

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Amos**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

I'm always delighted when we can study the books of the prophets. Because many of them are short, we can go into more detail. Ten books are written during the time of the civil war. God will send these prophets to work either in one nation or the other, but never in both. Their messages are relevant and powerful, but to understand them, we need to get as much background information as possible. Sometimes it will be in the history books of the Bible, like Kings or Chronicles.

Other times, there will be lots of information in the book itself. The best way to find it is to read quickly thru the book, looking only for information about the **author**: who he was, when and where he lived, where he went and then his basic message, concern or problems. When you find any of this, write it down in a notebook, using one page for all the information on the author. At this point you are not looking for the meaning of the book. You are only looking for basic facts.

After finding information about the author, then go back and scan it again. Using another page, write down everything you can about the **political, economic or spiritual conditions**. This is the way to get the most out of the book. So you can see how it is done, we will start the lesson on Amos, just getting the background.

First, we look for information about **Amos** himself.

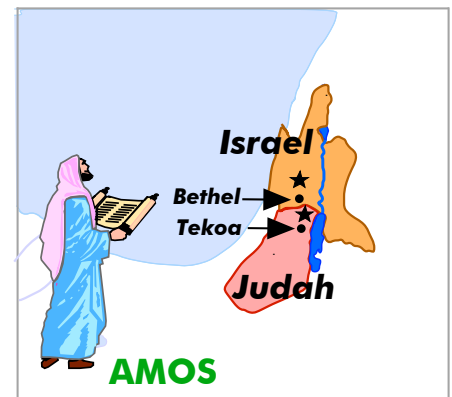
Chapter 1:1, says he lives in **Tekoa**. Bible dictionaries or footnotes will tell you this is a small farming town, about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. So Amos is from the southern nation of Judah.

Chapter 7 tells us more about him.

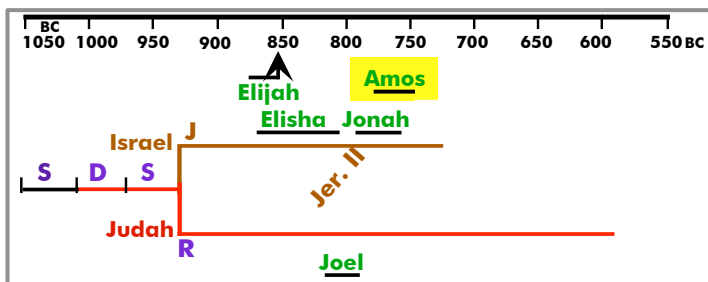
Verse 14 says he was a farmer and shepherd. He took care of an orchard of sycamore or wild fig trees. No one in his family had been a prophet. He had never attended the seminary for the prophets. This means he was either taught by God, mentored by Jonah or both.

According to verse 15, one day while working on the farm, God calls Amos to be a prophet to the Jews in the northern nation of Israel.

Verse 13 tells us he speaks in the city of **Bethel**.



We find the time of his ministry in chapter 1:1. It is when Uzziah is king of **Judah** and Jeroboam II is king in **Israel**. In other words, Amos is a prophet during the time of the Jewish civil war.



Whenever a prophet gives the names of kings in both Judah and Israel, you can automatically know his ministry was sometime during the 300 years of civil war.

Amos is during the time of Jeroboam II. That name should sound familiar. In the previous lesson, we learned **Jonah** was a prophet in the days of Jeroboam II.

Jonah was first, working in Samaria - the **political** capital, starting c. 790 BC.

Amos comes 17 years later, living and working in Bethel - the **religious** capital. He is there some 28 years, from 773 to 745 BC. This means Jonah and Amos are contemporaries in the nation of Israel.

The way we know Amos is later, is because the nation is at it's peak of prosperity. Jeroboam took a minimum of 11 years to increase the nation's size. It would have been a few more years for the nation to then develop it's great prosperity and luxurious living.

Now that we know about the prophet, we will look for the political, economic and spiritual conditions.

Since Jonah and Amos are contemporaries, the **political** condition is what we saw in the lesson on Jonah.

Jeroboam II had become king in Israel, 783 BC. Thru **Jonah**, God told him he would defeat Syria and expand Israel's boundaries. During the next eleven years, it happened just like Jonah said. Jeroboam led the north to her greatest period of political strength and security.

This brought **economic** prosperity along with a lavish lifestyle. Chapter 6:4-6.

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Joseph in this verse, is another name for the northern nation of Israel.

God's people are living in security and prosperity. The majority have absolutely no awareness their nation is headed for ruin.

The reason for this coming disaster is their **spiritual** condition.

Over the last 11 years, Israel has accepted all of God's mercy and blessings, but has rejected God's laws. The king and people are involved in idolatry and immorality. However on their holy days they worship with animal sacrifices, music and liturgy. It is part of their culture.

Jonah had been warning them to repent or God would send Assyria to conquer them. But the people did not believe him. How could there be a problem when they were **politically** strong, their **economy** was thriving and people were so **religious**? This is why God sends **Amos** with **further** warnings and greater details.

He tells them about God's judgment that is coming. He mentions the nations that will be judged and facts about the judgment. In the last chapter, he gives God's promise.

So the **OUTLINE** has 2 parts

GOD'S JUDGMENT	1-9:7
Nations under His judgment	
Facts about His judgment	
GOD'S PROMISE	9:8-15

The city of Bethel is on the southern border of Israel. Three hundred years earlier, when the nation was united and Samuel was their prophet, he had started a seminary for the prophets in Bethel. That was around 1100 BC.

Almost 200 years later, in 930 BC, the civil war began. Jeroboam I was the first king in the northern nation of **Israel**. He put a golden calf in Bethel. He wanted it to represent Yahweh God and be the place to worship instead of going to the temple in Jerusalem.

One hundred sixty more years go by. It is now the 770's. Jeroboam II is the 13th king of Israel. He lives part of the year in Samaria, the **political** capital and part of the year in Bethel, the **religious** capital. This is why Bethel is called the king's sanctuary. It is known for its riches, luxury and sophistication. God sends Amos to be a prophet in **this** city.

What an impossible assignment!

Amos is from Judah in the south. God sends him to be a prophet in the rival nation of the north.

He is a farmer from the country. He is sent to the city.

His ministry is to people who consider themselves elite because they socialize with the king.

They also feel smug and secure because they are part of the religious capital with all its special ceremonies.

God does not explain why he picks Amos for this situation.

Personally, I think it is his style of message.

He has tremendous knowledge of history, geography and nature.

He has great ability with words and poetry that the people would admire.

Amos comes with a message of judgment, but starts out with a part that will encourage the people.

God is going bring judgment on all their enemies – all the countries around them that have tried to destroy them.

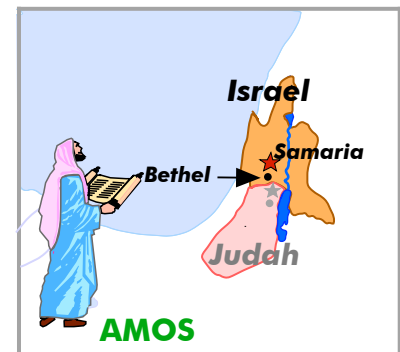
Each time he mentions a nation, he says their judgment is **for 3 sins, even for four**.

This does not mean they committed only 3 sins and if God looks hard enough, He might find four. It is a Hebrew phrase or idiom that means **sin after sin after sin** – so many have piled up, that now it is impossible to count them.

In chapter 1:3 Amos starts with Damascus

*This is what the Lord says: **for 3 sins of Damascus, even for 4**, I will not turn back.* In the *New International Version* are the added words, *My wrath*. But that is not in the original Hebrew.

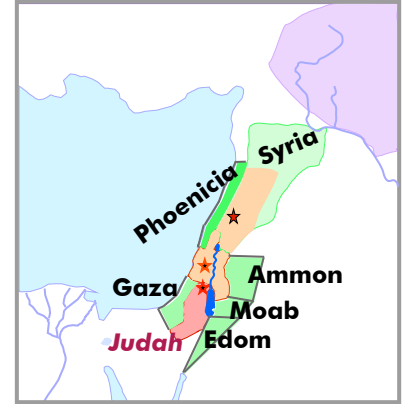
God is saying, *Because of your many sins, I will not hold back My punishment. It absolutely will come.*



God gives the **reason** in the last part of verse 3.

Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad.

Damascus is the capital of **Syria**, the country north of Israel. Twenty-five years earlier, Syria had occupied almost all of Israel, c. 800 BC. It was from God, for Israel's disobedience. But during the time of occupation, Syria had abused her power and had been guilty of **extreme cruelty**. God will now judge her for these cruel actions.



1:6 *This is what the Lord says: for 3 sins of Gaza, even for 4, I will not turn back or withhold My judgment.*

Today we call this area the Gaza strip. In the days of Amos, it was the nation of **Philistia**.

Gaza was the most important city. God had originally given this land to the Jews at the time of Joshua. But when they failed to drive out the Canaanites, the Philistines had come from Greece and had taken it over. In the days of Amos they have been kidnapping Jews and selling them as slaves to a nation called Edom. God is going to judge Philistia for her **slave trade**.

Verses 9-10 *This is what the Lord says: for 3 sins of Tyre, even for 4, I will not turn back. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses.*

Tyre as the major seaport, refers to the whole nation of **Phoenicia** along the Mediterranean seacoast. We know the country today as Lebanon. God says Phoenicia is going to be judged for **kidnapping** Jews from entire regions and **selling** them as slaves to Edom.

1:11 *This is what the Lord says: for 3 sins of Edom, even for 4, I will not turn back. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion; because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.*

The first 3 nations under God's judgment - Syria, Philistia and Phoenicia started out with no connection to Israel. **Edom** was different. She developed from Esau, Jacob's twin brother.

Jacob's descendants became the Jewish people. Esau's descendants married into and dominated the people living south of the Dead Sea and became known as the Edomites. Just as rivalry and conflict existed between Jacob and Esau, it continued between the nations of Edom and Israel.

From the beginning, Edomites were always trying to kill the Jews. During the time of Amos, they are **buying** Jewish slaves from Philistia and Phoenicia in order **to kill** them. So God is going to judge all 3 nations - Philistia, Phoenicia and Edom.

In 1:13 the prophet mentions **Ammon** - a country east of the Jordan River and northeast of the Dead Sea. There is no country of Ammon nor any Ammonite people today. But Jordan is still using their name. The capital of Jordan today is pronounced Ammán. It is in the exact area where the country of Ammon used to be.

Chapter 2:1 is about **Moab** - a nation directly east of the Dead Sea, just south of Ammon.

Both Ammon and Moab descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew. So like Edom, they have a connection with the Jews, but have become her enemies.

God is going to judge all these nations for their **inhumanity**. Once again notice that God is not judging them because they do not worship Him. That would not be fair. Thru the years God's people have been worshipping the idols of all these nations, so how would they know it was wrong?

God holds these nations responsible for the knowledge they have at the moment. He will judge them for violation of laws and codes they all have and accept. Thru the centuries God had warned these nations in ways they could understand, but they never changed their behavior.

So within 600 years, God will bring final judgment. All of these peoples, as **pure** ethnic groups and races, will be destroyed. Today there are no Philistines, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Ammonites, Moabites or Edomites. The Syrians of that time were the Aramean race.

While some of their names may still be used today, the people themselves were killed by the Babylonian or Greek armies. In addition, Alexander the Great and the Greek kings that followed made it their goal to Hellenize any who survived. As a result they were absorbed thru marriage into other cultures. Over time the majority were people of mixed race.

It is Amos who first gives specific warnings of God's judgment on these peoples and nations.

When Amos tells the Jews in Bethel that God is going to judge their enemies, they feel even more secure. They are beginning to like this prophet from the south. Then Amos shocks them by what he says in 2:4.

*This is what the Lord says: **for 3 sins of Judah, even for 4, I will not turn back.** Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept His decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.*

The people can hardly believe it. Here is a prophet from Judah saying God is going to judge his own country. By now the people are listening. They think he has a wonderful message.

It is at this point, in 2:6, that he says,

*This is what the Lord says **for 3 sins of Israel, even for 4, I will not turn back** My judgment.*

The people and religious leaders would argue, *God is not against us. Look at our prosperity, all our religious activities and our economic success. It proves we have God's favor. And besides, this is the religious capital of our nation.*

Amos answers each of their claims.

1st. Their **prosperity**. He tells them, **Your prosperity is not proof of God's blessing.**

He explains why in 2:6. *They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane My holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.*

God's people are guilty of **bribery**.

Innocent people are being declared guilty by judges who have been paid off with silver.

There is **injustice**.

Rich and influential Jews are violating God's laws about the poor. They are taking advantage of them.

There is **immorality**.

As Jews bring their animal sacrifices to worship at the outdoor altars in Bethel, they are also guilty of prostitution by the side of the altar. Father and son are using the same religious prostitute. All pagan religions included prostitution as part of their worship. They considered it a religious action. This is why it was called religious prostitution. The Jews have mixed this part of pagan worship with their worship of Yahweh God.

When bribery, injustice and immorality are in the life of God's people, God certainly is **not** going to bless them. Yes, they were prosperous. But their prosperity was not proof of **God's** blessing. It was merely proof of *their* dishonesty.

Their **2nd** claim of God's favor was their **religious** activity.

Amos tells them, *yes, you are very religious, but **it does not guarantee God's approval.***

He gives the reason in 5:21-24. Thru Amos, God says,

I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even tho you bring Me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Tho you bring choice fellowship or peace offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, rightness like a never failing stream!

There was lots of religious activity in Bethel, but God did not accept it. From His point of view, worship without obedience is hypocrisy. **Belief without behavior means nothing.**

Amos has told the people,

*Your **prosperity** is not proof of God's blessing; your **religious** activity does not guarantee God's approval.*

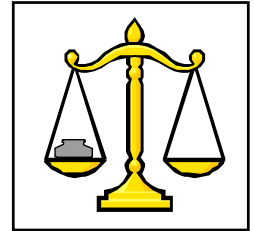
Their **3rd** claim of God's favor was **economic** success.

He tells them, *Yes, you do have a great economy, but **it is not proof of God's favor**.* The reason is in 8:4-6.

Here this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, when will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended, that we may market wheat? Skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals; selling even the sweepings with the wheat.

The people are guilty of greed and dishonesty. They want less time with God so they can have more time to get things for themselves. In the time they do set aside for God, instead of using it for worship, they are thinking of new ways to cheat their customers.

In those days when things were sold in the market, they were weighed on scales or balances. On one side of the scale they used a stone with a specific weight and then put grain or produce on the other side until the scales balanced.



But the merchants are skimping on the measure by using lighter weights.

For example, let's say the stone is supposed to weigh one pound - 16 ounces. The merchants are taking a lighter stone weighing only 14 ounces, but saying it is a pound weight.

This means the buyer pays for 16 ounces, but gets only 14 ounces worth of goods.

Not only are the merchants skimping on the measure, but they are also boosting the price.

The value of a coin in those days was determined by its weight in comparison to the standard weight of a shekel. So the merchants put their shekel on one side of the scale and the buyer's coins on the other side until once again the scales balance. The merchants are boosting prices by having a heavy shekel, making it weigh more than it should. This means it is taking more coins of the customer to equal the merchant's shekel. The people, especially the poor who can least afford it, are paying more, but getting less for their money.



Merchants are also making the scale weigh heavier by putting their finger on 1 side to make it appear the produce or grain weighs a pound and a half, when in reality it is only a pound.

A final example is about the quality of merchandise. These merchants are mixing chaff and moldy wheat, (the sweepings), along with the good. Amos is proving that greed and dishonesty are a part of their everyday life - the life of God's people.

The people think everything is wonderful. God wants them to know things are not wonderful. They have refused to listen. Their lives are filled with disobedience. Thruout their history, and before the days of Jeroboam II, God has used circumstances to warn and remind them. Amos goes down the list in chapter 4.

Verse 6 *I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town.* God had sent **famine**.

Verse 7 *I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still 3 months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none, and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink.* There had been **drought**.

Verse 9 *Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards; I struck them with blight and mildew. Locust devoured your fig and olive trees. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses.*

From the days of Moses, when God sent famine, drought, **plagues** or **loss of crops**, it was to remind them they had left God out of their life. If they do not want to experience these things again, they need to put God back into their life.

But notice what the response of God's people has been in the past. In chapter 4, the last phrase in verses 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 - **yet you have NOT returned to Me, declares the Lord**.

Whenever you find something repeated like this in Scripture, it is God's way of saying, *This is important*.

God has done everything possible. In the past He had sent various judgments. In the present He has allowed them to experience blessing. But regardless of what He has done over the last 20-30 years, the people continue to say *no* to God. Because of this,

4:12 *Therefore this is what I will do to you Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.*

Because the nation of Israel has not listened and responded to God's actions, they must now prepare to face even greater judgment.

Amos is going to tell them what this judgment is, but not all at once. Over the 28 years that he gives God's message, he gives them one detail at a time. The first detail is in 3:11.

Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: an enemy will overrun the land; he will put down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses.

40-50 years earlier, when Jeroboam's grandfather was king (Jehoahaz 814-798), the Syrians had taken over the land of Israel. Older Jews still remember it. But now, the younger generation cannot imagine such a thing. All of their life there has been political security and prosperity. Even now, around 773 BC, the country is stronger than ever. They cannot believe anyone could conquer their nation.

So after repeating this warning over several years, Amos adds another detail.

5:27 Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord whose name is God Almighty.

The country beyond Damascus is to the northeast, meaning the country of Assyria. God's coming judgment will not be like the past - with the enemy satisfied to occupy their land. This time the people will be forced to leave and sent into exile.

Several more years go by before Amos gives the next detail in chapter 7:9 *The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined.*

God is going to destroy their places of worship because they are worshipping in the ways of the world. God does not accept their religious activity because it does not honor Him.

The people think it is king Jeroboam II who has given them their prosperity. So at the end of this verse God says He is going to remove him. God wants His people to know He is the source of blessing and life, not their political leader.

As the years go by, Amos continues to warn God's people. Near the end of his ministry he now gives the worst part of God's coming judgment.

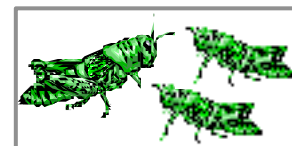
8:11 The days are coming, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine thru the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

For 180 years God has used Elijah, Elisha, Jonah and Amos (from 930 to 750 BC). Thru miracles, warnings and circumstances the people have known what God wants **from** them and what He wants to do **for** them. But the people are tired of hearing God's message. They wish God would stop sending His prophets. So God says He will do what they want. When they are sent into exile, there will not have any more prophets. While they will always have their sacred writings, there will be a famine of literally **hearing** the words of God from a man or woman of God.

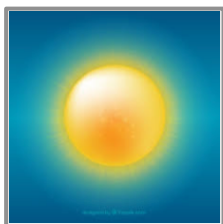
This book is only a summary of what Amos says to the people in Bethel over his 28 years of ministry. At first they liked his messages. They were interesting because it was all about God's judgment on their enemies. But when his message was about them, the people got tired of hearing, *God is going to judge **this** nation.*

This is why, spread out over the years, God gave Amos yet another way to get their attention. It was thru dreams that God gave him. All five of the dreams are at the end of the book because the Jews organize things by topic. But chronologically, they were given one at a time, with considerable time between each one. We know this because the dreams change in their emphasis. There is a progression of harshness or severity. Altho the 5 dreams are different, they all mean the same thing - **national judgment.**

The first dream in 7:1 is about a locust plague. The locust are going to eat up the late growth, or the second crop. The people of Israel always harvest 2 crops. The first is given as a tax to the king, while the 2nd harvest is for the people's use. God says He is going to send locust that will destroy the people's crop, the 2nd one.



In the dream, when Amos asks for God's mercy, God responds and says it will not happen. This is evidence the dream was near the beginning of Amos' ministry, when there was still opportunity to repent.

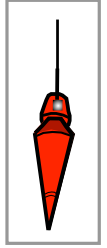


The second dream is found in 7:4. It mentions fire. When the Bible talks about land or crops and then mentions fire, it means drought. As the sun beats down and there is no rain, soon the land looks as tho it is scorched by fire.

After his dream, the next day Amos would tell the people, *Last night God gave me a dream of a coming drought. I saw the suffering it would bring. I asked God to have mercy and not bring this devastation. God says He will with-hold His judgment and not send it.*

Over the years, thru picture language of these 2 dreams, Amos is telling them, *God is still offering **mercy**. You do not need to go thru the coming judgment. It can be just for your enemies.* But the people as a nation ignore and reject God's mercy.

The 3rd dream is in 7:7. It is about a plumb line held up against a wall. A plumb line or plumb bob is a piece of string with a weight on the end of it. It is used even today in building or hanging wallpaper. When the weighted line is hung alongside the edge of something, one can instantly see if it goes to the right, the left or if it is straight like the line.



In the dream, the wall is a picture of God's people. The plumb line is a picture of God's laws. God is measuring Israel's conduct according to **His** standards. Because they do not line up - because they have not obeyed Him, God must judge. With this dream the emphasis changes from mercy to **fairness**. Because the people have rebelled for so many years, God has to judge them or He would not be fair.



More years go by. According to chapter 8:1, Amos has another dream and sees a basket of summer or ripe fruit. This is picture language to say Israel is ripe for **judgment**. It is **imminent** - it can come at any time. It is now towards the end of Amos' ministry.

The final dream in chapter 9:1 comes in his last year of ministry. Amos sees the Lord standing by an altar, commanding judgment. This is picture language to say **judgment is inevitable**. God has spoken and nothing can change it.

LORD AT ALTAR

Some **20** years later God's judgment does come. God's people are taken into exile and the northern nation of **Israel** is wiped off the map. She no longer existed. What Amos said would happen, did happen. It is important to notice however, that all of the messages of Amos offered escape. It was only at the end of his ministry that he could no longer offer mercy to the nation.

As we go thru the books of the prophets, we will find a surprising similarity. As much as God's people, the Jews, deserved judgment, God never ends His message with total rejection. There are always a few verses at the end to promise restoration in the future. Even if the *nation* must be judged, God will show mercy to individuals within the nation who want to follow Him.

In the book of Amos, God makes His promise in 9:9-15.

*I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,
says the Lord your God. 9:15*

This is not a promise for the **nation** in the days of Amos. **They** will go into exile. But as a **people**, the Jewish people, they will never be destroyed. They will not lose their land forever. There will be a future generation who will respond to God's mercy. Jewish people from all 12 tribes will one day return to the land, never again be uprooted.

Up to this point in history, it has not happened. Yes, hundreds of thousands of Jews have **physically** returned to their land. But until they **spiritually** return to the **God** of the land, they are still in danger of temporarily being forced from the land. However, there is coming a time in the future when God will set up His kingdom. Israel will live secure in the land because Jesus will be King. We also will be a part of that kingdom.

The book of Amos is all about a nation that refused to listen to God. God's special relationship to Israel is unique and we cannot compare ourselves to Israel. But there are basic **patterns** that can apply.

From Scripture and history, we know that God blesses Gentile nations. When a nation like America, has complete information about Him and uses the Bible as the basis for her laws, God expects her people to respond to that knowledge. When later generations willfully reject God and refuse to accept His boundaries, God will give warning after warning after warning over many years. But if there is still no response, God will step aside.

Yet many of God's people will never notice. They think God is still blessing the nation and everything is fine.

They will point to the increase in **religious** activity. Hundreds and even thousands attend churches each weekend. *But*, so many of their lives are filled with immorality, greed, hypocrisy and dishonesty. They have no clarity of right and wrong. Amos says, **when our creed does not affect our conduct, our religion is worthless to God.**

People think God is still blessing because there's an increase in beautiful forms of **worship** and **music**. God certainly is not against worship and music. But, without holiness and purity in our lives, He cannot approve nor accept **our** worship.

People think God is still blessing because of all the interest in Bibles and new translations. There are many new churches being started. That is good.

The problem is that so many *leaders* of these churches are not *teaching* the Word of God as it is written.

They would rather give their own ideas and stories rather than what God has said.

People are not *believing* God's Word as it is written.

They not only question but also change what God has said.

There is no respect for His commands.

To use the words of Amos, *there is famine for hearing God's Word.*

As these things **begin** to happen, when people pray for the nation, God withholds His judgment. But there comes a time when His judgment is inevitable and nothing can stop it. However, even if the **nation** must be judged, God will show mercy to all the **individuals** within the nation who want to follow Him.

While we grieve for our nation, because judgment **is** coming, there is so much for **us** to do. From the prophets we know it has to *start* with our lives.

How important to fill our minds with God's Word so we know what He has said.

It is essential to have holiness in our life, so we can reflect the character of God.

When we *have* His answers in our minds and our lives *are* showing His character,
then we can *share* the news of His mercy with those around us.

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

Chronology and dates

Samuel 1100 BC

King Uzziah of Judah 781-740 BC

King Jeroboam II of Israel 783-743 BC

Jonah 790-755 BC - in Nineveh 759/58 BC

Amos 773-745 BC