

# MAJOR MESSAGE, MINOR PROPHET: AMOS

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## Amos 5:1-2, 4-17, 21-27

**(The Message Translation)**

Listen to this, family of Israel, this Message  
I'm sending in bold print, this tragic warning:

"Virgin Israel has fallen flat on her face.

She'll never stand up again.

She's been left where she's fallen.

No one offers to help her up."

God's Message to the family of Israel:

"Seek me and live.

Don't fool around at those shrines of  
Bethel,

Don't waste time taking trips to Gilgal,  
and don't bother going down to  
Beer-sheba.

Gilgal is here today and gone tomorrow  
and Bethel is all show, no substance."

So seek God and live! You don't want to end  
up with nothing to show for your life

But a pile of ashes, a house burned to  
the ground.

For God will send just such a fire, and the  
firefighters will show up too late.

Woe to you who turn justice to vinegar and  
stomp righteousness into the mud.

Do you realize where you are? You're in a  
cosmos star-flung with constellations by  
God,

A world God wakes up each morning  
and puts to bed each night.

God dips water from the ocean and gives  
the land a drink.

God, God-revealed, does all this. And he  
can destroy it as easily as make it.

He can turn this vast wonder into total  
waste.

People hate this kind of talk.

Raw truth is never popular.

But here it is, bluntly spoken:

Because you run roughshod over the  
poor and take the bread right out of their  
mouths,

You're never going to move into the  
luxury homes you have built.

You're never going to drink wine from  
the expensive vineyards you've planted.

I know precisely the extent of your  
violations, the enormity of your sins.  
Appalling!

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You bully right-living people, taking  
bribes right and left and kicking the poor  
when they're down.

Justice is a lost cause. Evil is epidemic.

Decent people throw up their hands.

Protest and rebuke are useless, a waste  
of breath.

Seek good and not evil—

and live!

You talk about God, the  
God-of-the-Angel-Armies,

being your best friend.

Well, *live* like it, and maybe it will happen.

Hate evil and love good,

then work it out in the public square.

Maybe God, the God-of-the-Angel-Armies,  
will notice your remnant and be gracious.

Now again, my Master's Message, God,  
God-of-the-Angel-Armies:

"Go out into the streets and lament loudly!

Fill the malls and shops with cries of  
doom!

Weep loudly, 'Not me! Not us, Not now!'

Empty offices, stores, factories,  
workplaces.

Enlist everyone in the general lament.

I want to hear it loud and clear when I  
make my visit."

God's Decree.

"I can't stand your religious meetings.

I'm fed up with your conferences and  
conventions.

I want nothing to do with your religion  
projects,  
your pretentious slogans and goals.

I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes,  
your public relations and image making.

I've had all I can take of your noisy  
ego-music.

When was the last time you sang to *me*?

Do you know what I want?

I want justice—oceans of it.

I want fairness—rivers of it.

That's what I want. That's *all* I want.

"Didn't you, dear family of Israel, worship me  
faithfully for forty years in the wilderness,  
bringing the sacrifices and offerings I  
commanded? How is it you've stooped to  
dragging gimcrack statues of your so-called  
rulers around, hauling the cheap images of  
all your star-gods here and there? Since you  
like them so much, you can take them with  
you when I drive you into exile beyond  
Damascus." God's Message,  
God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

## REFLECT & DISCUSS

### Context

Amos is a revolutionary book. Not only does  
it speak a word of fierce rebuke to the  
people, as prophetic books do, it is likely the  
earliest book of prophecy in Israelite religion.  
Amos is a "minor" prophet not because of  
significance, but because the book is short  
compared to others. Major prophets are  
those with longer writings: Jeremiah,  
Ezekiel, Isaiah.

Prophets are not those who predict the  
future, but those who proclaim what is likely,  
indeed almost certain, if things don't change.

Amos is set in a time of prosperity for the  
northern and southern kingdoms of Israel

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(8th century BCE). Yet, even without immediate threat from outside empires and a sense of peace within, Amos speaks a cautionary word of downfall and destruction.

For Amos, as for the prophetic tradition that followed, the morality and spirituality of the people are a problem. Prosperity and peace are false security (and idolatrous). There is moral and spiritual decay that the prophet throws in front of the people. Amos pays special attention to the injustice toward the poor: the ones most likely and too often exploited, defrauded, and ignored by the courts. The consequences of moral rot--not caring for the poor and oppressed--are boldly declared by the prophet: national defeat and exile. Within a few decades, the neighboring Assyrians invaded and conquered the land.

## Big Ideas

1. The minor prophets are still major in the significance and relevance of their message.
2. The **purpose** of worship is not the **production** of worship.
3. "Justice" in the bible is about making things right. The prophets measured the spiritual strength of a society by its *just and fair* treatment of the poor.
4. Worship without justice is **empty**, justice without worship is **fleeting**.

## Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. What do you make of Amos' challenge to work out a love for good "in the public square"?
3. What is the purpose of worship? What is the relationship between justice and worship of God?
4. What difference do you see, if any, between justice and charity?
5. How might you faithfully work toward justice in today's world?