

July 2-8

## **Week 27**

Congratulations! You are about halfway through reading through the Bible. This week we are still in Act 2, scene 6, the divided kingdom. There were still two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The middle of the eighth century was not only a time of great prosperity and seeming safety but also a time of rampant idolatry. Amos and Hosea each prophesied against the northern kingdom, giving us some of the most powerful, penetrating material in the Bible on injustice, lack of concern for the poor, and empty religion. Isaiah's words were directed to Jerusalem and the southern kingdom. The prophets had a threefold message:

1. Return to covenant faithfulness.
2. If you don't repent, judgment is coming.
3. God loves his people and has a plan for the future.

The judgment that was on the horizon during this period came in the form of Assyria, a world power that would destroy the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. As you read this week, think about the peril of presumptuousness. The Israelites of this period presumed that since they were blessed in life, they were acceptable to God.

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## **Day 1**

### **Read Amos 1-5**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 18**

Amos, a sheep breeder from the town of Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah, was sent as a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel in about 760 BC. This was not only a time of great prosperity for Israel but also a time of great wickedness.

Amos 1:1–2:5 contains pronouncements of judgment against all of the nations surrounding Israel. The Israelites would have cheered these judgments, but they were at the center of the prophetic bull's-eye. Though they were religious, they had forgotten true worship of Yahweh, who delivered their ancestors from Egypt and brought them into the land (see Amos 2:10). Thus, their sacrifices and songs at the false shrine in Bethel (originally built by Jeroboam I) were hollow reflections of the real thing. Having abandoned the true God, they had also abandoned his social values, oppressing the poor and righteous people of the land. Consequently, God was bringing devastating judgment on the land. Read Amos 4–5 very carefully.

*Write your understanding of the connection between worship and ethics.*

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## **Day 2**

### **Read Amos 6-9**

#### **Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 19**

There is a pattern in the Prophets.

1. They called the nation to faithfulness to the Lord's covenant, pointing out violations against it.
2. They pronounced a coming judgment that would result from continued rebellion. This section of Amos contains a series of five visions of coming punishment.
3. They almost always mentioned hope for the future, often related to a righteous remnant God would raise up.

*See if you can identify these elements in this section of Amos.*

*How was Amos 9:11-15 fulfilled by Jesus and the gospel?*

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**Day 3**

**Read Hosea 1-5**

**Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 20**

Unlike his counterpart, Amos, Hosea was a prophet from the northern kingdom of Israel. His is the first and the longest of what we call the Minor Prophets (referring to their length; they are much shorter than books like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Hosea expressed God's passion for Israel. In fact, in the first two chapters Hosea dramatized God's relationship with Israel by marrying an adulterous woman, or prostitute. Notice the parallels drawn between a faithless wife and Israel's faithlessness to its true God. Also notice both God's passion about his people and his judgment on them for their sin.

*Today God continues to be passionate about his people. Thank him for how much he loves you—so much, in fact, that he will not allow you to live in unfaithfulness.*

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**Day 4**

**Read Hosea 6-9**

**Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 21**

This section of Scripture contains calls to repentance, laments that Israel was not faithful, and words about judgment that was coming (brought about when Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 BC). Notice that Israel's adultery in part had to do with political alliances (trusting other nations rather than trusting God) and in part had to do with religious perversion (worshiping false gods). Also notice that the nation abandoned God in part because they did not remember their own story of the way God delivered them from Egypt.

*How might we commit spiritual adultery today, and what spiritual commitments safeguard us from doing so?*

*How does knowing the story of Scripture well help us remain faithful to God?*

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**Day 5****Read Hosea 10-14****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 22**

Again today we have a mix of passages on God's passion for Israel, a call to repentance, warning of coming judgment, and the hope of restoration. Israel is often called Ephraim, named for a tribe of Israel central to the kingdom. Watch for figurative language in this section. Israel is called a "lush vine" in Hosea 10:1. The word picture describes the prosperity of the nation, but the result was not positive.

Finally, notice the historical reference to the exodus in Hosea 11:1. The gospel writer Matthew used this verse to refer to Jesus traveling up from Egypt with Mary and Joseph (see Matthew 2:15). God acts in corresponding ways in history. Jesus fulfilled this word from Hosea. Whereas the kingdom of Israel had failed miserably, delivered by God but abandoning him at every turn, Jesus, whose family was delivered from the wrath of King Herod, lived a life of perfect faithfulness to the Father.

*Write ways you nurture faithfulness to God in your life.*

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**Day 6****Read Isaiah 1-4****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 23**

Isaiah the prophet was from Jerusalem in Judah, and he prophesied from 740 BC to 687 BC. The people of Judah had failed to live life God's way, which are simply LIFE, and as a result consequential judgment was coming. In fact, much of the imagery in the first chapters of the book tells of a time when warfare will have devastated the land. For instance, in Isaiah 4:1 we are told there would be a lack of men to marry in the time of judgment.

Judah had failed God primarily by turning to idols and by a lack of social justice. They had failed to keep the covenant, in other words, and judgment was coming. Yet Isaiah also pointed to a coming time of hope. Read about that time in Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6. ?

Notice in the latter passage the references to the cloud of smoke and glowing flame by night, images representing God's presence that were taken from the period of Israel's wandering in the wilderness.

*Take time today to evaluate your life. Is there justice? Is your heart committed to the Lord alone as God? Do you know his presence?*

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**Day 7****Reading Summary for Week 27**

One short-lived dynasty followed another in the northern kingdom of Israel. The Lord continued to send his prophets, urging repentance, but the people would not listen. Hosea was from Israel, and his wife's adultery became a symbol showing that Israel had become unfaithful to the Lord by aligning with Baal. Amos was a prophet from Judah, and he proclaimed God's disgust with the northern kingdom because of their many acts of injustice, foretelling their exile.

**Prayer/Meditation**

God of Amos, I confess that it's too easy for me to suppose that having right religious forms and practices counts before you, while my life is characterized by greed and injustice. Help me see that you despise rituals from those whose hearts are far from you. Let me become more active in doing what pleases you as I deal with others. Help me "let justice flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24). Amen.

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