray

Father, You are a great King constantly at work in all things for Your glory and my good – welcoming me in my weakness and beautifying me in my brokenness. How can I keep from singing Your praise? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Anyone can stumble into sin and feel the correcting hand of God, but we are in far greater trouble when we feel God's correction and still will not return to Him. Perhaps one of my favourite images in the book of Amos is when he calls the women "*cows of Bashan*" and tells them to pay attention. The cows in Bashan were particularly known as being excellent cattle and were fed well. Amos calls the women this because these are pampered, self-indulgent ladies who maintain their lifestyle by crushing the poor and speaking demandingly to those around them. Notice the poor treatment of the husbands. The women order their husbands to wait upon them and provide them with luxuries so they can indulge themselves. This problem is not unique to their society; the same materialistic drive brings out these attitudes today. You have got to love this prophet who wasn't trained as such, but just shoots from the hip.

God will take away the things we put our trust in. Amos calls for the people to go to their centres of worship and continue to sin. It is a sarcastic call. These people are very religious, but worship that is not God-focused is sin. Notice that the people keep these religious practices so they can brag about them. We do the same thing when we come to worship every time the church doors are open and think we are so holy and pious. If you are boasting like this, then you are not worshipping God, but yourself. You are not worshipping for the glory of God, but for the glory of self.

Events were happening to Israel in an effort to cause the people to turn to God rather than continue down their sinful path. However, notice the repeated phrase in this chapter, "*Yet you did not return to Me, declares the Lord*" (verses 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). They refused to turn their eyes to God and refused to see that they needed the Lord in their lives. How sad!!!

Pray

Father, today I want to run into Your arms. I can be like a wayward child but help me always to know You love me with an everlasting love. You draw me, and draw me, and draw me. You never grow weary and Your mercies are new every single day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Amos 5

Live

Amos sees Israel as a tragic young woman who has fallen and no one is coming to her aid. In rebelling against God, Israel is as helpless as a young woman among violent men. Amos again confronts the corrupt legal system of Israel. Justice had been thoroughly destroyed and righteousness was as good as dead. Because Amos was a farmer, his prophecies are often connected to the land. Here, however, Israel's extreme sin merited an extreme correction, nothing less than exile and captivity. The extremity of Israel's sin and the longsuffering of God with her amazes me. Even among the harshness of God's judgment His redemptive nature always shows.

It is important to note that at the time Amos is preaching, the nation of Israel is experiencing prosperity. Israel has not had this kind of wealth and power since the reign of Solomon, two hundred years previous. And yet, Amos is singing a funeral song for the nation. The song is being sung as if the nation is already extinguished and it is over for them.

I love the description of God in verse 8. Not only did God create the stars, He put them in an order so that you can see designs in them. He has the power to turn deep darkness into morning. He calls for the waters of the sea and dumps them on the surface of the earth. The Lord is His name; He causes there to be light; He brings rain. Seek the Lord in humility because He is in charge. Seeking the Lord through living a holy life cannot be mere lip service. These people spoke about seeking the Lord; however, they were not doing this. They were claiming this truth that the Lord would be with them if they sought Him, but they were not living it. It is easy to say, "Seek the Lord" but it is another thing to truly seek the Lord by hating evil. I'm reminded of my own wayward ways and I'm glad I live under a new and better covenant where grace abounds towards me. I'm sure you will agree!

Pray

Father, increase my endurance in things that otherwise wear me down and use me up. Transform my character to make me more like Jesus, especially His humility and kindness. And restore my hope, lest I foolishly settle for some form of quick relief. I want to want only You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is not the first time Amos depicts Israel as serenely confident of God's approval without reason to be so. Israel is recklessly at ease, insensible to the real danger of her situation. The northern kingdom remains the primary focus of Amos' condemnation. We are talking about the capital here; Zion is the centre of political power and huge wealth. It is the influential and the rich who live and work in the capital whose complacency and judgment are described in the following verses. Now, the idea of rest isn't all bad. Jesus wants to give us rest (Matthew 11:28-29). There is a rest waiting for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9-11). And there is rest for us in heaven (Revelation 4:9-11). But there is another kind of rest, a sinful kind, a rest connected to indifference, laziness, and indulgence. I like what Spurgeon says: *"Self-indulgence! Oh, this is the God of many! They live not for Christ - What do they for him? They live not for his Church - What care they for that? They live for self, and for self only. And mark there are such among the poor as well as among the rich, for all classes have this evil leaven."*

Amos swings back to this constant theme: because of Israel's great and deep sin, judgment is coming through a conquering nation. In this chapter, we have the contrast between the people's unknowing complacency, pride, and self-confidence and the divine retribution about to befall them. These people were sincere, as people measure sincerity; they practiced their religion seriously but their religious life was a sincere belief in a god of their own devising. I like how Alec Motyer's commentary puts it: *"Sincerity had replaced theology and ceremony had replaced ethics. Their religion did not arise from who God actually is and what he had required of man."* May we never be the ones who sit back to relax at the peril of the lost. May the love of Jesus be so compelling we will gladly live for Him.

Pray

Father, in the face of known disappointments and with an eye toward an unknown future, please continue to convict me of the need to rescue those who are perishing and never to lose my heart for the underprivileged and disadvantaged. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today we have a series of three visions of judgment. The first was of God preparing a swarm of locusts to consume the harvest from Israel's second seasonal crop. The great hoard stripped the land clean and left no food for the people. This was God's way of pouring out judgment upon His people for their wickedness. When Amos saw what God was going to do, he pleaded with Him to forgive. He appealed to the Lord on the basis of His sovereignty and Israel's vulnerability. And because the Lord is both sovereign and compassionate, He relented, and the vision of the locusts never came to pass.

Then the Lord gave Amos another vision – judgment by fire. This ferocious fire dried up the sea and devoured the land. It appeared like an atomic bomb dropped on Israel annihilating all of its inhabitants. Amos cried out to the Lord again and interceded on Israel's behalf. He begged the Lord to not carry out this plan. And again, God heard Amos' prayer, changed His mind, and promised not to do this.

Then the Lord gave Amos a third vision. Amos saw the Lord standing beside a wall with a plumb line in His hand. A plumb line is a simple tool used to gauge whether something is perfectly vertical or upright. God said that He was setting a plumb line among His people Israel. This was a visual metaphor for how crooked God's people had become. Spiritual unfaithfulness, social injustice, and economic inequality were rampant, and God had had enough. God Himself would raise His sword against King Jeroboam and He would destroy the pagan shrines and idolatrous temples that had been built all over the land. This time, He would not relent or change His mind! This is another amazing example of how much rests upon prayer. This amazes me so much.

Pray

Father, how amazing this passage is. To think that when I pray, heaven responds as the ear of almighty God bends to hear my feeble cry. Oh, to think of the time when I stand before You and see what might have been, if only I had prayed more. Of all the things You could make me, Father, I ask today that by Your Spirit You would help me become a person of prayer with deep intercessions of my heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God shows Amos a basket of ripe fruit. As we all know, fruit does not keep ripe for long, especially in the summertime. This was a sign of final judgment upon Israel for their injustice to the poor. They couldn't wait for the Sabbath to end so they could get back to making money (and in a pretty deceitful way at that). There was chronic corruption in the business world. God saw it and was angry. When they sold wheat, they used a small measure. When they bought or gave change, they used a large measure for the shekel. God says He will send a famine not of the Word but of being able to hear the Word. This is awful. When we push away God's Word for a long time, we may find ourselves in a place where we can't find it, even if we wanted to. Jesus alluded to this principle in the parable of the soils and the sower: *"Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."* (Mark 4:24-25) When we seek God, it becomes easier to find Him. When we push God away, it becomes more difficult to hear and receive His Word. Seek Him afresh today.

As we read of Israel's oppression of the poor and God's view of it, we are reminded of the exhortation in Hebrews 10:24 to *"provoke others to love and good deeds"*. The truth is we can become good at winning arguments and losing friends and oftentimes we can provoke others to irritation and avoidance. These people had flown in the face of God for so long they obviously thought life would carry on as normal. But the eye of God had been on them the whole time as nothing escapes the scan of the Almighty. Just because we live under the New Covenant, it is not a license to live carelessly.

Pray

Father, by Your grace, help me offer others Your presence, Your welcoming heart, and genuine encouragement. Help me to be a carrier of all that You are. May Your grace and love abound in me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this final vision of Amos, he sees the Lord at the temple supervising the work of judgment. God isn't detached from His hard work of judgment. Around the opening of a structure is usually the strongest part, so if the doorposts are broken, it shows that the whole house has fallen in. This is a poetic and powerful way to describe complete destruction. It is devastating to hear Israel called the sinful kingdom. God wants all His people to be deeply aware that they can no longer presume upon His mercy or their chosenness.

The northern kingdom, Israel, had long since rejected the house of David but God definitely hadn't rejected it. I love the swing after verse 10. This is an abrupt change from the strong message of rebuke and judgment. The transition is the most abrupt and surprising in the entire book. The sword of judgment gives way to the trowel of reconstruction. It's beautiful imagery. When God releases blessing and restoration, the fruit comes quickly. It is a supernatural image we see here. The ploughman and reaper always labour separately and, of course, at different times. But here they bump into each other, so abundant are the crops and so eager is the land to grow more.

What a beautiful climax to a book of difficult judgments and prophecies. God's words drip with honey, *"New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring My people Israel back from exile. They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God."*

I hope you have enjoyed this little book as much as I have in studying it. My conclusion is that our God is mighty, awesome in power, merciful in judgment and better than all that, we can call Him "Abba, Father!" Beautiful!

Pray

Father, thank You for being the fulfilment of these promises. In Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. In You I stand redeemed by Your precious blood. I love and dwell in You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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