

Amos Chapters 5-6 – John Karmelich

1. First let me get the bad news out of the way: Chapters 5-6 will continue and finish a four-chapter discussion of why God judges us. When we get to chapter 7 in the next lesson, Amos changes his topic from the "why's to the "how's" of God's judgment. Until then, we still need to understand a little more on why God judges us. As I said in the last lesson, the key point is that God expects us to use our lives as a witness for Him. Eternal judgment for the believer is not a condemnation for our sins, but rewards for living how God desires. The hard part of life is God can "take us out of the ballgame" if we fail to live as He desires. That's why I call this lesson, "Behavior matters" as it is the key point of these chapters.
2. Let me start by reviewing a little: My last lesson asked, why does God have to judge us anyway? If we as Christians are strictly saved by God's grace, why is their judgment and what's the criteria for our judgment? My big question is, "Can one be saved and still be in big trouble as far as what is our relationship with God? There are two points we need to consider: 1) Are we saved? And 2) What have we done with it? I know Christian history has many people who have died right after they were saved as martyrs for Jesus. For the rest of us, the big question is always, "I'm saved, so now what? Do I go on living like I was before I trusted in Jesus for that salvation, or should I be doing something else?" That's the tough questions this lesson gets into.
 - a) The short version of this lesson is the Israelites that Amos was preaching too, failed to be a living witness for God and now they have to suffer the consequences. A reason we should study Amos isn't to so "Oh, too bad for those people who lived there 2,700 years ago." It's so we can hopefully learn from their mistakes to not make the same ones.
 - b) But John, I thought I was saved only by God's grace. I'm not adding to that or denying it. I am saying His judgment is not just eternal judgment. It's also how we live our lives here as Christians were being judged. The key point is He expects us to do something with our salvation. That's the big "now what" of our lives after we're saved.
 - c) I admit that almost every lesson, I give a lecture at least once on what we should be doing with our salvation. Let me get it over with now and get it out of my system. I recall one of the greatest preachers of the 19th Century, Charles Spurgeon being asked that question by someone. That one asking that question was a railroad worker. Mr. Spurgeon said to him that God has called you to be a good witness to railroad workers. Obviously there is more to it than that, but the idea is to be a good witness for Jesus no matter where we are in life. I believe we should get involved in projects to make a difference for Him. As I said to one of my friends in church this morning, I write because I can't stand not doing it.
3. Meanwhile, let me summarize these chapters in a few thoughts. After all, that's why we're here!
 - a) First and foremost Amos states his case why the Israelites are in big trouble. Smuggled in the first section is a plea for the Israelites to turn from the way they're living before it's too late. Essentially God lays His case out to the Israelites why they're not living as He desires them to live. Mixed in that case is are pleas to change before it's too late.
 - b) The heart of the message is "ritual's" versus giving our hearts to God. Let me explain that one a little better: What is really easy even for the Christian to do, "Is attend church every Sunday, write a check and then think, I can cross that off my to do list for the week, as I've made God happy for a week by doing what I'm supposed to do." That isn't how He wants us to live now or then. In effect, the Israelites back in Amos' day were doing that too. It is another case of going through the rituals but not letting God be in charge of our lives.
 - i) But if we go to church every week and write a check every week, isn't that proof of our Christian faith? Yes and no. The answer depends upon our motivation. If we think God must love us now because we did "x" this week, we're blowing it as the Israelites did back then. If we think, I'm going to church this week, because I love God and want to express that love to Him, then that's the right motivation.

- ii) The same applies to our giving. If our attitude is we trust God to provide for us, it is the right attitude about giving. If we think, "Now I can go do whatever I want to do" because I've written this check Sunday morning, then we've got it wrong!"
 - iii) What God desires is we trust Him in every aspect of our lives. Yes that's a learning process as we grow, we can realize aspects of our lives where we lack that trust. It is a matter of realizing He wants to be in charge of every aspect of our lives. We're not working to be good enough for Him. We're living to make a difference for Him by letting Him be in control of all aspects of our lives.
- c) Meanwhile the Israelites in Amos' day were in big trouble. The short version they're going through the "God rituals" and ignoring Him as they went through their lives. Let me give an example from the text: Those who owned land were charging high-rent to the farmers who worked the land. Archeological evidence of that time era found very expensive parts of cities and very poor areas. It's like you could easily tell the landowners from those who were required to work that land! As most of us know, that hasn't changed over time.
 - i) Let me give a few words about wealth: I consider money neither good nor evil. It's the love of money that is considered the root of evil. If one is forcing other people to pay a high price in order to simply live, that's taking advantage of others. If it's a matter of making a product or service that people want that's better than what is already out there, that's an acceptable thing if it is God's will. I'm grateful there are great entrepreneur's out there as they provide jobs for millions of people. Anyway some Israelites living around Israel were guilty of taking advantage of others.
 - ii) Let me ask another tough question: If that's true, why make everyone suffer? Why did God allow that whole country to be destroyed if just the "rich" were guilty? It's a matter of showing the world that people don't get away with stuff forever. Most of us realize that if there is no judgment by God our world would be a very unfair place to live. If there is a God who executes justice in this world and makes a lot of people eternally suffer for injustice, then that makes life "fair".
 - iii) But John, didn't you say in a past lesson God doesn't send us to hell for crimes, it's for rejecting His love for us? Yes that's true. But proof of where people's hearts are is based on how we act. All I'm saying is the evidence of how we've lived is what God uses to prove to us why many suffer His eternal judgment.
- 4. OK enough of all of that. Yes there are more details in the text, which is why I like to go through it verse by verse. The key point is many people are in trouble because they refuse to trust God in all aspects of their lives. The proof is how they live their lives. Even for us devout Christians the text is full of evidence of "here is how God desires we live" which is why we study Amos and the bible as a whole in the first place! With that said, let's start the text itself.
- 5. Amos Chapter 5, Verse 1: Hear this word, O house of Israel, this lament I take up concerning you:
 - a) One of the confusing things to grasp in the Old Testament is sometimes the word Israel is used to describe all Israelites and sometimes it's used to describe the Northern Kingdom. For the newcomer's, when Amos wrote, Israel was split in two separate kingdoms. Amos was called to preach to the "North" Kingdom called "Israel", while the Southern Kingdom was called "Judah". My point is, context is everything. If you studied the previous text in Amos, you'd know that he is preaching to the Northern Kingdom in this book. Since I got the "who" out of my system, we can focus on what Amos is preaching.
 - b) One can see there is a "natural" chapter break between Chapters 4 and 5 even if the breaks were not inserted until over a millennium later. To recap some points for Chapter 1, Amos was a simple sheep farmer, living in the Southern Kingdom. God somehow told Amos to go to the Northern Kingdom and preach to them to change their ways of living or they are going to suffer the end of their kingdom. That's Amos's purpose in a nutshell. Most of the book is the details of why this kingdom is about to suffer His judgment. The reason we're called to study it, is because God can work the same way with us as He did with them!

- c) Next let me explain the word "lament". It's basically a sad poem. It's as if someone tells us, "Let me tell you a sad story in a song. This song contains lessons on how life works!" Since we don't have the music, all we can do is read what Amos says, and see if it applies to us. One reason it's here is we can understand why it is God judges us!
 - d) But John, the text says this "lament" is for Israel. Why should we take it personally? It's as if we're asking, "Why is it in the bible if it's just a matter of learning ancient history?" God isn't as interested in us learning the details of Israel's history as much as He's interested in us being a witness for Him. Bottom line, learn your history as to not repeat its mistakes!
6. Verse 2: "Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up."
- a) Speaking of history lessons, one thing to note is often when we get a "bible" history lesson, God will refer to the Israelites as a virgin. For those of us who've raised daughters, recall a time when our daughters were young and innocent, and that's the idea of "Virgin". The point is simply that God separated the Northern Kingdom from the Southern one to make a point to the Southern King that he should be kind to the people. The "South King" when the split occurred was named Rehoboam. When I think of Rehoboam, I'd say he was a jerk and God took most of the kingdom from him. Amos didn't come on the scene until about two centuries later. BY the time of Amos, God's saying in effect, "I've had enough of your country collectively failing to be a witness for Me and even though I've watched you since you were young, it is time for judgment as you're beyond hope." That is effectively what Amos is telling us in his poetic way of speaking in this chapter.
 - b) Speaking of poetic predictions, let's look at Verse 3:
7. Verse 3: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "The city that marches out a thousand strong for Israel will have only a hundred left; the town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left."
- a) Imagine if you were standing in a large crowd. The speaker says, "Look around, in a short time, only one of ten will still be alive". Personally, I'd want to kill that speaker or at least walk away from that message. If it's God Himself telling us that, yes it's time to be scared.
 - b) If that thought isn't scary enough, realize this verse is describing a military situation. It is telling us that if we send ten soldiers out to fight the enemy, only one will return alive. If you were with me in some of the previous lessons, I told you that the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by an empire called the Assyrians, which was based out of "Northern Iraq" if "Iraq" existed back then. The way they defeated someone was by outnumbering them. The Assyrians would conquer a city by surrounding it and starving it out, or by attacking if that city fought them. Anyway, Amos is describing how this history took place several decades before all of that occurred.
 - c) So how do we know Amos didn't write this "post-tense"? How do we know this isn't just a made up story after it took place and after the Northern Kingdom was destroyed? One reason is that Amos was accepted as a prophet soon after the destruction. The book would not be accepted as biblical if it were written post-tense. Another clue is Amos mentions a few geography details that would be difficult to do without the archeological dig to prove it. Such "digs" didn't occur until much later when Israel was in control of that land again.
 - i) All I'm saying is "time" proved Amos to be historically accurate and was accepted by both Jewish and Christian scholars as being "bible worthy" and accurate.
 - ii) In the meantime, we're just getting warmed up.
8. Verse 4: This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live;⁵ do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing. "
- a) Here we get Amos' plea of it's not too late! If the Israelites collectively sought God, Amos is promising the Israelites here that God will relent of this disaster. Does that mean if the Northern Kingdom had repented, would history be different? Apparently so.

- b) One of the things to grasp about God is that He exists outside of "time" as we know it. We also get the idea that God likes to interfere within our world, if for no other reason than to draw people closer to Him. How do we know that for sure? For starters the bible says He does. This chapter of Amos is the proof that the bible "says so". To state the obvious none of us can see God "work" in history. All we can do is see the outcomes and realize how it is working itself out for God's glory by how world history is taking place. To give another obvious example, if people ask, "How do you know the bible is the word of God", I like to say, "Look at the history of Israel, it has occurred exactly as the bible says it does." To look at biblical archeology is one way to prove the bible is the word of God. Another way is by the thousands of predictions made and seeing the accuracy of those predictions as they've come true over time.
 - c) Meanwhile, I left Amos begging the Israelites to turn back to God. Amos next mentions 3 places in Israel. Speaking of ancient history, I'd like to give a brief lesson on these places.
 - i) The short version is Bethel and Gilgal were cities in the Northern Kingdom. Those places had biblically-positive historical events there, but those places also became associated with places of "false-god" worship. It's like God saying, come seek Me, and don't go to places associated with false gods.
 - ii) The third city mentioned is Beersheba. That city was in the Southern Kingdom. It is as if God is saying, "You don't have to run away to the "South" in order to live to make a difference for Me. All of you can be a good witness for Me just where you are, but whether you like it or not, all of you have been called to be a My witnesses to the world of My existence."
 - iii) Ever stop to think why is the land of Israel is where it is? If you think about it God could have lead the Israelites anywhere in Europe Asia or Africa, and said to them here's where I want you to settle down. Why there? Think of the continents, I just listed: The "land bridge" between them is where Israel was located. All I'm saying is God put the Israelites there, as in that location by the way they lived, they'd be a living witness for God when people went from Africa to Europe or Asia or if they were going the other way. My point here is one reason why God's pleading with them to act like they are His witnesses to the world is that's why they're.
 - iv) OK, that's interesting, why should I care? Remember my introduction I told you about Charles Spurgeon lecturing a railroad worker about being a witness for God right where he was? Mr. Spurgeon effectively making the same point as Amos is about where the Israelites were located: It's that God's called us to be a witness for Him right where we are, or wherever He leads us to be His witness.
 - d) Speaking of Amos, let's return to him. The main point here is Amos is telling the Israelites that it's not too late. If they act like God wants them to act, life will be different.
9. Verse 6: Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.
- a) Bottom line, "Change your way's or you're doomed, deal with it!"
 - b) As to the specific's of what they were supposed to do, we'll get to that. Before that, Amos is trying to make it clear that God isn't to be messed with.
 - c) Let me explain the poetic term "House of Joseph". When Israel split into two kingdoms, it was only the tribe of Judah and Benjamin that made up the Southern Kingdom. That one was called "Judah" as they were the dominant tribe. Since most of the Israel tribes were in the Northern Kingdom, the "house of Joseph" is a cute nickname for them. It'd be like me saying, "Hey all you Israelites listen up." Instead of saying Israelites, Amos mixed it up by using the nickname "House of Joseph" to refer to the Northern Kingdom.
 - d) The main point is Amos is warning them that God's going to destroy that kingdom as if a fire swept through the land. I can't think of a scarier thing in life than to realize that the God who created everything is pretty ticked off at me right now!

- e) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me discuss the idea of God "getting angry". How can a God who knows all things get angry? Does a perfect god have emotions where He's angry sometimes and loving others? Of course not. The point is to consider perspective: From our perspective it can seem like God is happy with us because He's blessing us in a way at the moment or He's angry because some horrid thing happens. From His perspective, I'm saying that God is "perfectly angry" at sin all the time. I also believe God is perfect in His love to us at all times. God doesn't bless us because we deserve it. He blesses us because He loves us and wants us to be a good witness for Him. We can't make God be loving or angry. We can however, from our perspective experience those things if we re not living as He desires.
 - i) So am I saying if something bad happens God ordained it? No idea. I do know He allows things to happen to believers ultimately to glorify Him. I can't explain why He allows things to happen, I just accept that He does. Our job is to live in a world He created and be a witness for Him with the time He gives us.
- f) In the meantime, it appears like God's pretty ticked off at the Israelites right now, so we'll read onwards and see what Amos wants to teach them and us!
- 10. Verse 7: You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground
 - a) It's time for our first "why" of this lesson. Why is God doing this? The short version is the wealthy were taking advantage of the poor. As I explained in the introduction, those who owned land would charge a high rent to the land workers to farm there.
 - b) Notice Amos doesn't say, "You violated Commandment #6 of the 10, so you're doomed!"
 - i) My point is it's not about trying to follow a set of rules, it is about doing the right thing. Let me put it this way: the key commandment is we're to love God as much as possible and love our neighbor as ourselves. If we're requiring rent so high that a person can barely afford to live, that's an example of doing the wrong thing.
 - ii) Suppose you live in the nice neighborhood. You ask others, what's the going rate to rent my land. Let's say it's 50% of what you pick. Knowing nothing about how to pick crops, let's say people can't live on that. The right thing might be to say I'll pay a better rate. Often, you'll get better works anyway, because they're willing to work for someone who pays better.
 - iii) To say all of this another way, if our house isn't as nice as our neighbors, but those who work for us say "we're fair", that's a sign we're not violating Verse 7.
 - c) Let me also add that if a person or a group of people are "casting away righteousness", it's pretty good odds they're messing up in other ways that aren't pleasing to God. That's why it's not necessary to say, "Here's how you're violating the 10 Commandments". There are practical ways to judge if we're being a good witness for Jesus based on how we're living.
- 11. Verse 8: (he who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkens day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name--⁹he flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin),
 - a) I have to admit, Verse 8 is a strange transition. In Verse 7, Amos was "busy" condemning the Israelites for the way they lived. In Verse 8, we get a "God is so big He does all of this" type of statements. So as opposed to Amos just saying, "God created the world and all it's contents, why did Amos single out star constellations the Pleiades and Orion, the fact that the earth goes around the sun and the fact that we get rain and finally that destruction can occur by forces "of nature".
 - i) The answer is that Amos was using images he can relate to. Remember that Amos was a shepherd. That means he had the "night watch" at times, which means he at times watched the sun rise and even learned the basics of astronomy.
 - ii) A few words on stargazing while I'm in the neighborhood. For millenniums, those who gaze at stars have divided them up in groups based on their location within a night's sky. Pleiades and Orion happen to be two of those groups. So why these?

- iii) Of all the constellations (star groupings) in the sky, only these two "influence each other" in terms of position. My simple point is Amos, who was probably bored as he watched sheep all night, spent enough time watching the night sky that he did notice things like that. He's probably also watched many a sunrise and storms of lightening that does damage.
 - iv) The point of this verse is Amos is using the most "grand scale" things he can relate to tell us "how big God is and why we should obey Him." OK, enough of that, lets get back to his condemnation of sin.
12. Verse 10: you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. ¹¹ You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.
- a) We get two specific sins mentioned in these verses. The first is "having false witnesses in court" in order to get one's way. In ancient times, city officials sat at the gate entrance to a city. They would also judge disputes as part of their job. The point is for those who were rich they got away with "stuff", they had immoral justice at those city gates.
 - b) As to the second crime, I've already described it in this lesson. The landowners charged a high rent to work the land. Amos is saying, all those who benefited from this unfair way of doing business won't get away with it as the North Israel nation will soon be destroyed.
 - c) So does the punishment fit the crime, if certain rich people were guilty of crimes, and God allowed the entire nation to be destroyed? I believe in order to God to change the "status quo" (for the Israelites not collectively living as He desires) He had to go to these extreme measures as there was nothing else God could do to end this?
 - d) Let me put it this way: If God is God, why couldn't He just "zap the guilty dead?" I'd say that the poor would then just go loot rich people's homes. They wouldn't learn the lesson of how God wants to them to live.
 - e) Anyway, the punishment God choose meant that the wealthy weren't going to enjoy what they had for very long as destruction is coming.
13. Verse 12: For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
- a) Amos is telling us that God's aware of people getting away with stuff. I'd be like someone suing an innocent person just to get their money and winning. One of the things I've seen from years in the business world is the poor rarely get sued. It's usually people who have earned great wealth find themselves regularly being sued by those who don't have it. God is not saying being wealthy or poor is more desirable. The point is about being doing our best to be fair in business dealings.
14. Verse 13: Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.
- a) I got to admit, Verse 13 reads like it comes right out of the book of Proverbs. One of those great lessons we learn in life is there are times when to take a stand and fix a wrong. Most of us also know of things that are beyond our control. A famous proverb that's associated with "AA" is to ask God, "Help me to change the things I can, and help me to not worry of the things I can't." That's a paraphrase, but it makes a similar point to this verse.
15. Verse 14: Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.
- a) The reason it appears like Amos is quoting "Proverbs" type of statements in Verses 13-15, is because Amos is pleading with the Israelites to change their ways before it's too late. It comes back to my statement about having the wisdom to change what we can, as well as the wisdom to let go of what we can't. The point here is effectively if we seek God as hard as we can and do our best to hate evil and do what is right, then we can be sure that He'll bless our lives collectively and have mercy on us.

- b) Let me explain that a little better. As a society we can see the corruption of our leaders as if to think, "What can little old me do about them?" It's as if God's saying to us, you go be the type of witness I desire you to be and I'll take care of "them". Again we're back to the idea of doing what we can and letting God do what we can't and having the wisdom as to know the difference. The essential point is if we're not trying to make a difference, we are part of the problem whether we realize it or not. Of course we can't fix the world, but that shouldn't prevent us from trying to clean up our little corner of it! No we can't solve every issue, but we should pick things we're passionate about that make a difference for Him!
 - c) I also admit, I'm fascinated by the idea of "hating evil": to love what God loves also means to hate evil. For example evil is those who kill innocent people just because they're part of a different religion or skin color. Evil are those who profit by selling babies body-parts of aborted babies. All I'm saying is to love God also means we're to hate what He hates, and that would be acts of evil. Enough of that, onto the next verse.
16. Verse 16: Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail. ¹⁷ There will be wailing in all the vineyards, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.
- a) To paraphrase, "Since you don't want to change the way you're living doom is coming in the near future! You will hire professional "mourners" to cry out and wail as all that you know about life where you live will be destroyed." Remember that Israel was essentially an agricultural society. Therefore for the farmers to cry out, was more than a bad year of crops, it's about the end of life as they knew it.
 - b) Let's modernize this. We know history and the present time has a lot of crooked and rich dictators and tyrants. Why isn't God striking all those people dead on the spot? Why do they get away with their lifestyles? The short answer is that's all they'll get for all eternity as they failed to trust in God to guide their lives or care about those they've hurt. We got to remember that the issue isn't "them" but us! The bible essentially teaches us how we're expected to live and be a witness for Him. "They" are usually beyond our control. What God cares about is us using our lives as a witness for Him. He deals with everything else!
 - c) With that said, Amos is going to transition into "Revelation stuff" here:
17. Verse 18: Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. ¹⁹ It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. ²⁰ Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light-- pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?
- a) To paraphrase, "Why do you long for all that Revelation stuff to occur? Don't you realize it'll be bad news and not good news?" The essential point of Revelation is that God rules over the world and He's going to judge all of us based on how we've lived. Those living in Amos' time and place, were thinking, "If only the Messiah would come here and now, then life would be better!" Amos is effectively saying, "You don't realize how much you are messing up right now. Having the Messiah come back now won't be good news. It'll be as if you escaped one danger only to find yourself in even a greater danger!"
 - b) While I'm in the neighborhood, let me discuss "Jesus return" and living our daily lives. I hold the simple view that Jesus will come when He comes and there's nothing I can do to speed up that event. It could be today or it could be a thousand years from now. That is His business and not mine. Mine is to be a good witness for Him until that day occurs or until the day I'm called to be with Him forever. Yes I pray for His Kingdom to come, but that is a reminder that we should live as God desires us to live. It's also a reminder to us that He will come one day to right the wrongs of the world. The point here is a desire to have that day "now" will not solve our problems! If we're not right with God, that time will be bad news, not good news. That's Amos' key point in these verses.

18. Verse 21: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!
- a) One has to understand that the Northern Kingdom was still "religious" even though they have ignored what God wanted them to do. They'd "cover their bases" by performing say a ritual to God as well as honoring the false gods that existed back then. They would still go through the motions of honoring God and even offer sacrifices to Him and sing songs of their love for God. They suffered from the age-old problem of "Not putting their lives or their finances where their mouth is!" It's one thing to go church every week, and write a check. It's another to live as God desires the rest of the week! No God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect effort to make a difference for Him.
 - b) Anyway Amos is preaching, "Put your money where your mouth is" in so many words. It is not a lecture to give to Amos. It's a lecture to do the right thing whenever possible!
 - c) Remember my little lecture about "hating evil", that's effectively what Amos is doing here in these verses, especially Verse 24. To desire justice and doing what's right is what God desires of us far more than our rituals of say going to church once a week!
 - d) In the meantime, Amos is now going to slip into a historical lecture about the Israelites as to make a point how "nothing's changed over the centuries of them as a single group!"
19. Verse 25: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god-- which you made for yourselves.
- a) Before I say anything, these verses are quoted in Acts Chapter 7:42-43 when Stephen gave his defense of his trust in Jesus in that Chapter. My point is simply that the Jewish people living at that time considered Amos to be a prophet of God. His quote isn't exactly as it is written here in Amos, as most likely, Stephen quoted the Greek translation. Still Stephen had these verses in mind as he lectured the Jewish leadership. All I'm saying is Amos was by that time accepted as one of God's chosen prophets.
 - b) With that said, my first question about these verses, is why bring it up here and now? The time of Israel wandering in the desert before they came into that land was about 700 years earlier if my math is correct. What Amos is getting at is ever since their ancestors came up out of Egypt, they've been guilty of mixing "idol-worship" with God worship and nothing has changed since then. Yes the Israelites have had their positive moments when they did collectively worshipped God, but Amos' point like Stephen's point is they constantly went back to "their old habits" instead of living as God desired they lived. I could bore you with details of the false gods the Israelites worshipped. What's far more important is what are we seeking besides God. To state a famous Christian proverb, "God wants to be Number 1 on a list of 1, not a list of 10". That doesn't mean we can't have hobbies. It means that we make God the central focus of our lives in whatever we do! It doesn't mean we have to be thinking of God "24/7", but it does mean in all situations we should be asking ourselves if we're doing the right thing, not just when we're off to church to use a simple example!
 - c) With that said, let's finish Chapter 5 as there is only one more verse:
20. Verse 27: "Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.
- a) If you were with me in previous lessons on Amos, you might recall that I stated there was archeological evidence that the reign of the Northern Kingdom extended to Damascus. It is part of Syria today but that city existed then as it does today. His point is the Israelites living in that kingdom are going to be exiled beyond the territory that they associate with their kingdom. So why not just say Assyria? Because those that survive the siege will be sent all over their empire and not just the capital. The main point is they're in big trouble!

- b) OK John, I get the sad reality that they were taken captive out of their land. What does it have to do with you and me today? Most likely God won't "uproot us" out of our land as God called Christians to be His witnesses effectively around the world. What God could do and has done in the past is take away our "witness" for Him. For those of you who've lived a while, probably can name at least one or two churches that have "died" as they're no longer being the type of witness God desired. With that said onto Chapter 6:
21. Chapter 6, Verse 1: Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!
- a) You got to admit, for a "nobody" shepherder, Amos has been getting pretty brave as he's been called to condemn Israelites for being complacent in their worship of God.
- b) Since Amos got a roll in the last chapter condemning the Israelites in the North Kingdom, he expands his lecture to the South One as well. The word "Zion" is a nickname for all of Israel but in this context, I'd argue he's talking Jerusalem as it represents the "South". He's saying in effect all of Israel is blowing it!
- c) Since Amos is using Zion to represent the Southern Capital, and Samaria is the North One realize he's saying, "The people look to the leaders for guidance, and they're blowing it."
- d) As to how Israel is blowing it, we'll get to that soon enough!
22. Verse 2: Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?
- a) OK, unless you've studied ancient geography this verse is confusing. All three cites can be considered "borders" of a large "fruitful valley" for growing crops. All three of these cities are not part of either kingdom but were part of that same area where crops can grow.
- b) Amos is saying, "Do you think that land is any better than yours?" What he is effectively saying to the Israelites is "You're acting no better than your pagan neighbors! God desires that we be His witnesses to others. If we are not acting any better than all those who don't believe in Him, how are we being His witnesses? If God's people are taking advantage of their fellow Israelites (the rich oppressing the poor), then how are they being a witness for God? That's the underlying point here.
23. Verse 3: You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror.
- a) Imagine seeing most of the people you know killed. Even the survivors are separated to go live in different places never to see each other again. The logical question they'd have is "Hey God, why are you doing this to us?" His response in effect is, "You have brought this on yourself. I tried to get your attention (Remember all the some rain here, but none over their method from the last chapter?) but I have to go to drastic measures to show the world that being a witness for God is an assignment to be taken seriously or else they will have to suffer the consequences.
- b) OK John, if all of this is true, how do you explain the Holocaust from God's perspective? I would say "evil exists and we have to fight it". I'd say Satan is doing all He can to destroy the Israelite population so they can't be in the land when Jesus returns. Millions died, and I'll let God judge them fairly. So why did God allow it? As best I can tell, to see if people would rise up to stop it. The great positive thing that came out of it was it allowed Israel to be a country again!
24. Verse 4: You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵ You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. ⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.
- a) Remember I said we'll get to the specific charges soon? We're at the "soon". Like I already said, it's not like Amos said, you specifically violated commandments "3, 5 and 8". Instead we get a three verse lecture of "Many of you are sitting around living the life of luxury, as you ignore those who are suffering. I won't give another "ivory home" and nice couch or nice food lecture. I'll just get to the key points here.

- b) Most of us know the style of arguments where we try to anticipate what the other person will say in response and "cut them off at the pass". That's effectively what Amos is doing by making the comment about "playing your musical instrument like David". Yes he was famous for writing psalms and probably the music to accompany them. What he's trying to tell us in a subtle way is, yes the most famous king in Israel's history did do that, but he didn't allow injustice to occur in his life even though he spent time writing psalms!
 - i) Let me expand on that while I'm in the neighborhood. Do you think David lived in a nice palace while the peasants had simple homes? Yes I do. The underlying issue is about one class "abusing" the other class in order to achieve that power. As I've lectured before, there is nothing wrong with legitimate success. Our sin is if we're taking advantage of others in order to achieve that success. The point is Israel was not only was a bad witness to their fellow countrymen, but also to the nations that were nearby. Word was "out" how the "rich" treated everyone else.
 - c) Final question, what's the "ruin of Joseph". Yes it could be a prediction about what's about to occur as both the North and South will be destroyed in about 100 years of each other. I don't happen to hold that view. I think the "ruin" is being a bad witness for the God who made it possible for the Israelites to be there in the first place. That's the underlying logic of the past few chapters as Amos is getting close to wrapping up this four chapter lecture!
25. Verse 7: Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.
- a) What's the motivation for an army to go attack a neighboring country? I'd say it is power for the leaders, but for the army it was the "loot" they could capture. Prisoners were those they had to deal with. I'd bet when the Assyrians attacked the North Kingdom, they didn't care that much about the poor neighborhoods as that's just more prisoners to deal with. I would say the real prize for the army is the expensive homes and all that's inside of them!
 - b) That's why the rich who Amos is condemning will be the first to suffer this invasion. That is the point of this verse.
 - c) So does that mean the rich will suffer more in hell? Again the reason people are sent there is for rejecting God's free gift of salvation. I'd argue that salvation prior to that was based on what one did know about God and how they reacted to that information. I do suspect that many who lived in luxury will be shocked in the end how they wasted much of their lives and things that did not matter for eternity! OK, enough guilt here. Onto Verse 8.
26. Verse 8: The Sovereign LORD has sworn by himself--the LORD God Almighty declares: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it."
- a) As I read through these chapters, I keep thinking about the story Jesus told of Lazarus and the rich man from Luke 16. In that story, an unnamed rich man was sent to the "bad part of hell" and Lazarus, a poor man was sent to a "nice waiting room" as I call it as Christians argue that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. What I thought about is that, we think of the rich man being in hell for being rich. That wasn't the case in Jesus' story, nor is it the case with people around Amos as well. The issue isn't having wealth. What is important is what have we done with it, how have we earned it, and are we using what we have as a witness for Jesus? That's the underlying question throughout much of Amos!
 - b) Bottom line for the Israelites that Amos is preaching too is "there is a too late!" Remember the key issue is not individual salvation, it's our witness to God. I'm pretty positive I have now beaten that over our heads pretty strongly throughout this lesson and the last few. A "too late" can be cumulative as well. It's almost as if God is saying, I've watched all of you live for generation after generation and things aren't getting any better. Therefore, you do not leave me (God) any choice but to execute tough justice. It's not that God desires to kill anyone or send them to hell. The issue is our witness for Him. If we blow it long enough, there is a "too late". I have no idea when one reaches "too late" and to state the obvious, I don't want to push my luck. I consider this an incentive motive to keep on my toes!

27. Verse 9: If ten men are left in one house, they too will die. ¹⁰ And if a relative who is to burn the bodies comes to carry them out of the house and asks anyone still hiding there, "Is anyone with you?" and he says, "No," then he will say, "Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD."
- a) A logical question Amos' audience would be asking at this point is, "How bad will it be?" Amos answers that question in these verses. He doesn't say, everyone around you will die tomorrow so start crying! He's saying it will be so bad, people will get to a point where to even mention God's name will bring fear. It'd be like saying, "We're in so much trouble as it is, let's not risk making it worse by bringing up God's name! so He'll act more!"
 - b) Personally if things were that bad, I'd be praying like there is no tomorrow for forgiveness and mercy. I'd be mentioning His name over and over again as if to ask, "Make it obvious to me what it is you want me to do despite all this damage." One of my favorite prayers is simply, to ask God to help me learn whatever lessons He wants me to learn from what I'm dealing with at the moment. I'm willing to bet as the Israelites as they were being taken to captivity or killed they were wondering the same thing. The real issue is, "Are we willing to truly change"? I get the impression with the Israelites that it took "that much" for them to realize the errors of their ways.
 - c) Hopefully it'll never take "that much" for you and me to learn what God wants us to learn. How do we know what He wants? That's why we're to study His word to learn how God wants us to live as a witness for Him. I'm not saying we have to memorize the bible day 1. I'm saying God wants to be intimately involved in our lives. To steal a phrase from one of my favorite bible teacher: "Never be so busy going about the King's business, that you fail to make time for the King!" (From Chuck Missler).
 - d) While you're thinking about that one, we only have four more verses to go.
28. Verse 11: For the LORD has given the command, and he will smash the great house into pieces and the small house into bits.
- a) To state the obvious a big fist didn't appear in the sky to smash the Israelites houses. It's a colorful way of saying destruction is coming.
 - b) Here's an interesting little historical fact I haven't shared as of yet. During the time North Israel had it's expansion of wealth and even conquering Damascus, Assyria wasn't doing well and wasn't expanding it's territory. A new leader came on the scene probably a short time after Amos wrote this who expanded their empire and yes, conquered "North" Israel.
 - c) I brought that up here as I suspect a lot of people were probably listening to Amos, who did not think of Assyria as a problem at that moment. However, as history taught us, Amos is giving a fairly accurate prediction of history and describing the destruction as if God gave the commandment Himself for the judgment.
 - d) Let me ask another tough question. (I promise the last one of this lesson). Israel as it exists today is mostly secular. Does that mean they're ripe for judgment like Amos' day? I don't have such knowledge as to state the obvious I'm not God. I do know that prophecy comes in patterns to be studied and not just singular events. Whether God decides to just let the nation exist for Jesus to rule there or repeat that pattern is literally His business, period!
29. Verse 12: Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness-- ¹³ you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, "Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?"
- a) Verse 12 is essentially saying, "I know you people are smart enough to know the obvious!" You know that horses don't run well on rocky surfaces or plowing a field without oxen to lead that plow is almost impossible! Still, you don't have the "brains" to realize that when the Northern Israel Kingdom expanded by conquering two nearby cities, it was God who allowed that to occur? I've been discussing for a few lessons now how the North Kingdom was wealthy at that time. One of the reasons for their success was they expanded the land they had by conquering nearby places. Amos' point here is that God allowed that to occur if for no other reason than to show the Israelites their improper use of their success.

- b) A simple but important point to grasp is God allows both success and failure in the lives of believers ultimately for His glory. I can't explain why things occur. Like most people, I can look back in hindsight and realize that God is working the world out for His glory. If you've lived a while, you've probably seen horrid things occur as well as great things that happen in life if we think about it. Being a witness for Jesus is about making a difference where we can and letting God do what we can't and asking His help to guide us so we do use our lives for His glory. That's what being "His witnesses" is all about.
 - c) Life's about realizing He exists and He desires to help us use our life to make a difference for Him in the world we live in. That's the greatest purpose one can have in life, as to be used by the God of the Universe to glorify Him with our lives. Of all the things I've done in my life, nothing brings me greater joy than to realize I'm being used by God to make a difference for Him. That's what makes life worth living.
 - d) In the meantime, I still have one more verse to discuss:
30. Verse 14: For the LORD God Almighty declares, "I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah."
- a) If this verse was the final one of Amos, it would be a very depressing book. The essential point is that the Northern Kingdom will be destroyed from one end to the other. Realize the places mentioned would be like saying "from the most Northern to the most Southern part" are about to be destroyed.
 - b) Keep in mind that Amos has just spent the last four chapters explaining to "North" Israel why it is doomed for judgment. Amos ends this section by essentially saying, "It's a done deal, there is no changing God's mind and it's too late to repent, so deal with it."
 - c) I was thinking that if I got news like that, I'd be praying like there was no tomorrow! The point to keep in mind over and above all the destruction to come, is about being a witness for Jesus. I'm willing to bet there will be people in heaven who were part of that kingdom even though God just gave it a death sentence! My point is we have to separate salvation in the "eternal sense" from judgment as a witness for God. That's what I've been trying to beat over all our heads for the past few lessons. We are saved by our trust in Jesus as God and the fact we believe He died for our sins and of course is in charge of our lives. What we fail to consider is Christians can and are judged as a witness for Him. It may not affect our lifestyle here and now, but if there are eternal rewards based on how we've used what time God has given us, that fact alone should remind us of what is important in life!
 - d) What I don't want you to do is panic that we're wasting our time. What I hope to inspire in each of us is a desire to consider how we've wasted all our time and our resources and give thought to those things from His perspective. The key point is we only have one life to live and the greatest thing we can do with our lives as believers is use them to glorify Him based on how we live out that life. That's the key point of this lesson.
31. Let's pray: Father, first we thank You that you have separated us from the world so that we can spend eternity glorifying You by serving You. That's why we were made in the first place. Help us not to waste the most valuable thing You give us our time, and trust in Your power so that we can use our lives to glorify You. Help us to have the boldness to make a difference for You as we step out in faith that You will lead us as You desire. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.