



Let Justice
roll

Amos Bible Study



Watch this great Intro to Amos video from the Bible project to get up to speed
www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGgWaPGpGz4

Why Amos?

There is perhaps no better book in the bible with which to study the topic of justice than Amos. A book of sermons, poems and visions for the people of Israel, Amos brings a message of biblical justice still relevant to the church today. Amos calls us to imagine, and then act on, how the Kingdom of God will break through death, despair and the prevailing systems of injustice.

This two-part study can be used either on your own, in your small group or with your family. It's designed to be flexible with the intention to help us explore this powerful prophetic teaching and enable us to imagine what these ancient words have to say in 21st Century Australia.

The Context of Amos

By 800 B.C. both Israel and Judah had reached new political and military heights. Peace seemingly reigned and business was booming. It was a time of great prosperity, notable religious piety, and apparent security.

Enter Amos, a native of the small Judean village of Tekoa, he was called by God from a shepherd's task (7:14-15) to the difficult mission of preaching harsh words in a smooth season. Amos saw that prosperity was limited to the wealthy, and that it fed on injustice and on the oppression of the poor. Religious observance was insincere, and security more apparent than real. With passion and courage Amos preached and called for justice as the foundation of faith.

Throughout his teachings, Amos focuses on the connection between justice and righteousness, between the personal and the public. The book of Amos challenges us to examine ourselves and our society and to confront injustice wherever we find it, including in ourselves!





GOOD
VIBES
ONLY

Amos declares that if we seek 'good' then God's presence will be with us. But what is the nature of this 'good' we are to seek?



Read Amos 5:1-15

At the very heart of the book of Amos sits the following passage:

*Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
Then truly the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be with you as you claim.
Hate evil and love good,
and let justice prevail at the gate;
Then it may be that the LORD, the God of
hosts,
will have pity on the remnant of Joseph.*

The term "good" appears twice in this text. These two lines are not only parallel in content (that is, both contain a command concerning the good), but they also are interconnected by an inverse parallelism of this command: "seek good and hate evil . . . hate evil and love good." These and other literary techniques are no coincidence here: This is a mandate, not a casual suggestion. Only by seeking "good" can the nation hope for any sort of future: or the horrific destruction that looms on the horizon will happen.

1 What good do we seek in the world?



Discuss

- What, then, is that "good" that Yahweh so emphatically demands? What does that look like for you and others around you?
- What, then, is that "evil" that Yahweh so emphatically demands we resist? What does that look like for you and others around you?



Read Chapters 1 & 2

STUDY ONE

With the heart of the book in mind, we can now turn to its beginning. Chapter 1 and flowing into Chapter 2, the Lord declares impending punishment for the evil done by Israel's neighbours: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, and Moab. All this would have been quite natural for the people of God to hear – after all, they were surrounded by those who were not following God's way. But then, from 2:4, the Lord declares the same punishment on them! On God's own people!



Discuss | Seek Good

The following list is taken from the "evils" charged against God's people and their neighbours. What strikes you about this list? How do these evils translate and differ from the list you created earlier? Draw parallels between the text and what you see today. What's absent from either? What resonates

- Ethnic cleansing and violent atrocities (1:3-4, 11-14)
- Economic destruction (1:3-5)
- Slavery (Amos 1:6-8)
- Rejection of the law (2:4)
- Creation of inequality (2:6 and 4:1)
- Cruelty to the poor (2:7)
- Perpetuate abuse and prostitution (2:7)
- Worship idols (2:8)
- Suppress the voices of the prophets (2:12)

*Hate evil &
Love good:*

Amos 5:15

Note: Ignorance is no defence! Pleading ignorance against claims of injustice is a common response, both then and now. It is important to note here that the transgressions of Israel are not "sins of omission" (things that they have not done). Rather, the actions of Israel reflect a wilful turning away from covenantal requirements. They knew what the good was and they wilfully undertook evil actions. This is made plain by the prophet's use of emotional words: "hate evil, love good" (5:15a). To seek good is a conscious choice, as is detesting evil. Both choices arise from the depths of the individual and communal soul.



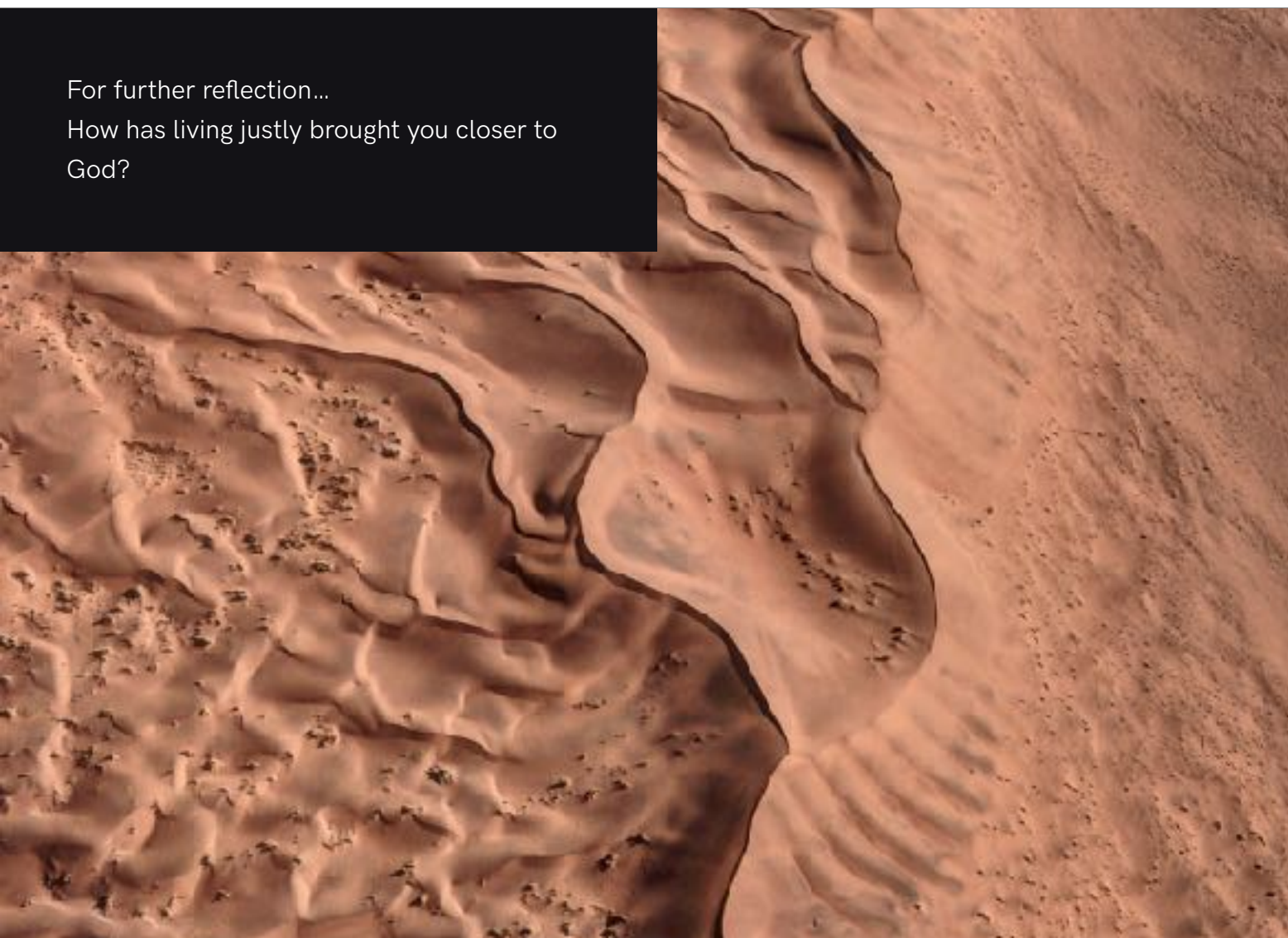
Discuss | Seek God

STUDY ONE

Corresponding to verses 5:14-15 is a matching section at 5:4-6. Again, we find the repetition of the word “seek” but this time the “good” is not humans treating other humans well, but rather seeking God. Here, it is “good” for Israel to pursue the Lord, Yahweh. Amos, and the other minor prophets, consistently teach that it is Yahweh who brings the full blessings of goodness to his people as they seek him, and who sends curses for their choice of evil. The “good” is more than a picture of an ideal human community linked by history and religion (and, to some extent, ethnicity). Yahweh is the greatest good, and without him this vision of social harmony is an impossibility.

[1] M. Daniel Carroll, *Seeking The Virtues Among The Prophets: The Book Of Amos As A Test Case*. *Ex Auditu* 17 (2001): 77-96.

For further reflection...
How has living justly brought you closer to
God?



2 Let Justice roll like a river



In the book of Amos, the practises of justice and righteousness are intertwined. But what do these two pursuits of the Kingdom look like in our own context, every day?



Read Amos 5:21-24

The words justice and righteousness are often paired together throughout the Old Testament and nowhere more famously so that in Amos 5:24. The Hebrew word is *mishpat*, usually translated into English as justice. The term is often paired with *tsedaqah*, standardly translated as righteousness. In poetic texts like Amos, two are often divided between the two halves of a poetic line. For example:

*Let justice roll down like water,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24)*

*He looked for justice and found bloodshed,
for righteousness, and heard a cry (Isaiah 5:7)*

In studying this pairing more widely, what becomes clear is that rather than indicating two distinct characteristics, the phrases express a single idea by the use of two words coordinated grammatically.

Individually, the words carry a wide range of meanings. *Mishpat* may mean rule, judgment, justice, custom, law, or a legal decision. *Tsedaqa's* range of meaning is even wider, covering right order, just conduct, generosity, prosperity, and victory.

When paired together, they create a practice of seeking good and God towards the Kingdom come.



Discuss | Mishpat and tsedaqah

What difference do you discern between justice and righteousness? Can you practise one without the other?

Read the quotes below, from recent and contemporary Christians. What do they say about justice and righteousness?

"If you are trying to live a life in accordance with the Bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable." - Tim Keller

"Part of living justly is recognising that the decisions we make affect not only the people around us but the communities and the environments around the world. We must live our lives and make our choices with that in mind." - Kimberly Hunt

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor." - Desmond Tutu

"Jesus came to bring complete transformation in us - transformation of our lives - to bring justice into the world." - Kuki Rokhum

"In seeking to do justice, we have to be open to the reality that God will challenge us, change us and transform us. In doing justice and in doing things that matter to God, we actually grow more in his likeness. We begin to reflect more the character of God. We grow more intimate with the heart of God."
- Eugene Cho





Discuss | Worship and justice

God is scathing of Israel's practice of worship. It can be really hard to read this passage and not feel convicted about the way we go about things most Sunday mornings. The passage cuts to the core of what it means to worship with integrity, connecting what we say to God and what we do unto others.

Of course, the definition of worship goes beyond our Sunday services and the type of music we sing, the lighting we choose and the words we say. While the bible is clear that we are to worship God with our whole lives, our Sunday Services are a tell-tale sign of how we worship throughout the week.



Group Prayer

This prayer is designed to be shared aloud. Choose three people to read the different voices.

Voice 1:

God of justice, keep us silent
 when the only words we have to utter are ones
 of judgement, exclusion or prejudice. Teach us to face the wounds in our own hearts
 (Silence)

God of Justice, give us power of speech to resist injustice, oppression and hate, not only on our own behalf but for others who are not heard. Make us peacemakers and restorers of the streets.

Voice 2:

God of power, keep us silent
 so that we may listen respectfully to another person's pain
 without trying to fade or fix it,
 for you are present within each one of us
 (Silence)

God of power, give us courage to share our gifts of speech
 To comfort, uphold and strengthen.
 Let us be a glimpse of your love to those in need.

Voice 3:

God of love, in the silence of our hearts
 give us words of welcome, acceptance and
 renewal so that when we speak
 our words come from you
 (Silence)

God of love, give us voices of praise to
 celebrate each other
 And the glories of creation
 Believing that we all live within your
 blessing.

Yvonne Morland

For Ongoing Reflection

What does this flow of justice mean for you personally?

What are two things you can cultivate in your own life to live more justly or, another way of saying it is, to live right? The two additional resources provide a great range of ideas as starting points.

Write them down, maybe share with a friend and commit to catching up regularly.



About TEAR Australia

We're focused in places of great need, partnering with local Christian agencies to end poverty, challenge inequality and build sustainable communities. Together, we act with courage, tackling injustice in order that all may experience fullness of life.

www.tear.org.au



**THE JUSTICE
CONFERENCE**

About The Justice Conference

The Justice Conference is a global movement, uniting followers of Christ as they pursue justice in their contexts. We bring together the local church to be equipped and encouraged as they hear from leading theologians, practitioners and artists.

www.thejusticeconference.com.au



Additional resources on living justice

Coming Home. Discipleship, Ecology and Everyday Economics (Jonathan Cornford, Manna Gum)

Coming Home seeks to make a real and practical connection between faith, the way we live, and the great ethical and environmental challenges of our time.

www.mannagum.org.au/whats_on/new-book-coming-home

Renewed Way of Living (TEAR Australia Discipleship Guide)

Four-part series in what it means to live well as Christians today. Examines biblically and practically the subjects of; work, money, vocation and sustainability

www.tear.org.au/resources/renewed-way-of-living-discipleship-group-guide