

# AMOS—WEEK 5

## INJUSTICE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is by James Tissot (1836–1902)*

*Amos was the owner of a flock of sheep. Tissot shows him with a stick and a dog.*

Israel is cheating everyone, especially the poor. The LORD has inflicted various strange punishments on them, but nothing has gotten their attention.

He's gonna lower the boom. That, plus Amos's prophesy of it, should do the trick.

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Thank you.

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Amos, Week 5 — Injustice  
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1 Amos 4:9–11

*“I blasted you with blight and mildew.  
When your gardens increased,  
Your vineyards,  
Your fig trees,  
And your olive trees,  
The locust devoured them;  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
Says the LORD.*

*“I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt;  
Your young men I killed with a sword,  
Along with your captive horses;  
I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils;  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
Says the LORD.*

*“I overthrew some of you,  
As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,  
And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning;  
Yet you have not returned to Me,”  
Says the LORD.*

This passage starts out with a contradiction. The word translated here as “blight” (שִׁדְפוֹן “shid-da-phone”) literally means scorching heat. Heat kills mildew. Irrigation systems are set to run in the morning so that the plants can dry out in the day. Water your lawn in the evening and it’ll develop powdery mildew from being wet all night. Scorching heat may be hard on plants, but it prevents mildew. Hmmm.

We’ve seen this before. God tried to get Israel’s attention with an impossible combination of events that they couldn’t dismiss as mere coincidence. And then, when they got past this and their *gardens increased*, locusts wiped out everything. And that was only the beginning. Plague, war, and even destruction in the manner of *Sodom and Gomorrah* all came to pass. They definitely should have been wondering what they did wrong.

But no. They didn’t think, and they did not return to the LORD.

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The Israelis are disconnected from God. They’re unaware of His presence and influence in their affairs. Their resistance to His clues is striking, but don’t assume we’re any better. We memorize the words that say God is in control of all things, but do we take this seriously? Do we look for God in all things?

Bruce Van Patter’s column at The Fellowship of Ailbe does that. Check it out.

<https://www.ailbe.org/columns/818>

2 Amos 4:12–13

*“Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel;  
Because I will do this to you,  
Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”*

*For behold,  
He who forms mountains,  
And creates the wind,  
Who declares to man what his thought is,  
And makes the morning darkness,  
Who treads the high places of the earth—  
The LORD God of hosts is His name.*

This passage is the transition from the past to the future. The previous eight verses (the last three DEEPs) were about Israel’s transgressions, what God did in response, and how that still didn’t awaken Israel to their predicament. Now God is going to really turn up the heat. It’s judgement time.

God will no longer just be dropping hints. Now He’s going to lower the boom.

But the most important part of God turning up the heat isn’t the afflictions to be mentioned in the verses to come; it’s God sending Amos to write these verses.

If all the afflictions and all those impossible weather patterns didn’t get Israel’s attention, maybe having someone tell them directly that this is from the LORD—and having it all come true—will do the trick.

It will.

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Just as prophesy provides context for events, prayer provides context for whatever happens next. We pray, and God responds. If we pay attention—beyond just being happy or sad about what God did—we learn. Part of this is praying for things other than simple favors. For example:

*So Gideon said to God, “If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.” And it was so. ... Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. — Judges 6:36–40*

This is the origin of the practice of discerning God’s will through testing prayers. It has become known as “fleeing.” A minister/author friend wrote a thorough explanation of this, with important caveats.

<http://www.nehemiahministries.com/fleece2.htm>

3 Amos 5:1–3

*Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel:*

*The virgin of Israel has fallen;  
She will rise no more.  
She lies forsaken on her land;  
There is no one to raise her up.*

*For thus says the Lord GOD:*

*“The city that goes out by a thousand  
Shall have a hundred left,  
And that which goes out by a hundred  
Shall have ten left to the house of Israel.”*

This is hugely sad. The Hebrew word translated as "Lamentation" is *qi-nah* (קִינָה). It literally means elegy or dirge. Even though some of it is in the future tense, it's still a funeral speech.

These are desperate times for Israel, and they don't know it. For the first seventeen verses of chapter five, God will turn up the volume all the way in a "going nuclear" attempt to get Israel to repent. This will feel a bit like the pitch in one of those silly spam emails that begins with the words, "Only one day left ..."—except that it's legit.

Israel won't be just decimated, which means losing a tenth; they will lose nine-tenths and only keep a tenth. As we've seen before, that's the covenant remnant. And *the virgin of Israel* isn't a virgin in Israel; it is Israel. God sees the nation as His precious daughter.

Even though God is sentencing her to "I've fallen, and I can't get up," He's broken-hearted about it.

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God's discipline of His servants is often remarkably strict. But never forget that everything is rooted in love. This is the key to understanding life. God does not lose His temper the way we do. His patience never runs out.

So, if you're going through an especially tough spell, keep a lookout for His love in all things. The action can get incredibly intense, but the stakes are just as high. God wants us to make progress and that can get expensive because it's so precious. CS Lewis had a wonderful explanation of this in *Mere Christianity*:

*The great thing to remember is that, though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not. It is not wearied by our sins, or our indifference; and, therefore, it is quite relentless in its determination that we shall be cured of those sins, at whatever cost to us, at whatever cost to Him.*

4 Amos 5:4–9

*For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel:*

*“Seek Me and live;  
But do not seek Bethel,  
Nor enter Gilgal,  
Nor pass over to Beersheba;  
For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,  
And Bethel shall come to nothing.  
Seek the LORD and live,  
Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
And devour it,  
With no one to quench it in Bethel—  
You who turn justice to wormwood,  
And lay righteousness to rest in the earth!”*

*He made the Pleiades and Orion;  
He turns the shadow of death into morning  
And makes the day dark as night;  
He calls for the waters of the sea  
And pours them out on the face of the earth;  
The LORD is His name.  
He rains ruin upon the strong,  
So that fury comes upon the fortress.*

The key to understanding this passage is verse seven, which specifies the target audience. *You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!* Wormwood is a bitter herb containing the chemical thujone, which excites the central nervous system. It can even cause seizures. While it has modern medical uses, back then it was simply nasty and potentially poisonous. The point in verse seven is that these folks meted out unfair justice and tamped down righteousness.

There’s a way out of the prophecies described previously; they’re not cast in stone. *“Seek Me and live.”* Great cities won’t protect you.

God isn’t impressed by cities.

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The Pleiades (AKA “The Seven Sisters”) and Orion are beautiful examples of why God isn’t impressed by cities. They are magnificent celestial wonders. You can see them best in the fall and winter.

<https://www.sciencefocus.com/space/how-can-i-see-the-pleiades-star-cluster/>

The Pleiades are awe-inspiring enough to the naked eye. But look again with binoculars and the sight will almost knock you over. You’ll see countless stars where you had seen fewer than a dozen.

5 Amos 5:10–15

*They hate the one who rebukes in the gate,  
And they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.  
Therefore, because you tread down the poor  
And take grain taxes from him,  
Though you have built houses of hewn stone,  
Yet you shall not dwell in them;  
You have planted pleasant vineyards,  
But you shall not drink wine from them.  
For I know your manifold transgressions  
And your mighty sins:  
Afflicting the just and taking bribes;  
Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.  
Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time,  
For it is an evil time.*

*Seek good and not evil,  
That you may live;  
So the LORD God of hosts will be with you,  
As you have spoken.  
Hate evil, love good;  
Establish justice in the gate.  
It may be that the LORD God of hosts  
Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

Corruption starts at the top, and the top in a walled city is in the gates.

City gates were huge, with multiple chambers. It would be insecure to have a door or gate where you could go from outside a city to inside in a single step. Attackers would just love that. So, you enter a walled city through many chambers, making you subject to review, or even attack, the whole way.

The city elders sat in these gates in an ad-hoc court system—a corrupt one. *Afflicting the just and taking bribes. Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.*

But it's not too late to repent. *Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate.*

*It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

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Justice does not come naturally to our fallen selves. As bad as it was in ancient Israel, it's no better here; it's just mostly on-line now. Scams and fraud are everywhere. Make sure your on-line passwords are strong (containing numbers and characters like #, \$, %, or &). If not, change them today.

This is especially important for anything financial. Set up two-factor authentication where it's available.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What's your favorite thing about creation?
2. Have you ever tried a fleecing-type prayer?
3. Give an example of a loving punishment.
4. What's your favorite celestial object or event?
5. What scams are you aware of?

*Items for prayer:*