

# Adult Teaching Resources

July 17, 2016



## Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

Living Like You Mean It — Galatians 6:1-16

## Nothing 'Minor' About These Prophets (July 10-31)

The Leaning Tower of Israel — Amos 7:7-17

**Full Pockets and Empty Hearts — Amos 8:1-12**

A Seriously Broken Home — Hosea 1:1-10

A Love That Won't Let Go — Hosea 11:1-11

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# Full Pockets and Empty Hearts

*Amos 8:1-12*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Before the Lesson:** Have a small bottle of water for each class member, to be distributed during the Transformational Exercise. Make copies of the labels handout. Cut and paste the label to the bottle before the class begins.

### Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

Do you have a garden? If so, what have you harvested so far?

What is your favorite summer fruit or vegetable?

### Information

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Amos was a farmer. “I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees,” he said. (Amos 7:14) Maybe he had vegetables, too. In today’s lesson, this prophet had another vision – this time of food.

[Have a class member read Amos 8:1-3.]

We might have a hard time putting summer fruit and massive death together. Indeed, were we to have a vision of fruit or vegetables, we might take this to be a happy vision relating to a productive life or a healthy era. We don’t get the connection because we do not speak Hebrew. The word for “summer fruit” and the word for “end” were homonyms – they sounded the same. In an English language vision, it might be that the prophet saw a flag with a sideways blue cross on it. “What do you see?” asks God. “I see a Finnish flag,” says the prophet. God says, “That’s because I am finished with these people.” God, after all, created everything, including puns.

But what God was saying was very, very serious. “The end has come to my people.” They were going to be wiped out. Amos has given warnings about the people’s complacency, scheming, greed, and idolatry. But, apparently, they assumed that God would do nothing to them, because they were, after all, God’s people. God made a covenant. God made promises. He’s got to keep them – right?

But God was absolutely fed up, according to Amos. The summer fruit was all rotten.

[Have a class member read Amos 8:4-6.]

## Information *continued*

Were these a religious people?

Why doesn't our religion affect our ethics?

“They bought ‘the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.’ This is a powerful statement. It stays with us and tempts us to condemn them. But how many of the poor of our country are locked out (trampled on, brought to ruin, as the text puts it) for want of a telephone to receive a call from a prospective employer, or want of transportation to a job interview or a job, or want of the proper clothes to wear to an interview? Many times, it is easier to tell ourselves that they do not want to do better than it is to admit that we have not done all we can to help. Why is it that the rich in the day of Amos seem wicked, while we, who almost surely have more of life's comforts and material resources than they did, do not? Both groups, both they and we, are religious...But what both they and we have done is ignore the commands of God concerning the poor.” (Sherri Adams. “Amos: A Word for Our Times”. *Interpreting Amos for Preaching and Teaching*. Ed. Cecil P. Staton, Jr. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys. 1995. p. 148.)

Let's be reminded about some of these commands:

[Have a class member read Leviticus 19:9-10.]

[Have a class member read Leviticus 25:35-38.]

[Have a class member read Leviticus 25:39-43.]

[Have a class member read Deuteronomy 15:7-11.]

We do not glean the fields anymore and we have an entirely different political system. But there are some principles that cross cultural situations.

Have we ignored the commands of God concerning the poor? If so, what is our excuse?

These people were not only ignoring God's commands about taking care of the poor. They were actually working actively against those God commanded them to care for.

“Their formal piety is betrayed by their inner desires...As debts mount up for the poor, people are forced to sell themselves or their children into slavery to cover their debts. This is not just a descriptive statement of what is happening but is part of the quotation of what the merchants say. The tragedy is that on Sabbath days, the merchants want to get back to work so that they can end up driving more people into debt in order to own those people.” (Gary V. Smith. *Hosea/Amos/Micah*, The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2001. p. 384.)

Our greed affects people. Amos says that our greed affects the earth itself.

[Have a class member read Amos 8:7-10.]

“The presupposition here is clear...that anyone in Israel who tampers with the just orders of life draws the earth and its inhabitants into perdition at the same time.” (Hans Walter Wolff.

## Information *continued*

*Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977. p. 329.)

How has our greed and self-centeredness affected the earth?

How does your faith affect your actions when it comes to caring for Creation?

“Though our scientific system has done a tremendous job alerting us to the dimensions of climate change, we are not doing anything meaningful about it. Our political system, our cultural system, so far has yet to respond in any significant way. The reason that it hasn’t responded goes back to the question with which we began. As long as we consider ourselves to be enviably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change,” (From the Bill McKibben sermon, “The Comforting Whirlwind God and the Environmental Crisis”. <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/CryOfCreation.pdf>)

[Have a class member read Amos 8:11-14.]

The people of God would grow so hardened to the Word of God that their souls would shrivel.

How does God speak to us today? (through the Scriptures, through prayer, through life’s experiences, through worship, through God’s people, etc.)

Imagine if all of that ceased! What would happen to our faith?

Paul concludes his letter to an early church with several quick words of advice. Listen for how these instructions could keep our faith fresh.

[Have a class member read I Thessalonians 5:16-22.]

How could these instructions keep our faith fresh?

## Transformational Exercise

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When we look back at the people that Amos was preaching to, we see several faith issues. They were religiously complacent. They felt spiritually (and nationally) exceptional. They ignored God’s commandments to help the needy. They found ways to rob the poor of their freedom and dignity. They acted in ways that negatively affected Creation.

As we look at this week’s headlines, we can see that things may not have changed much. All those issues are still our issues. But God has not left the world voiceless. We can yield our voices to God’s Spirit, so that God can speak through our words and our actions. There is a famine of God’s Word if we do not share the bread of life. There is a draught of the water of life, if we do not speak and act.

[Give each class member a bottle of water with its attached label.]

I want to encourage you to carry this bottle with you today – and maybe this week. Put it where you will see it as a reminder to offer yourself as a container of fresh, life-giving good news. (And, of course, recycle the bottle when you’ve finished drinking the water!)

## Transformational Exercise *continued*

[Close in a prayer something like this: *From you flow springs of living water. From you comes nourishment for the souls of this world. This week, we choose life and we choose to be containers of your life. Use us as you will, Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**How did Amos’ book come to be?** - As we have said, Amos was probably active in Israel for only a very short time. Such words as he uttered would not be well received – as illustrated by the confrontation with Amaziah in 7:10-17 – and Amos would have been quickly shipped out of the country. The wonder of it is that he was not killed outright.

Amos preached a message of doom for a sinful people who flaunted God’s law and abused God’s people. One could preach the entire text of Amos in a twenty-minute sermon, but the book apparently contains parts of several sermons and other encounters, such as that with Amaziah. It is likely that the words were recorded, presumably by Amos, not long after they were preached. Whether Amos was returning home to Tekoa or settling in to a new home in exile, Tekoa became a place where he and others of like mind gathered to preserve his teaching.

The book of Amos does not seem to have been changed much by later editors, though there may be a few later additions, such as the prologue in 1:1-2. That was the work of southern editors, who listed Uzziah of Judah before the northern king Jeroboam (1:1), and who regarded Jerusalem as the place of God’s dwelling (1:2). Verses such as 3:7 and 5:13 sound more like editorial comments than like words of Amos. A few verses (4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6) sound like fragments of hymns. Many scholars regard 9:11-15 as a later addition, since the unadulterated hope it offers seems so out of character with Amos’ primary message of impending doom.

There is something to be said for that idea, but it is also quite possible that Amos could have held out a word of hope for Israel. These verses do not deny the punishment that would ravage Israel, but see a glimmer of light beyond the darkness. Such periodic words of hope are common to the prophets, for fellow 8th century prophets like Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah also included hopeful words. It would be hard to persevere as a prophet if God did not give to his messenger at least a hint of hope for something good beyond the judgment.

There are very few clues in Amos that will yield precise dates for his ministry, though the general time frame is clear. The opening verse says he prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah (783-742 BCE) and Jeroboam II of Israel (786-747 BCE). If we assume this is accurate, his ministry could not have begun before 786 or extended past 742. It is likely that Amos’ preaching covered a very short period of time. A more specific clue to the timing of his public ministry may be found in 1:1, which says that he prophesied “two years before the earthquake.” Israeli archaeologist and historian Yigael Yadin has noted that a memorable earthquake occurred in 760 BCE, and Amos’ vision in 9:1-6 predicts judgment in the form of an earthquake. A known solar eclipse in June 763 BCE may be reflected in 8:9, where Amos declared “On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.”

## Digging Deeper *continued*

If these hints are applicable, Amos' preaching probably took place over a short period of time in the neighborhood of 762 BCE.

**New moons** – The New Moon festival went back to the time of Moses, who commanded that the Israelites mark the beginning of each month by blowing ceremonial ram's horns and offering sacrifices to God (Num. 10:10, 28:11). Several texts suggest that it remained a facet of Hebrew life for some time (1 Sam. 20:24-25, 2 Kgs. 4:23, Isa. 1:13, Hos. 2:11).

**Honest weights** – Coins were not yet in use in Amos' day: people paid for items by barter, or with broken pieces of copper, bronze, silver, or gold, at different exchange rates. These were weighed on a balance against standardized weights made of stone or metal. The base weight was the shekel, which typically weighed about two-fifths of an ounce. By using heavier shekel weights on their side of the scale, merchants could overcharge customers who had to add additional weight to their side of the scale.



These stone weights from the First Temple period represent various fractions of a shekel. Beginning at the top left and going clockwise, the engraving labels the stone weights as “beka,” “pim,” “two shekels,” and “nezeph.” (Photo by Z. Radovan)

The Hebrew Scriptures routinely criticized the use of false balances or inaccurate weights. The book of Proverbs holds forth the ideal: “Honest balances and scales are the LORD’S; all the weights in the bag are his work” (Prov. 16:11). Likewise, “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but an accurate weight is his delight” (Prov. 11:1). Amos’ contemporaries, Hosea and Micah, also spoke against playing tricks with weights or balances. Hosea criticized the trader “in whose hands are false balances,” saying “he loves to oppress” (Hos. 12:7). Speaking for God, Micah asked “Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?” (Mic. 6:11).

**Sweepings of the wheat** – I’ve never bought wheat by the ephah or sack, so I never worried about whether chaff and trash were mixed in with the grain. Many years ago, however, while living in the mountains, I once bought a dump truck load of firewood logs to feed my wood stove. When I called to place the order, I asked for assurance that the wood would be comprised of good hardwood that would split easily and burn for a long time. The seller insisted that he sold nothing else. When he dumped the load in my yard, however, at least half of it was fast-burning poplar or pieces of sweetgum that were too twisted to split without great effort. I had been sold the “sweepings of the wheat.”

**“That day”** – Amos often spoke of “that day,” indicating what others called “the day of the

## Digging Deeper *continued*

LORD,” a day when God would visit the earth to judge the nations, punish the wicked, and raise up the righteous. The day is often described as entailing cosmic upheavals, and it would be good news for some but bad news for others, including some who would be surprised. For other references to “that day” in Amos, see 5:18-20; 8:3, 9, 11, 13; and 9:11).

**Bread, water, and the word of God** – Like Amos, the book of Deuteronomy draws a connection between food, water, and God’s word: “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3).

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Who were the Israelites swearing by?

Amos illustrated Israel's abandonment of God by pointing to other deities or entities by which people swore oaths, but some of his references are not self-evident. Who were they swearing by?

Some scholars hold that "Ashimah of Samaria" may refer to a Syrian goddess called Ashimah who was worshiped in Hamath (2 Kgs. 17:30), but that requires a change in the vowel pointing of the received text. Others suggest that "Ashimah" might be a localized pronunciation or misspelled name for the popular Canaanite goddess Asherah. A better option may be to note that the Hebrew word 'ashimah ('ashmat in the feminine construct form of the text) derives from a verb that means "to sin" or "to trespass." The noun form, then, means "guiltiness" or "sin." Swearing by "the guilt of Samaria" may be a reference to the golden calves that Jeroboam had installed at Dan and Bethel, or to idols depicting Baal and Asherah that were housed in Samaria itself. The serious error of such an oath is made evident in comparison to Yahweh's oath by "the pride of Jacob" – perhaps the ideal Israel – in v. 7.

Amos mentions two other oaths. Some swore by the god (elohim) of Dan – almost certainly a reference to the golden calf in the temple there. When Jeroboam first built the temple and put a golden calf inside, he may have thought of the calf as a symbol of Yahweh, but such practices easily led to thoughts of a different god localized in and about the northern city of Dan.

Yet others, Amos said, swore by "the way (derek) of Beer-sheba." This phrase has caused much consternation. The word "derek" typically means "road" or "way." One might think it could refer to a popular pilgrimage route, though it would seem strange to think of a road when saying "as the way of Beer-sheba lives," the typical oath formulation that Amos cited. Thus, it is often suggested that Beer-sheba may have been home to a syncretistic "derek" cult.

More significant than the specific entities involved are the cities: Dan, Samaria, and Beer-sheba represented the northernmost, central, and southernmost regions of Israel and Judah together. Amos' charge is that all Israel had abandoned Yahweh in favor of other gods, in clear violation of Exod. 20:1-6 and Deut 5:6-10, not realizing what they had lost in the process.

**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.**