

Seek *the* Lord *and* Live! (Amos)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Amos 5:1–15, Heb. 5:14, Isa. 5:20, Amos 7:10–17, 9:11–15, Acts 15:13–18.*

Memory Text: “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you, just as you have said!” (*Amos 5:14, NASB*).

Key Thought: Amos reminds us that only in seeking the Lord is there life.

Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through their honor and exaltation. If they had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them ‘high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor.’ ‘All people of the earth,’ said Moses, ‘shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee.’ ‘The nations which shall hear all these statutes’ shall say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ Deut. 26:19; 28:10; 4:6. But because of their unfaithfulness, God’s purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.

This week, as we continue to study the book of Amos, we will see even more of the ways in which the Lord pled with His people to put away their sins and return unto Him, the only true Source of life. In the end, we all have only one of two choices: life or death. There is no middle ground. Amos shows us a little more about the stark differences between these choices.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 4.

Hate Evil, Love Good

Things had become very bad in Israel; the corruption, the oppression, the sin. The point was reached where the very survival of the nation was at stake. For this reason, Amos composed a lament to mourn the coming death of Israel (*Amos 5:1–15*). Often in the prophetic books, no distinction is made between the word of the prophet and the word of the Lord. Thus, Amos' lament is also God's lament over Israel.

The purpose of the funeral song in Amos 5:1–15 was to shock the people into facing reality. If they persisted in their sins, they surely would die. If, on the other hand, they rejected evil and returned to God, they would live. The Lord's character is such that He expects conformity to the divine will.

Read Amos 5:14, 15. How does one learn to “hate the evil and love the good”? See also Heb. 5:14, Rom. 12:9, Prov. 8:36.

Amos invites the people not just to stop seeking evil but also to hate evil and love good. The commands in this section are progressive. The verbs *to love* (Heb. 'ahav) and *to hate* (sane') in the Bible often refer to decisions and actions, not simply to feelings and attitudes. In other words, a change in the people's attitudes will lead to change in their actions.

In this context, what warning is found in Isaiah 5:20?

“All who in that evil day would fearlessly serve God according to the dictates of conscience, will need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His word; for those who are true to God will be persecuted, their motives will be impugned, their best efforts misinterpreted, and their names cast out as evil. Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431.

How can we learn to love the good and hate the evil if we can be deceived into calling evil good and good evil? What is our only protection against this deception?

Religion as Usual

Read Amos 5:23, 24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; Psalm 51:17. What are these texts saying? More important, how can the principle here be applied directly to our own spiritual life today, as Seventh-day Adventists? That is, in what ways might we be guilty of doing exactly what is warned about here? (Remember, too, that it is very easy to be self-deceived in this area).

More than most other books of the Bible, Amos focuses on injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity. It also offers the divine perspective on such practices. Amos preached that God despised the empty rituals of the people's dead formalism, and He called upon them to reform. The Lord was not pleased by outward and empty forms of worship offered to Him by those who at the same time were oppressing others for the sake of personal gain. Their lives revealed that they missed the whole point of what it means to be followers of Yahweh; they also totally misunderstood the deeper meaning of His law.

Indeed, God rejected their religious rituals because they did not flow from lives of faith. The climactic words in Amos 5:14, 15 are the command to seek the Lord and live. Seeking the Lord is contrasted with making pilgrimages to the famous religious centers in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (*Amos 5:5*), three cities with sanctuaries that were destined for destruction.

What God really wanted was justice and righteousness in the land. The command to "seek the Lord" parallels the one to "seek good." The Lord called on the remnant to distance themselves from evil practices and religious formalism and, instead, to let justice flow like a river and righteousness flow like a never-failing stream. While justice concerns the establishment of what is right before God, righteousness is the quality of life in relationship to God and others in the community. The picture presented here is that of a religious people whose religion had degraded into nothing but forms and rites without the change of heart that must accompany true faith. (*See Deut. 10:16.*)

How careful we must be.

Called to Be a Prophet

Amos' home was Tekoa, in Judah, but God sent him to prophesy in Israel. He had gone to the northern kingdom and preached with such power that the land was not "able to bear all his words" (*Amos 7:10, NKJV*). Certainly many Israelites looked at Amos with suspicion and rejected him as God's messenger. In spite of that rejection, he faithfully performed his prophetic ministry.

Read Amos 7:10–17. What familiar pattern is seen here? What other examples can you find in the Bible of the same thing happening? What should we learn from all these examples?

Among those who did not like Amos' preaching was Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, who accused Amos of conspiracy against Israel's king. Bethel was one of the two royal sanctuaries, the very centers of apostate worship. Amos had predicted in public that if Israel did not repent, its king would die by the sword and the people would be led away captive. Amaziah ordered Amos to go back to the land of Judah, where his messages against Israel would be more popular.

In his response to the priest, Amos affirmed that his prophetic call came from God. He claimed that he was not a professional prophet who could be hired for services. Amos distanced himself from professional prophets who prophesied for gain.

However, speaking the truth by no means guarantees acceptance, because the truth can at times be uncomfortable and—if it disturbs those in power—it can produce serious opposition. God's call compelled Amos to preach so openly and so boldly against the sins of the king and the nobility from the northern kingdom that he was accused of treason.

What is our attitude when told that our actions and/or lifestyles are sinful and will bring punishment upon us? What does our answer tell us about ourselves and about, perhaps, the need for a change of heart and attitude?

The Worst Type of Famine

“ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it’ ” (*Amos 8:11, 12, NIV*). How are we to understand the meaning of these verses?

In Amos 8, the prophet describes devastating effects of God’s judgment on unrepentant Israel. God will punish the people for their sins by sending famine upon the land. But in verses 11 and 12, the prophet speaks of hunger and thirst for God’s Word. The tragedy that will stand out above all others is a famine of God’s Word because God will be silent, and no other famine could be worse.

Often when the people of Israel experienced great distress, they would turn to the Lord for a prophetic word in hope of guidance. This time God’s answer will consist of silence. A part of God’s judgment on His people will be the Lord’s withdrawal of His Word through His prophets.

If God’s people continue to be disobedient, the prophet says, the time would come when they will be eager to hear the message, but it will be too late to turn to God’s Word in hope of escaping the judgment. This is the result of Israel’s persistent refusal to hear God’s message through Amos. Like Saul before his last battle (*1 Sam. 28:6*), the people will one day come to realize how much they need God’s Word.

An entire population will frantically search for God’s Word, the same word that they chose to ignore in the prophet’s time. Those especially affected will be the young. While the former generations heard God’s Word and rejected it, the young people never will have the opportunity to hear the prophetic proclamation.

What do the following passages teach about the dire effects of the silence of God? *1 Sam. 14:37, Ps. 74:9, Prov. 1:28, Lam. 2:9, Hos. 5:6, Mic. 3:5–7.*

In what ways is it possible to silence the voice of God in our lives? However scary that thought, dwell on the implications. How can we make sure that never happens to us?

Judah's Ruins Restored

The prophet turns from the dark picture of the people's sinfulness and the resulting judgments to the glorious promises of the future restoration (*Amos 9:11–15*). The day of the Lord, previously described as the day of punishment (*Amos 5:18*), is now a day of salvation because salvation, not punishment, is God's last word to His people. However, salvation will come after punishment, not instead of it.

Amid all the gloom and doom, Amos does close his book with a message of hope. Facing the prospect of an immediate exile, David's dynasty has fallen so low that it can no longer be called a house but a hut. But David's kingdom will be renewed and united under one ruler. Beyond Israel's borders, other nations will call on God's name and enjoy His blessings along with Israel. The book concludes on this happy and hopeful note.

Biblical prophets did not teach that God's punishment is for punishment's sake itself. Behind almost all the warnings is the call of redemption. Though the threat of exile was imminent, the Lord encouraged the remnant with the promise of restoration to the land. The remnant would enjoy the renewal of the covenant. Those who experience the judgment would see God acting to save and restore.

What is the ultimate fulfillment of Amos' promises about the restoration of God's people? See *Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 15:13–18*.

Many Jewish teachers regarded Amos 9:11 as a messianic promise given to Abram, reaffirmed to David, and expressed throughout the Old Testament. The new king from David's line will reign over many nations in fulfillment of God's promise to Abram (*Gen. 12:1–3*). The Messiah will reign even over enemies such as Edom. The restored ruins of God's people never again will be destroyed.

Through the coming of Jesus Christ, David's greater Son, God upheld His gracious promise. James quoted this passage from Amos to show that the door of salvation is open to Gentiles to enjoy a full share of covenant privileges entrusted to the church. God would offer His redemptive blessings to Jews and Gentiles in the promised Messiah, the offspring of both Abram and David.

The ultimate fulfillment of these promises to everyone who accepts them, Jew or Gentile, will be seen only at the Second Coming. How can we keep that hope and promise alive and not let it fade amid the stresses of life?

Further Study: “Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

Discussion Questions:

1 As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s question about learning to hate evil and love the good, as well as the danger of calling evil good and good evil. Why is this danger especially prevalent when culture and society start to change their values in ways that accept certain behaviors, lifestyles, and attitudes that clearly are condemned in the Bible? As individuals, and even as a church as a whole, we are not immune to the cultural and societal trends in which we are immersed, are we? Dwell on the changes that have happened in your own culture and society over the years. For example, what things that were once considered shameful and taboo now openly are expressed and practiced, even deemed good or, at least, not wrong? How have these changes impacted the church’s attitudes toward these acts? What can we do in order to protect ourselves and our church from falling into the dangerous trap of calling evil good? At the same time, what cultural changes for the good have impacted the church in a good way, a way that more closely reflects the principles of love and acceptance revealed by Jesus’ life?

2 Dwell more on this idea of “a famine” for the Word of God. What is the likely way that could come about? Does the Lord purposely hide truth from people, or is it that people’s attitudes make them totally unreceptive to the Word of the Lord? Or could it be both? Or something else entirely? Discuss.

3 As Seventh-day Adventists who live with so much light and have so many reasons to believe in the truths that we have been given, are we not in danger of thinking that our knowledge of these wonderful truths alone is all that we need? How should the truths with which we have been blessed impact the way in which we live and interact with others, not only in the church but in our community? In other words, how can we live out the truths with which we have been entrusted? Why is it so important that we do?

One More Door

Anatoly [ah-nah-TOH-lee] was tired. He had been working for hours to share pamphlets and Bible study cards in his assigned territory with little success. He wanted to go home, but he had promised God that he would visit every home he could, so he continued to work.

Anatoly, 13, lives in Moldova, a small country west of Russia. His shoulders slumped as he approached the last house on the road. He whispered a prayer and knocked at the door. He heard voices inside and thought the family had guests. But before he could leave, the door swung open and a woman invited him in.

She removed some papers from a chair and invited Anatoly to sit down. She offered him some tea and introduced him to her 12 children. Anatoly shook off his surprise and offered the family a book and a Bible enrollment card. The woman seemed pleased to have the booklet. They visited for a few minutes before Anatoly stood to leave. The woman invited him to come again.

As Anatoly walked home, he was glad he had gone to that last house. He decided to visit the family again.

When Anatoly returned to see the family, they seemed cautious. He invited them to attend evangelistic meetings at the church, and Natasha, the eldest daughter, wanted to go. But the parents gently refused his invitation. So when Anatoly saw Natasha, her brother, Vania, and sister, Lena, at the meetings, he was surprised. "Did your parents change their mind and let you come?"

"Not exactly," Natasha said. "We told Mother that we were going for a walk. But I've learned so much tonight! I want to come back, but I don't know whether my parents will allow us." Anatoly promised to pray that they could attend the meetings.

Natasha, Vania, and Lena attended the meetings, but their parents refused to allow them to attend church on Sabbath. Yet, the three had learned about the importance of the Sabbath and were determined to keep God's holy day. Natasha told her parents simply, "God is God. He wants our worship all the time, not just once or twice a year. What He commands, we must do."

The children worked hard to finish their chores by Friday so they could worship on Sabbath. Natasha asked to be baptized, and Vania and Lena joined Pathfinders. The children were such good examples at home that their parents agreed they could attend church. They even took their younger brothers and sisters.

Anatoly is glad that he did not ignore that last house on the road. Because he was faithful, another family met the Savior. Our mission offerings help provide funds for evangelism at home and around the world. Thank you for giving.