

Amos' Text Message

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FAITH STORY:

Amos 9

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Read the Insights prior to class and be prepared to answer questions that may come up.
- Bibles for all students
- Copies of the Insights for each student
- A bag of Famous Amos cookies and an alternative if you have students who can't eat cookies.
- Poster paper and markers

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Greet students, check in about their week, and then hold up the bag of Famous Amos cookies. Ask students who Amos is. When a student offers an answer, offer them a cookie. (All answers are okay.)

CONNECT:

Ask students if they know anything about Amos in the Bible. After they've guessed or shared anything they know, share this quiz. Ask students to stand if they think it's true, sit if they think it's false.

- 1 Amos was a probably a rich guy before God gave him a new job. (T)
- 2 Amos was a sheep breeder. (T)
- 3 Amos had a lot of support in his new job as a prophet. (F)
- 4 God told Amos to give Israel a bad time about how they were worshipping God.
- 5 Amos begged God to be nice to Israel (T)
- 6 God was happy to hear that Amos was pleading Israel's case. (F)

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Hand out the Bibles and the “Insights about the Book of Amos” sheets. Read the sheets together. Then read Amos 9, taking turns and reading a verse at a time.

Ask students to use the poster paper and markers to write a text message that summarizes Amos 9:1-10, and another one for verses 11-15. Students may do this in small groups or individually.

Share the text messages with the class.

APPLY AND RESPOND:

Ask: Are these text messages just good for the people of Israel a long time ago? Do any of them apply to us? Which ones? Why?

Ask students to turn to Amos 5:24.

“I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a river of righteous living that will never run dry.” (New Living Translation)

Discuss: What would you be doing, and what would our church be doing, if we were part of a “mighty flood of justice” and in a “river of righteous living.” What would that mean in practical terms? Is there anything we are willing to change in our lives and our church right now?

Close with a prayer:

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

Amos’ time of prophesy occurred during the divided monarchy when both Judah and Israel were quite prosperous and well off. Both were expanding their territories without causing conflicts with one another or being involved in any large military conflicts. They were quite well fortified and their armies were successful, so there was no reason for concern or worry during such a time of peace. However, Amos’ prophecies did come true in 722 BC and it is after this point that this book was probably written.

The people of both Israel and Judah were living the high life during this period: business was good; religion was important, and all seemed well with the world. However, although there were many people prospering, many more were poor and being exploited by the wealthy members of society. Taxes and fines were a big burden for the average person and if they had a bad year it meant being sold into slavery to pay the debt. The judicial system was biased toward the wealthy members of society, restricting justice even more.

How did things get in such shambles? For the Israelites, ethics had become separated from their religion. They were going to the temple and offering sacrifices, yet neglected to care for

the concerns of the poor. This happened over time through misinterpretation of scripture. They thought of themselves as God's favorite people instead of called for a mission to work for the will of God on earth. They had the idea that if good things were happening to them, God must certainly be on their side. Additionally they made God out to be much smaller than God is, leaving out his great power and sovereignty.

Amos was likely one of the wealthy before he became a prophet. Scripture tells us that he was a sheep breeder, that is, a shepherd on a large scale. The only other use of this word is in reference to a king. However, Amos was called by God to cry out against the status quo. Amos agreed, but since he loved the people, he interceded for them until God made him stop.

Background on Chapter Nine

This vision of judgment and destruction is the fifth and final one in the book of Amos. However, the first four probably occurred at the beginning of his career, whereas this one is probably in the midst of it. We see God bringing judgment at the same place where priests go to seek forgiveness. God will first send an earthquake – which although common in this area because of a fault line, is to be interpreted as judgment and not just a natural occurrence. The second thing God will do is send military invasion. However, the people have problems believing this because life is so good that nothing could possibly go wrong.

There are also several important geographical references in this section. Anywhere the people try to go, God can still find them, even in the deepest place they know of (Sheol), the highest places they know of (heaven, Mt. Carmel), and the farthest edges of the earth in their awareness (bottom of the sea). The Nile is a reference to the annual ebb and flow of the Nile River in Egypt. Rains in Africa cause it to swell every year and then during the dry season it recedes again.

God speaks of his love for the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Arameans in verse seven. The Philistines especially are people that the Israelites saw as enemies to be slaughtered in war. God acts in all nations, not just Israel. The people of God finally realize this in the New Testament when Gentiles are finally accepted as children of God.

The line about the sieve (v. 10) is in reference to the process of sorting undesirable pebbles and other foreign objects from grain by use of a mesh screen. In this case, God is purifying his people, taking out all the unwanted rocks.

The last section of chapter nine speaks of hope. Verses 11 and 12 are possibly a later addition to the scripture. They were probably not spoken to the people by Amos because it was not the message they needed to hear at that time. The words of hope were likely added during exile when people were experiencing the judgment Amos had proclaimed.

Verses 11-15 are also often looked at through the eyes of the New Testament. Jesus is the new David and the joining of the nations happens at the Jerusalem Conference. It may very well be expressing the messianic expectation that developed during the exile in Babylon, which was likely when this book was written (as mentioned earlier).

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