

Seek (Look to) the Lord and Live! (Amos)



SABBATH—APRIL 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Amos 5:1–15; Hebrews 5:14; Isaiah 5:20; Amos 7:10–17; Amos 9:11–15; Acts 15:13–18.

MEMORY VERSE: “Look to what is good, not to what is evil. Then you will live. And the LORD God who rules over all will be with you, just as you say he is” (Amos 5:14, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Amos reminds us that we will have eternal life only if we seek the Lord.

“IF ISRAEL HAD BEEN TRUE TO GOD, GOD COULD HAVE DONE HIS WORK THROUGH IT IN A WAY THAT WOULD HAVE BROUGHT GREAT HONOR AND GLORY TO THE NATION. If its people had obeyed Him, He would have made them ‘famous. He’ll [he will] give you more praise and honor than all of the other nations he has made. And he has said that you will be a holy nation.’ ‘All of the nations on earth will see that you belong to the Lord. And they will be afraid of you.’ . . . ‘That will show the nations how wise and understanding you are. They will hear about all of those rules. They’ll [they will] say, “That great nation certainly has wise and understanding people.”’ Deuteronomy 26:19, NlrV; Deuteronomy 28:10, NlrV; Deuteronomy 4:6, NlrV. But because the people were unfaithful, God could work out His purpose only through continued punishments.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 28.

This week, as we continue to study the book of Amos, we will again understand how the Lord tried to beg His people to put away their sins and return to Him. He knew He was their only true hope for life. In the end, we all have only one of two choices: life or death. There is no middle ground. Amos shows us a little more about the sharp (strong) differences between these choices.

SUNDAY—APRIL 28**HATE EVIL, LOVE GOOD
(Amos 5:14, 15)**

Things had become very bad in Israel. There were dirty (unfair) politics and sin. The situation was so bad that Israel as a nation was ready to fall apart. For this reason, Amos wrote a very sad story to mourn the coming death of Israel (Amos 5:1–15). Often in the books written by the prophets (special messengers), no difference is made between the word of the prophet and the Word of the Lord. So, Amos' sad song is also God's sad song to Israel.

The funeral song in Amos 5:1–15 was written to shock the people into accepting what was going to happen. If the people continued to sin, they surely would die. But, if they turned away from evil and returned to God, they would live. The Lord expects people to be obedient to His will.

Read Amos 5:14, 15. How does someone learn to “hate the evil and love the good”? Read also Hebrews 5:14; Romans 12:9; and Proverbs 8:36.

Amos asks the people to stop sinning and to hate evil and to love good. The commands in this part come in steps. In the Bible the verbs *to love* (Hebrew *ahav*) and *to hate* (*śane'*) often depend on decisions and actions, not on feelings and attitudes (thoughts and feelings). In other words, a change in the people's attitudes will

cause a change in their actions.

With this in mind, what is the warning found in Isaiah 5:20?

“All in that evil day would need to fearlessly serve God by following their conscience. To do so, they would need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His Word (the Bible). This is because they would be attacked. Their reasons for following God also would be attacked. Their best efforts would be misunderstood. And they will receive a bad name. Satan will work with all his power to influence the heart and confuse the understanding. He will make evil appear good, and good appear evil.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Leaders and Teachers], page 431.

How can we learn to love good and hate evil if we can be tricked into calling evil good and good evil? What is our only protection against this lie?

MONDAY—APRIL 29**RELIGION AS USUAL
(Amos 5:23, 24)**

Read Amos 5:23, 24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; and Psalm 51:17. What are these verses saying? How can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, use this principle (important rule) in our own spiritual lives today? How might we be guilty of doing exactly what Amos warned against?

(Remember, too, that it is very easy to believe in a lie.)

More than most other books of the Bible, Amos points to injustice and cruelty. It also tells what God thinks about such practices (ways). Amos preaches that God hates the empty and cold religious services. Amos calls upon the people to reform (change for the better). The Lord is not pleased by empty and cold forms of worship offered to Him by people who get rich by using others. The way they live shows that they do not understand what it means to be followers of God. They also completely misunderstand the deeper meaning of His law.

God refuses to accept their religious services because they do not come from lives of faith. The important words in Amos 5:14, 15 are the command to “seek the Lord and live” (NKJV). And seeking the Lord is different from making trips to the famous religious centers in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba (Amos 5:5). These were the three cities that, along with their sanctuaries (places of worship), were going to be destroyed.



The people misunderstood the deeper meaning of God’s law.

What God really wants is justice and righteousness (holiness) in the land. The command to “seek the Lord” means to “seek good.” The Lord calls on the faithful few to separate themselves from evil practices and cold religious services. Instead, they are to let justice and righteousness flow like a river. *Justice* means doing what is right before God. And *righteousness* is one’s life relationship with God and others in the community. The picture shows a religious people whose religion was nothing but empty and cold practices (customs) without the change of heart that must come with true faith. (Read Deuteronomy 10:16.)

How careful we must be that we do not practice such an empty faith.



The people are to let justice flow like a river.

TUESDAY—APRIL 30

**CALLED TO BE A PROPHET
(Amos 7:10–17)**

Amos’ home was Tekoa, in Judah.

But God sends him to prophesy¹ in Israel. He goes to the northern kingdom and preaches with such power that the people in the land cannot “stand to listen to what he’s [he is] saying” (Amos 7:10, NIV). Certainly many Israelites look at Amos with suspicion. They refuse to accept him as God’s messenger. But Amos faithfully does his work as a prophet.

Read Amos 7:10–17. What familiar situation is happening here? What other examples can you find in the Bible where the same thing happened? What should we learn from all these examples?

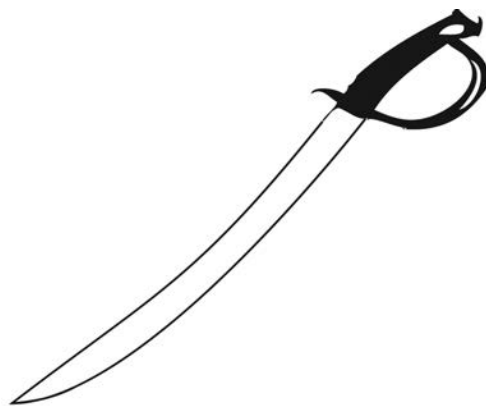
Among those who do not like Amos’ preaching was Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Amaziah accuses Amos of rebelling (fighting) against Israel’s king. Bethel was one of the two royal sanctuaries, the very centers of false worship. Amos has prophesied in public that if Israel did not repent,² its king would die by the sword. Then the people would be led away as slaves. Amaziah orders Amos to go back to the land of Judah, where his messages against Israel would be more popular.

In his answer to the priest, Amos claims that his call to be a prophet came from God. Amos also says that he is not a professional prophet who might be paid for services. Amos keeps himself away from professional prophets who prophesy for profit.

Thus, speaking the truth does not always mean that you will be fully

accepted. This is because the truth can be uncomfortable at times. It can bother those who are in power. And it can make people angry. God’s call leads Amos to preach so openly and so boldly against the sins of the kings and the nobles (people of high standing from certain families) in the northern kingdom that he is accused of being disloyal to the king.

What is our attitude (feeling) when God tells us that we will be punished because our actions and/or lifestyles are sinful? What does our answer tell us about the way we are and about how we need a change of heart and attitude?



If Israel did not repent, its king would die by the sword.

WEDNESDAY—MAY 1

THE WORST KIND OF FAMINE (Amos 8:11, 12)

What is the meaning of Amos 8:11, 12?

1. prophesy—to give a special message from God, often a warning or an explanation of what will happen in the future.

2. repent—to feel sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In Amos 8, the prophet describes the terrible results of God's judgment (punishment) on Israel. God will punish the people for their sins by sending famine (shortage of crops) upon the land. But in verses 11 and 12 Amos speaks of hunger and thirst for God's Word. The sad event is a famine of God's Word because God will be silent. And no other famine could be worse.

Often when the people of Israel faced a great problem, they would turn to the Lord to help them out of it. But this time God's answer will be silence. A part of God's judgment on His people will be that He refuses to give His Word through His prophets.

Amos says that if God's people continue to be disobedient, the time would come when they will be eager to hear the message. But it would be too late to turn to God's Word with the hope of escaping the judgment. This would happen because Israel refused to hear God's message told by Amos. Just as Saul did before his last battle (1 Samuel 28:6), the people will one day understand how much they need God's Word.

All of the people will search hard for God's Word. It is the same Word that they chose to ignore in the prophet's time. Those who really suffer will be the young people. The older people had heard God's Word in the past and refused to accept it. But the young people never will have the opportunity to hear the prophets' preaching.

What do the following verses teach

3. restored—brought back to an original, or even better, condition.

4. restoration—renewal.

about the terrible results of God's silence? Read 1 Samuel 14:37; Psalm 74:9; Proverbs 1:28; Lamentations 2:9; Hosea 5:6; and Micah 3:5–7.

In what ways is it possible to keep the voice of God silent in our lives? The thought may be scary. But think about what it may mean. How can we make sure that never happens to us?



Amos warned of a hunger and thirst for God's Word.

THURSDAY—MAY 2

JUDAH'S RUINS RESTORED³ (Amos 9:11–15)

Amos turns from the dark picture of the people's sinfulness and God's judgments to the glorious (wonderful) promises of the future restoration⁴ (Amos 9:11–15). The day of the Lord was described as the day of punishment (Amos 5:18). But it is now a day of salvation. This is because salvation, not punishment, is God's last Word to His people. But salvation will come after punishment, not in place of it.

Amid all the gloom and doom, Amos ends his book with a message of hope. Facing the future as slaves in another country, David's kingdom has fallen so low that it can no longer be called a house but a hut. But David's kingdom will be renewed and united (joined) under one ruler. And outside of Israel's borders, other nations will call on God's name and enjoy His blessings along with Israel. The book ends on this happy and hopeful note.

Bible prophets did not teach that God's punishment was done just to punish people. Instead, they taught that behind almost all the warnings was the call of salvation. It is true that the threat of slavery was real. But the Lord encouraged the remnant (faithful few) with the promise of restoration to the land. The remnant would enjoy the renewal of the covenant (agreement with God). And those who experience the judgment will see God acting to save and restore the earth.

God used Amos to promise the restoration of God's people. How is this promise fulfilled? Read Luke 1:32, 33 and Acts 15:13–18.

Many Jewish teachers believed that Amos 9:11 was the promise of a Messiah (Jesus) given to Abram. It was repeated to David. And it was spoken of throughout the Old Testament. The promise was that the new king from David's line would rule over many nations, making God's promise to Abram (Genesis 12:1–3) come true. The Messiah even would rule over

enemies such as Edom. God's people would be restored and never again destroyed.

And through the coming of Jesus Christ, David's greater Son, God continued to keep His promise. James quotes this verse from Amos to show that the door of salvation is open to Gentiles (non-Jews). They were to enjoy full rights as members of the church. God would offer His blessings of salvation to Jews and Gentiles in the promised Messiah, the child who came from the lines of Abram and David.

It is only at the Second Coming that everyone who accepts these promises will see them fulfilled (kept). How can we keep that hope and promise alive?

FRIDAY—MAY 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "Our standing [position] before God does not depend upon the amount of light we have received. Instead, it depends upon the use we make of what we have. Even the unbelievers who choose the right as far as they can know it are better off than are those who have had great light but refuse to follow the light. And by their daily life they fail to live up to their beliefs."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 239.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1 As a class, go over your answers to Sunday's question about learning to hate evil and love the good.

Also discuss the danger of calling evil good and good evil. Why is this danger greater when culture and society start to change their values so that they no longer follow the Bible? As individuals, and even as a church, we are not safe from the changes that take place in culture and society, are we? Think about the changes that have happened in your own culture and society over the years. For example, what things that were once shameful are now openly practiced (done)? How have these changes influenced the church's attitudes toward these acts? What can we do to protect ourselves and our church from falling into the dangerous trap of calling evil good? At the same time, what cultural changes for the good have influenced the church to follow the principles of love and

acceptance shown by Jesus' life?

② Think about this idea of "a famine" (starvation; hunger) for the Word of God. How might that happen? Does the Lord hide truth from people on purpose? Or is it that people's attitudes make them unable to listen to the Word of the Lord? Or could it be both? Or something else? Discuss.

③ As Seventh-day Adventists who have much light in the truths, is it possible that we are in danger of thinking that our knowledge of these wonderful truths is all that we need? How should these truths influence the way that we live and mix with people in the church and in our community? In other words, how can we live out these truths? Why is it so important that we do this?