



PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

WHO IS LIKE OUR GOD?

*Exploring the Justice of God in
Amos & Micah*

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The Goal of This Study

The minor prophets were the books of the Bible I skipped—including during my college studies in religion. I read the gospels. I read the Torah. I read the epistles. I even read major prophets like Ezekiel. But the minor prophets seemed like a bridge too far; I could not figure out how they fit into the big picture of the Bible, and the repetition was enough to make Proverbs seem easy!

It was not until I completed a chronological reading plan—reading through the whole Bible in a year, in the order the events occurred—that my perspective changed. I was reading the minor prophet books alongside the historical narrative books of Kings and Chronicles. I was seeing promises made hundreds of years before fulfilled through the faithful prophecy of Habakkuk, Malachi, and yes, Micah and Amos! Though prophetic books would always be more challenging for me than books like John and Romans, I found in them a deeper understanding of God's love as expressed through His wrath and justice.

Western society loves Jesus, but it does not like God. We tend to pit Father God and Jesus Christ against each other, as if Jesus came to remedy what God was doing in the Old Testament. This

could not be further from the truth. Jesus is the *fulfillment*, the full picture, of the God we meet in the Old Testament. He is the physical, human manifestation of God Himself. We cannot separate Jesus from the Old Testament God any more than we can separate the Old Testament God from Jesus. *They are one.*

This is important when reading Amos and Micah's prophecies because some of what is said in these minor prophet books is uncomfortable for modern ears. We want God's love but resent His wrath—forgetting that a God who is loving but not wrathful against evil is not a safe God to begin with. True love will always have boundaries. True love defends and protects its own! Like a good Father, God fights for the very best for His children—even when His children reject the gift. We should be comforted by a loving God who hates evil. The justice of God (and therefore, of Christ) is a reflection of His deeply personal, loving nature.

I come away from reading these texts with a deeper reverence and awe for the nature of God. I realize in reading Micah and Amos that God is bigger than I ever before supposed and more willing to fight for me than I ever before realized. But I am also challenged: I am forced to acknowledge the ways I have compromised justice and righteousness. These books particularly call out evil governments and deceptive church leaders. Are we participating in these systems of evil and deceit, or are we exposing them to the light of God's goodness?

I hope this study opens your eyes to the justice and wrath of God and how comforting these attributes can be to people trapped in injustice, corruption, oppression, and pain. May you, and I, be inspired to make a difference in our world: fighting for consistent, biblical justice, with an appropriate wrath against any evil that sets itself up against God and His children.

I have included minimal commentary in this study. This is standard practice for my Bible studies; I do not wish to shape your view of Scripture. Rather, I wish to guide you to deeper

interaction with it. Please utilize your Bible's study notes and cross-references to deepen your study even further. Bring a curious mind to the Bible, and you will be astonished at how much you take away.

-P/M



How to Read Prophetic Literature

Prophetic literature can be challenging for modern readers. It uses vibrant imagery, incessant repetition, and bold language to express God's truths. But without historical and literary context, readers can get lost in the narrative. Before you begin this study, it is worth taking a moment to set your expectations of prophetic literature so your reading experience is the best it can be. Below are three tips for reading prophetic literature inspired by professor of Old Testament, Peter J. Gentry.

1. **All prophetic literature points back to the covenant truths in Deuteronomy.** You will review some important Deuteronomy passages in the chapters of Amos 1 and Micah 1. Deuteronomy literally means "second law" and marks the second giving of the Mosaic Covenant right before Israel enters the Promised Land. This covenant was conditional, meaning that Israel had obligations to fulfill in order to keep the land. Moses actually predicts (prophesies) what will happen if Israel walks away from their God and His good Law. Much of what is said in Deuteronomy is *fulfilled* in Kings, Chronicles, and the major/minor prophetic books.

2. **Foretelling prophecy acts as confirmation of God's faithfulness to His Word.** Prophets like Micah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel often speak "dual-fulfillment prophecies": prophetic words that have *both* immediate and future meaning. Foretelling prophecies confirm God's faithfulness to His Word. Though prophets like Elijah and Elisha also spoke God's Word, Israel's sins became so severe that prophetic messages had to be written down—evidence that proves God's predictions of the future were true. Spoiler alert: the people of Israel do not listen to Amos and Micah. They experience the predicted judgment, despite ample opportunity to repent. God keeps His Word, even when it is painful.
3. **Hebrew literature is recursive, which makes it repetitive.** Recursive literature discusses a topic at length from one angle, then picks up the topic again from a different angle. An author may repeat this cycle numerous times and *still* be talking about one topic. The repetition in prophetic books is due to the nature of Hebrew literature. Look for the subtle differences in how and why the prophet discusses a particular topic. In Amos, the theme is often social injustice toward the poor and weak. In Micah, the focus is abusive and deceitful leaders or prophets. Gentry speaks of the Hebrew approach to discourse like "left and right speakers of a stereo system."¹

All of what you read in Amos and Micah was intended for an ancient audience. Discerning how to apply their truths to modern day is a journey: determining the principle about God, deciding how that principle fits with the whole of Scripture, and

¹ Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*, p. 42.

applying that principle to modern cultural contexts. When we study slowly, we have the chance to apply these principles the way they are intended.

Who Is Like Our God?



Introduction to Amos

The prophet Amos was not in vocational ministry—he was not a prophet by trade but was instead a herdsman called by God to prophesy between 793–739 BC. His prophecy particularly focused on the social sins of Israel: their unjust treatment of the poor, weak, and elderly. Israel was proud. They believed they were chosen and protected, impervious to the consequences of their own sin. They wanted God to judge their enemies but did not expect God to judge their own sin. Amos calls the people to look at their hearts and be consistent in their desire for justice.

Before and during Amos's ministry, the Assyrian empire had been assaulting the coastline nations but stopped for a period of time. This led Israel to a false sense of security. Amos prophesies a coming judgment for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Judah is the Southern Kingdom). And in 722 BC, not long after Amos's ministry, Assyria conquered Israel.

The ESV Study Bible says, *“Justice and righteousness in the treatment of other people are the key evidences of a right relationship to the Lord.”* Israel wanted to claim God's favor without showing favor to the weakest among them. Their hypocrisy and false “faith” did not allow for justice for all God's people. Amos demands all believers recognize that the Day of the Lord is an

accounting for every kind of evil—including our own.



Amos 1

READ THE ENTIRE CHAPTER OF AMOS 1

1. Who was Amos? What was his profession? (v. 1)
2. How does the author (Amos) mark the timeline of his vision? (v. 1)

3. Read Zechariah 14:5. What does it say about an earthquake? How does this confirm Amos's message?

At the time of Amos's ministry, the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom (called Israel, the capital was Samaria) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah, the capital was Jerusalem). Solomon's Temple was located in Jerusalem, where God commanded the Israelites to worship, but by the time of Amos, they had begun worshipping in the "high places," private shrines where worship of Yahweh with worship of the Canaanite gods, Baal and Asherah, were often combined. The violent nation of Assyria was pressing in on Israel and the surrounding nations in Palestine. The first verse of Amos gives us a specific timeframe for Amos's ministry and the events occurring during the reigns of the northern and southern kings.

4. Look up 2 Kings 14:23–27. In the space below, write three things you learn about King Jeroboam II of Israel.

5. Look up 2 Kings 15:1–6. In the space below, write three things you learn about King Uzziah of Judah (also called Azariah).

6. How does the opening oracle in Amos give authority to what he is about to say? (v. 2)

Amos 1:3 introduces a series of eight “statements of doom” against specific cities and nations: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel.

7. Look at Amos 1:3–5. What did Damascus do to Israel (Gilead; east of the Jordan river, in present-day Jordan)?

8. What will the consequences of their violence be?
9. How does Amos end this “woe” against Damascus? (v. 5)
10. Look at Amos 1:6–8. What did Gaza do to Israel? (Gaza was a Philistine territory.)
11. What will the consequences of their actions be?
12. How does Amos end this “woe” against Gaza?

13. Look at Amos 1:9–10. What did Tyre do to Israel? Who did they work with?

14. What will the consequences of their actions be?

15. Look at Amos 1:11–12. What did Edom do to Israel?

16. Look up the following verses about the origins of Edom and record what you find.
 - Genesis 25:29–32

 - Genesis 36:8

 - Numbers 20:14–21

- Deuteronomy 2:4–6

17. What will the consequences of Edom's actions be?

18. Look at Amos 1:13–15. What did the Ammonites do to Israel? (The Ammonite capital, Rabbah, is the capital of modern-day Jordan, Amman.)

19. Look up the following verses about the origins of Ammon and record what you find.

- Genesis 19:36–38

- Deuteronomy 2:19–21

- Deuteronomy 23:3–6

- Judges 11:4–13

20. What will the consequences of the Ammonites' actions be?

21. How does Amos end this “woe” against Ammon?

God, through Amos, predicts judgment on these pagan nations who surround the people of Israel. Though they think their actions will go without consequence, the coming Assyrian conquest is permitted by God as an act of justice for their unrepentant wrongdoing.

22. What principle about God's character do you learn from this chapter?

23. How will you apply this today?



Amos 2

READ THE ENTIRE CHAPTER OF AMOS 2

1. Look at Amos 2:1–3. What did Moab do?

2. Look up the following passages about the origins of Moab and record what you find.
 - Genesis 19:35–38

 - Numbers 22:1–12

- Numbers 25:1–4

- Deuteronomy 2:9

3. What will the consequences of the Moabites' actions be?

4. How does Amos end this passage? (v. 3)

5. Look at Amos 2:4–5. What did Judah do?

6. Judah is the Southern Kingdom of Israel, God's people. What does it say about God that they are included (not exempt) from the list of nations susceptible to judgment?

After God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, He took them to Mount Sinai and cut a covenant, or agreement, with them. Israel willingly participated in this covenant. In exchange for the land of Canaan, Israel promised to obey God's Law and to honor His vision for a righteous, just society.

7. Look at the following passages. Record what you learn about God's Law and the consequences of breaking the Mosaic covenant (there will be a lot to record!).

- Exodus 20:1–19

- Deuteronomy 28:15, 47–50

- Leviticus 26:36–45

8. How are Amos's words similar to what we read in Deuteronomy and Leviticus?

9. Look at Amos 2:6–8. What did Israel do?

10. What specific types of sins does Amos identify? Which of the Ten Commandments do they violate?

11. Look at Amos 2:9–11. What did God do for Israel (three things)?

Note: The Nazirites were a group of set-apart people, consecrated to the service of God, who did not cut their hair or drink wine. The Nazirite vow is found in Numbers 6 and is freely chosen by the individual who participates. It was temporary (not lifelong) and could be taken by men or women. Famous Nazirites in the Bible were Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist.

12. Look at Amos 2:12–16. What did the Israelites do to the Nazirites?

13. What does this say about the state of Israel's hearts?

14. What will happen to Israel as the natural consequence of their spiritual state? (v. 13–16)

15. Look at Exodus 20:2. What does God say right before He gives the Ten Commandments?

16. Why do you think God reiterates His salvation before giving behavioral commands?

The covenants God makes with people (Adamic, Noahic, Mosaic, Davidic) are based on relationship, not rules. But true relationship with God leads to obedience and honor. As Judah and Israel depart from their relationship with God, their moral lives show evidence of that rift. Salvation is a covenant relationship. God always emphasizes His salvation to show that relationship is the basis of righteousness.

17. What does 2 Corinthians 5:21 say about our righteousness?

18. What does 1 John 5:18 say about identity and behavior?

19. What does 1 John 2:29 say about those who are “born of God” (given a righteous identity)?

Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26, two passages you looked up earlier, list the consequences Israel will experience if they depart from God’s relational righteousness and choose to follow the demonic, pagan values of the cultures around them. Many people read these passages as God being “harsh” or “unfair” to Israel. But God is not listing ways He plans to “smite” His people; He is observing *the natural outcomes of evil in the world*. When Israel chooses to reject His way, they actively choose to accept another way—the way of darkness, death, illness, terror, and loss. By choosing the absence of God, they choose the absence of God’s blessings. God’s “punishments” were really natural consequences freely chosen by the Israelites after countless warnings and appeals from God.

20. How does this impact your view of God’s judgment?

21. Is God right to judge Israel/Judah this way? Why?

22. What principle about God do you learn in this passage?

23. How can you apply this today?