



LifeLight

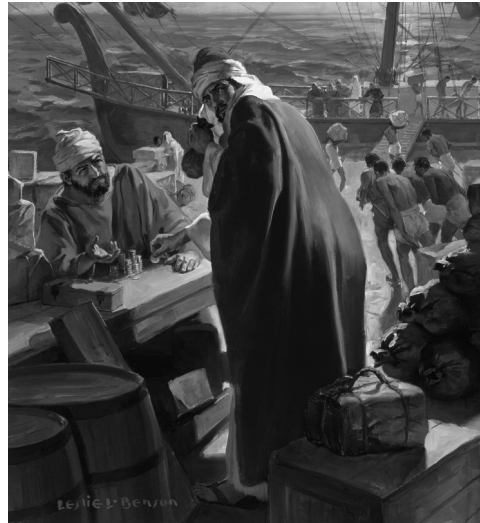
"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Minor Prophets

Amos, Jonah, Habakkuk

LEADERS GUIDE

Light and dark, hard and soft, up and down—a study in contrasts elicits a deeper understanding of extremes. Without a comprehension of light, for example, we would never know true darkness. And without knowing darkness, we would never fully appreciate the light. Along with nine other Old Testament prophetic writings, the Books of Amos, Jonah, and Habakkuk comprise the “Minor Prophets.” This term has nothing to do with their importance, however; it simply distinguishes them from longer, or major, prophetic literature. In their own way, Amos, Jonah (depicted here shortly before his failed escape by boat to Tarshish), and Micah contrast God’s judgment with His forgiveness. Man justly deserves God’s wrath and punishment and yet God’s plan is to bring forth the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment made to returning exiles (Amos 9:13–15), the consummation of Jonah’s sign (Jonah 1:17–2:10), and the promised, peaceful ruler, the Babe of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2–5).



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Written by Edward G. Kettner and Elaine Richter

Edited by Earl H. Gaulke, Ken Schurb

Field testing coordinated by Laverne Schmidt and Terri Bottke, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Lodi, CA, and Zion Lutheran Church, Moberly, MO

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 57**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small groups;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week’s work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible-study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week’s lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week’s assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week’s study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied

in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another 5 minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use a recording to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The discussion leader will obtain the recording and leaflets from the director. A congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process begins all over again!

Recommended Study and Worship Resources

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Judgment on the Nations

Amos 1:1–2:5

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The opening oracles of Amos pronounce God's judgment on the nations surrounding Israel. These nations are justly condemned for dealing unjustly with their neighbors. Thus, these oracles show God's love and concern for the victims of injustice.

Objectives

The participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. see how God pronounced and executed judgment on the nations surrounding His chosen people because of their terrible deeds;
2. come to appreciate that God ultimately holds all the nations of the world accountable for their acts of injustice; and
3. know that judgment comes upon the nations because God cares for the victims of injustice, and in His punishment of sin He still seeks to lead people to repentance and faith.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with the prayer in the study leaflet.

For the Lecture Presentation

If a large map is available for all to see, it would be very helpful to use it to pinpoint locations mentioned in the lecture.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

"Justice!" The cry for justice issues throughout the world on behalf of those oppressed, whether it be by authoritarian governments or by those within democratic societies who believe that they have not been and are not being treated fairly. Many identify themselves with the name of Christ, yet have been guilty of taking economic advantage of those who have little or nothing. Christians, too, can lack concern for the poor and the outsider, claiming to worship the Lord of heaven yet continually violating His command to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

What does God have to say about these issues? What does economic justice have to do with eternal salvation? Is God concerned about earthly justice, about salvation, or about both? How are the two related?

What is the Christian's duty toward the oppressed of this world? How about you? What is your duty?

Ultimately, the central question is: how does love of neighbor relate to love of God? We seek answers to some of these questions as we study the Book of Amos. This prophet was called by God to denounce the injustices in the society of his day and to pronounce judgment upon the perpetrators of those injustices.

1 Amos, Prophet of Judgment (1:1)

Amos himself is introduced as an outsider. He was called to be a prophet, but he had not occupied any office in what might be called the professional ministry of the time. By trade, he had been a shepherd. Likewise, Amos was sent by God to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, even though he came from the kingdom of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, ruled by the line of David. Amos' hometown was Tekoa, about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles from Jerusalem. Still, God called him to preach to the northern tribes, which had broken away from David's kingdom after Solomon's death, about 150 to 200 years before Amos began his ministry. A southerner, then, Amos preached in and to the north. A member of the working class, he was called to denounce the unjust practices of the upper classes. He was an outsider.

The book begins by noting that this outsider's prophetic career took place during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (792–740 BC) and Jeroboam II in Israel (793–753 BC). We do not know the date of the earthquake mentioned in the first verse, but it has been suggested that the bulk of Amos's ministry took place around 760–750 BC. This would be at the end of Jeroboam's reign, and about thirty years before the Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC.

Amos has sometimes been called a "prophet of doom" because of the seemingly unrelenting call of judgment upon the nations surrounding Israel and upon the nations of Israel and Judah themselves and the virtual lack of any message of hope. Amos talked tough—so tough that some scholars have even said the one bit of hope at the very end of the book (9:11–15) must have been added by a later writer. However, Amos' proclamation of both judgment and mercy did not differ in kind from that of any other prophet who spoke the Lord's Word to Israel. Remember, the Lord kills to make alive. There is no good reason to think that He did not give

Amos an oracle of hope for the end of his message.

Still, the judgment pronounced through Amos stands out as severe. Israel was warned that it would be destroyed if it continued along its path. In fact it was destroyed, only a generation later. Behind this judgment stands a God who is both holy and merciful, a God who cannot abide sin but in His love also forgives the sinner on account of Christ. One of the points Amos makes is that God did not destroy the nation without first sending a prophet to call upon the nation to turn from its sin (Amos 1:2; 3:7–8).

2 The Lord, the God of Judgment (1:2)

Our world has tried to "de-claw" God. He is often perceived as being either impotent or nice. He is frequently regarded as loving the world but being totally unable to do anything about the evil that exists. It is as if He keeps pacing back and forth in heaven wringing His hands at all of the suffering that exists, desiring to rectify it if He could, but remaining unable to do so. Or else God is seen as the "nice old man" sitting in the heavens, lovingly patting His wayward children on the head with a "there, there." Yet in this thinking He is too nice to judge or punish them—or anyone else, for that matter.

Our age sets up such ideas. However neatly arranged, they have all the stability of bowling pins. Amos's opening words knock them down. God is neither impotent nor nice. He is a roaring lion, the lion of Judah. His voice announces judgment and death. He brings destruction on the sinner as fire brings destruction upon the pastures and the mountains. As a shepherd, Amos knew the terror that a lion's roar could bring, for it meant that the lion had found its prey and was ready to pounce. Such is the roar of the Lord Himself.

The Lord is roaring from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, Amos says, the site of the temple where the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat is located. This is the very throne of God on earth. From here, His voice extends all the way to Mount Carmel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. On this mountain, Elijah had done battle with the priests of Baal and the Lord emerged victorious in such a mighty way that the people present cried out "The LORD . . . is God" (1 Kings 18:39). From the driest part of the land to the greenest, the voice of the Lord brings judgment.

Why does the Lord roar? He roars because of the injustice He sees in Israel and in all the nations surrounding her. He calls to the nations to announce their doom. Their sinful acts merit the wage of death.

3 Oracles against the Nations (1:3–2:3)

In the individual oracles that fill chapters 1 and 2 of Amos, the nations are condemned for specific atrocities: conscious, willful sins against God and His people. A particular judgment is spoken against each, in keeping with the nature of their sins. Each of these oracles begins with the words, "Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not revoke the punishment." Amos makes it quite clear that the Lord God Himself was speaking.

We might be tempted to add the three and the four together and get seven, the number of completeness, stating that the completed wickedness of these nations leads to their receiving the fullness of the wrath of God. However, these words might well mean a fourth transgression added to the three previous, with the sin specifically mentioned being the one that brings God's patience to an end. Or this form may be used simply to show that the numbers have no significance, that what is being noted is simply the multiplicity of sins. Whatever it may mean, the focus is upon the willful, persistent sinning of the nations. These are not just isolated, individual lapses from righteousness; they are symptoms of consistently rebellious hearts, which demonstrate their rebellion time after time.

Each of the nations mentioned in the opening oracles was an immediate neighbor to Israel and throughout that nation's history served as a buffer between Israel and the empires that sought to gain control of the entire Mediterranean region. At the time Amos was writing, the emerging empire was Assyria, with its capital city of Nineveh. Quite often, Amos points to Assyria as the means by which God will bring His judgment to bear on the sins of the nations.

Damascus (1:3–5)

The first of the oracles is against the city of Damascus. Damascus was the capital of the state of Aram (modern-day Syria), which lay directly to the north of Israel. It was constantly in conflict with Israel. The specific sin

mentioned is that of its conquest of the territory of Gilead, which was part of Israel, and lay to the east of the Jordan River. Not only did the forces of Damascus conquer Gilead; they destroyed its crops in the fields by cutting the grain and then threshing the grain with wooden sledges. The conquest itself was an affront to the God who had given that territory to His own people. The cruelty that went along with that conquest is an act of utter contempt for God which must lead to the display of His wrath.

There is irony in the attacks against Israel by the house of Hazael, because the prophets of the Lord in Israel were used by God so that the house of Hazael would gain power in Aram (Syria). After the display of the Lord's power at Mount Carmel, Elijah fled into the Sinai Peninsula, to Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb), the very mountain upon which God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses. Here God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place and to anoint Hazael king of Aram (1 Kings 19:15–16). It was some time later, after Elijah had been taken to heaven, that Elisha went to Hazael and announced to him that he would become king of Aram, a prophecy which was fulfilled when Hazael murdered King Ben-hadad and took the kingship for himself. Even as Elisha prophesied the ascension of Hazael to the throne, he wept, foreseeing the destruction that Hazael and his successors would bring upon Israel (2 Kings 8:7–15).

Although Hazael became king because God willed it, it cannot be said that God willed the means by which he became king nor the evil that he did as king. Hazael and his successors (for example, his son, also named Ben-hadad, mentioned in Amos 1:4) were held accountable for their sins and were subject to God's punishment. The king of Aram was removed and the people taken into captivity into Kir, the place out of which that people had originally come (Amos 9:7). While this took place by an act of the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9), ultimately this conquest and captivity must be ascribed to the hand of God.

Gaza (1:6–8)

Next, God turns His attention to the southwest, to the nation of Philistia, along the Mediterranean coast. It occupied territory originally given by God to the tribe of Judah, but which Judah was never able to take as its

own. Philistia served as a buffer between Palestine and Egypt. Four of its five major cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron—are mentioned by name. Only Gath is missing, possibly because it had already been conquered. The specific sin mentioned here is that of taking captive villages, apparently villages of Israel and Judah, the people of God. Philistia then sold their inhabitants to the nation of Edom.

The judgment meted out on Philistia was the destruction of its rulers and cities one by one, culminating in the death of the last of the Philistines. Philistia was eventually destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. He was God's instrument to bring about His judgment upon the Philistines.

Tyre (1:9–10)

Moving up the Mediterranean coast to the land north of the territory God had given to Israel, God speaks His condemnation against the city of Tyre, the great merchant city of Phoenicia. Like Gaza, Tyre sold the inhabitants of captive villages to Edom.

Not only was Tyre responsible for these acts; it actually played a part in Israel's apostasy. Worship of the fertility god Baal had been actively encouraged in Israel by Queen Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre. She had married the Israelite King Ahab some one hundred years before the time of Amos.

Tyre's sin was especially abhorrent in that Tyre had been allied to Israel by a treaty of brotherhood ever since the time of David. Hence, their attacks on Israel amounted to an attack of brother upon brother. Again, the judgment of God comes upon His enemies resulting in the destruction of all of the city's defenses, the very things upon which it had relied.

Edom (1:11–12)

The next three nations had blood relationships to Israel. The first of these is Edom, which lay to the southeast of Judah. Edom, meaning "red," was the name given to Esau, the brother of Jacob, for selling his birthright to his brother for a bowl of red stew (Genesis 25:30). Because Jacob took both Esau's birthright and his blessing from their father Isaac (Genesis 27), Esau bore a grudge against his brother. Although Esau and Jacob eventually reconciled (Genesis 33), enmity lasted for generations between the nations descended from them.

Edom participated in the sins of Philistia and Tyre by buying those they had taken captive. Here God, through Amos, declares Edom the guilty nation for continually pursuing war with its brother. As a result of Edom's sin, its major cities, Teman and Bozrah, were destroyed, thus ending Edom's capacity to wage war.

Ammon (1:13–15)

The next nation condemned was Ammon, which lay directly to the east of the territory of Israel on the east side of the Jordan River. Both Ammon and Moab were descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, as a result of Lot's sexual relations with his two daughters following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:30–38).

Ammon was condemned for its atrocities in its attacks on Gilead, the Israelite territory upon which it bordered. These attacks were made simply for the sake of extending borders. As a result of the atrocities, not only humanity but also nature rose up against Ammon. Both violent warfare and violent storms attacked the nation's fortresses. With the king and all of his officials sent into exile, the nation was leaderless and so was no longer able to inflict such outrage upon its neighbors.

Moab (2:1–3)

As Amos 2 begins, God turns His attention to Moab, which lay to the north of Edom, on the southern portion of the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. Besides being related to Israel through Lot, Moab was also the native country of Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:17), a fact which brings that nation into the family of our Lord Himself.

Moab was condemned, not for its sins against Israel, but specifically for its sin of burning the bones of the king of Edom. Like other countries of that region, Moab had a respect for the body, and generally practiced burial rather than cremation. The burning of the bones of the king of Edom was thus an act of utter contempt. Not content with removing him from this world, Moab sought to continue his punishment in the next life as well. As a result of such sin, Moab, too, was conquered, the fortresses of Kerioth (either the name of a major town, or a plural noun meaning "cities") was destroyed, and rulers were put to death. As Scripture says, those who draw the sword truly die by the sword (Matthew

26:52).

4 Oracle against Judah (2:4–5)

Up to this point, the nations condemned have been historic enemies of God's chosen people. They deserved their condemnation not only for their general sinfulness, but also because they had committed horrible crimes against the nation God had made His own. But here God begins to speak words of judgment against His very own people! Judah was the nation still ruled by the house of His chosen King David. In this nation, God's temple stood. There His throne on earth was located.

Why the condemnation? The previously named nations were condemned because they engaged in practices which all people recognized as evil. No such atrocities are ascribed to Judah. Nevertheless, Judah stands condemned too. For Judah had rejected the Law which God had given. Centuries before, when God gave His Law on Mount Sinai, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was one united people together with the tribes that eventually became the Northern Kingdom of Israel. These people all had received God's Law there, and so they had a much clearer knowledge of God than other nations had. He had gone so far as to reveal Himself to them.

Despite this loving act of God, Amos indicates the people of Judah deliberately turned their backs on His Law. Moreover, the reason they rejected God's Law was that they had in fact rejected God Himself. They turned from Him to the false gods of the surrounding nations, specifically those gods their ancestors had worshiped. The family of Abraham worshiped false gods before God called Abraham to go on the long journey to Canaan and to worship the Lord alone.

Jesus said, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). The first five nations mentioned by Amos did not follow the dictates of the law written on their hearts. On the contrary, they deliberately violated that Law and directed their evil at God's chosen nation. Judah, on the other hand, violated the law that had been given by the very voice and finger of God, an event of which their ancestors were the witnesses (Exodus 20). So when even those who had been given little were being condemned for not living up to the little they had, how much more was Judah

being condemned for failing to obey God's clear revelation! For Judah did more than turn its back on the Law of God. By rejecting God Himself, Judah rejected the redemption God had provided. The other nations should have examined themselves before the Lord, found themselves wanting, and begged for mercy. Judah had already seen God's mercy. Yet it spurned that very mercy! The other nations were judged by the God they did not know. Judah was judged by the God it knew and held in contempt.

The end result for Judah was the same as for the other nations. Fire consumed its fortresses. The nation was attacked and overpowered by another nation, resulting in its destruction. Instead of trusting in their God, the people had put their trust first in other gods, then also in themselves, their own wealth, and their own power. With the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah saw that such trust was in vain. Although the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians did not come for perhaps 150 years after the prophecy of Amos, it did come. The great tragedy is that it could have been averted if only Judah heeded the warnings of Amos and the other prophets and turned from its sin to the God of mercy!

The words of warning given by Amos were harsh. They promised nothing but destruction. We dare not forget that all nations, all people, are deserving of such treatment by the holy God. The sins cataloged against all of the nations except Judah were sins against their neighbors. Still today, the Golden Rule, as enunciated by Jesus, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12), appears more or less intact in world religions, not only in Christianity. It is even accepted by those who have no religion to speak of. Such advice strikes people as simple common sense. One should indeed treat others as one desires to be treated. The nations of Amos's day violated even this basic canon of common sense in their horrible treatment of their neighbors. They did not love their neighbors as themselves. Circumstances have changed, but this basic failure remains.

Judah was different. The sins of Judah, as mentioned by Amos, violated the command given by God to His people: "You shall love the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 6:5). God's chosen people, called out of Egypt by Him and made into His people, turned their back on

God's revelation and on Him. So Judah, too, stood condemned. In its refusal to know God, any outward obedience Judah might have rendered was a false obedience arising from an evil heart. Amos's warning to Judah is clear: "Repent!"

Conclusion

We also need to repent, for we also sin horribly against both God and neighbor, even when we think we are at our best. The Good News is that it is precisely for sinners like us that Jesus died. He paid for our sin. On account of Christ, God declares sinners not guilty, sinners exactly like us.

God's judgments always find their mark. So do His blessings in Christ.

Concluding Activities

Speak a closing prayer, perhaps asking God to bless your study of these prophets. Make any necessary announcements, and distribute study leaflet 2.

Judgment on Israel

Amos 2:6–3:15

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Now Israel comes under God's judgment for her blatant violation of the Law of the Lord who chose her to be His own. God exposes the faithlessness that clings to His people according to our sinful flesh. In His Word, He also reminds us of His forgiveness in Christ and our new status before Him.

Objectives

The participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. recognize more fully the high standards by which God calls His people to live;
2. recognize God's judgment upon those who have knowledge of His revealed will and refuse to live up to it; and
3. rejoice in the goodness of God's Law and the power of His forgiving grace that enables us to grow in the new life in Christ.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's

especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with the prayer in the study leaflet.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

At the start of Amos's prophecy, we heard the Lord as the lion roaring His judgment against the surrounding nations. So did Israel, listening while Amos proclaimed the Lord's Word. He listed seven nations and spoke God's judgment on each. Seven is often a number of completeness in the Bible, so the Israelites might have been reaching for a cloth to wipe their collective brow and rest. The Lord had roared against all their neighbors but left them alone. Right?

Wrong!

It turns out that the first seven oracles against other peoples served as but a prelude to the main thrust of Amos's message, which was directed straight at the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Guilty as any other nations were, their guilt did not exempt Israel from judgment for its contempt for God. Israel would not escape His justice.

1 Oracle against Israel (2:6–16)

God's words to Israel begin in precisely the same form as His words to the other nations: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (2:6). However, Amos's catalog of Israel's sins is more lengthy than his lists for the other nations. Against the Gentiles, the focus was always on particular atrocities. In the oracle against Judah, the emphasis fell on its rejection of God's Law and God Himself. In the case of Israel, Amos mentions specific sins of the people against both their fellow citizens and against God.

His list begins by focusing on the sins against the poor and powerless in Israelite society. This was a time of great prosperity for Israel. Material blessings come from the hand of God, and Israel at this time had an

abundance of those possessions. In addition, the nation was as secure from invasion from outside nations as it had ever been since the time of Solomon. By all earthly standards, King Jeroboam II showed himself a great king, a distinguished political and military leader. He had been blessed by God, for “the LORD had not said that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (2 Kings 14:27).

Prosperity always comes from the hand of God, but often it is not received as such. The Lord warned the Israelites, before they entered the Promised Land: “When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them” (Deuteronomy 31:20). History showed Israel’s tendency to take God for granted and depart from Him when things went well. Only when things were going badly did the people repent and return to the God who had delivered them from slavery. You might wonder whether Amos himself might have considered his ministry an exercise in futility! Subsequent events show that the nation ignored his words, continued on its way, and was destroyed. Yet God was merciful in speaking words of warning beforehand. God destroys only as a last resort. He threatens destruction in order that such destruction might be rendered unnecessary through repentance. We do not know how many individuals repented as a result of God’s message through Amos.

The first sin for which Israel is condemned is greed (2:6). Not content with the prosperity they had received from God, the Israelites sought to gain even more, and to do so by any means possible, even the ruin of other people. Rather than helping those in need by forgiving debts at the end of every seventh year as the Law of Moses commanded (Deuteronomy 15:1–6), they would sell their debtors into slavery if they failed to pay the debts they owed. Even the “righteous” were sold when the opportunity presented itself. God had given the land to the nation in order that all might benefit from it. Had the nation followed the Law of the Lord, that blessing would have been shared by all. But because of the greed of a few, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. In the race to get as much wealth as possible, the poor were not only left in the dust, they were trampled in

the dust. Justice, fair treatment, which from God’s perspective meant that the poor were to be aided, was in Israel only for those who could afford it. People were not looked upon as people of God, but as means by which one could gain more for oneself.

The use of people as objects could be seen not only in the race for wealth, but also in the pursuit of sexual gratification (2:7b). Amos notes that a father and son would even use the same girl for their own gratification. The Law of Moses dictated that sexual relations and marriage went hand-in-hand, and sexual faithfulness in marriage was essential. For two men to share one woman under any circumstances turned that woman from a person to be loved into an object for one’s own pleasure. For the two men involved to be father and son was even worse and was strictly forbidden by the Law of Moses.

Having violated God’s commands against harming one’s neighbor, the people of Israel even went so far as to desecrate His name (2:8). Instead of worshiping the Lord Himself at the altar in the temple in Jerusalem as God had commanded them, they went off to the altars of other gods. This was Israel’s chief sin from the time they broke away from the reign of the house of David, rebelling against Solomon’s son Rehoboam. In order to maintain their separateness, they built their own altars at Bethel in the south and Dan in the north, placing images on these altars, which directly violated God’s commands on worshiping Him.

Worshiping their own preferred gods instead of the true God, they used the spoils of their crimes to glory in their false worship. The Law of Moses forbade keeping overnight a man’s garment given in pledge that a debt would be repaid (Exodus 22:26–27) and forbade taking the garment of a widow at all (Deuteronomy 24:17). Yet these men rejoiced in doing so, spreading those garments before the altars of their gods and lying down on them. The wine they took from the poor in payment for real or falsified charges was drunk in the temples, showing that they even rejoiced in their crimes before their gods.

Since Israel knew God and His power, the nation’s acts of defiance are incomprehensible. The Lord declared to all who could hear that this nation had abandoned Him. This nation, which took delight in wantonly defying every command that He gave them out of His love,

was the nation He Himself had brought in to displace the Amorites (2:9), a wicked, ungodly people who engaged in the very type of behavior in which Israel was engaging. God's righteousness and holiness were shown by His elimination of the Amorite people. Though that nation had been tall and strong, "whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks" (2:9), God nevertheless laid it low because of its sins. He declared, "I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath" (2:9). The Amorite nation had been wiped from the face of the earth. Not only were its visible works, its fruit, dealt with harshly; its very roots were destroyed. It was not merely chopped down to a stump out of which a new shoot might eventually grow; its very roots were cut out and burned. Thus God had dealt with the Amorites by the hand of Israel.

In contrast to His dealings with the Amorites, God reminded the Israelites how kindly and mercifully He had dealt with them (2:10). He had delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, where the people had been horribly oppressed, and led them out to the land of the Amorites, which He then gave to them. This He did apart from any worthiness on the part of Israel. He did not announce that His deliverance was predicated on their prior service. It was freely done out of love. Furthermore, having called them out from Egypt as His people, He did not leave them alone to fend for themselves. In spite of their rebellion in the wilderness, He did not leave them there to die, but instead led them through the wilderness for forty years before leading them into the Promised Land.

Even after He had led them into the Promised Land, God did not abandon them, nor did He leave them to their own devices. In spite of their continued apostasy, in spite of the fact that they continually turned to the gods of the people whom they were to displace, God continued to lead them. He reminded them that He had raised up prophets from among the sons of Israel, men who were called directly by God to speak His word to the nation, calling the people to repentance and warning of the judgment to come if they did not repent.

He also raised up Nazirites, men and women who made a special vow of dedication to God and who by doing so separated themselves from society. This separation was signified by abstention from use of all alcoholic beverages and by not allowing a razor to touch

a Nazirite's head during that time (Numbers 6:1-21). (Though the vow was usually made for only a time, the most famous Nazirite, Samson, was made a Nazirite from birth by decree of God Himself.) The example set by the Nazirites served to call people to renewed dedication to the God who had made a covenant with Israel, setting the nation apart from the rest of the world as His own people.

Instead of listening to the prophets and following the example of the Nazirites, however, the Israelites turned their backs on the God who had sent these servants (2:12). The Israelites commanded the prophets not to prophesy. They sought to bring the Nazirites down to their level by causing them to violate their vows and to drink wine. Of course, rebuke of sin is always irksome when sinners hear it, and righteous living is always an embarrassment to those who refuse to live righteously. Yet instead of being shamed to repentance, the unrighteous instead sought to corrupt the righteous. Israelites justified their own ungodliness by trying to make everyone as ungodly as they were.

Against these actions of avoidance and defiance, God pronounced His judgment. With stark imagery He described what He would do to Israel (2:13-16). Just as a cart loaded with grain will crush anything in its path, God would crush the nation. He could not be stopped any more than a runaway cart can be stopped. Those who are in its way will be destroyed. So strong was the force of God's judgment that no one in the army of opposition was able to stand before Him. Whether they tried to flee or whether they stood their ground and fought, not one was able to save himself.

2 Oracle against the Chosen People (3:1-15)

God begins the next oracle with an announcement of His gracious acts toward Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (3:2). Of course, God is the God of the entire world, the ruler of all. Yet He was God of Israel in a unique way, for He had chosen Israel to be His own, declaring, "You shall be My people, and I will be your God" (Jeremiah 30:22). To Israel's ancestor Abraham God declared, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Through Israel God would send His Son into the world to be its redeemer. God had a central place for the nation of

Israel in His plan of salvation.

Surprise! Here is another reason why Israel was judged.

The Israelites' disobedience was of much greater significance than that of others. Since they had been chosen by God as His family, and knew God like no one else had known Him, they had to be called to account for their blatant, willful disobedience. God said: in view of the fact that I chose you and you nevertheless defied Me, I will punish you for your sins. He gave this warning to call the people back to Himself. It was a sign of things to come.

Amos next poses a series of rhetorical questions to show that things happen in this world for a reason and not in a meaningless, haphazard way. When two people walk together, whether literally or symbolically, they do so because they are heading toward the same goal and have agreed to move together toward that goal (3:3). They are together because they have discovered beforehand a basis for agreement. When a lion roars in the thicket, he does not do so because he likes the sound of his own voice but because he has seen his prey and is announcing it to the world (3:4). When it hears the roar, what else can the prey do but tremble? When a bird falls into a trap it does so because the trap has been set (3:5). Conversely, the trap does not spring unless there is actually something there that sets it off.

As the questions progress, they hit closer and closer to home. "Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid" (3:6)? The warnings sound when the enemy is at the gate. The trumpet sounds when the danger of destruction is imminent. The Lord threatened disaster upon Israel because of its sin, and Amos declared, "Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it" (v. 7)? When disaster comes, it does not hit one place and not another by blind chance; disaster comes through the hand of God. As the trumpet is set off by imminent danger, so disaster is triggered by God Himself.

Yet even here God shows His love for His people by pointing out that He is not going to bring disaster upon the people while they remain unaware. He is speaking harshly to them precisely because He desires to save them. In His concern for His people, He does nothing without first revealing it to the people through His prophets; but when the warning is issued it had best be heeded. Amos concludes with a resounding proclamation: "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The

Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy" (3:8)? For more than two chapters now, the lion has been roaring. His roar cannot be ignored. God has spoken, and He has chosen Amos as His mouthpiece. How can Amos do anything but speak what God has told Him to speak? Amos's words here would later be echoed by the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied in Judah more than one hundred years later: "If I say, 'I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9). When God speaks to His servants and commands them to speak, they cannot help but proclaim what He would have them say.

Having noted what God condescended to say, and having noted that danger signals from the mouths of the prophets cannot be ignored, Amos continues with the message entrusted to him. While previously the surrounding nations were condemned because they disobeyed the Law of God, now the surrounding nations are being called together to witness God's indictment upon the nation of Israel (3:9). Egypt and Philistia are told to come to assemble on the mountains of Samaria, Israel's capital city, to observe the strife taking place in the nation because the rich are oppressing the poor, because wealth is being hoarded instead of being used in service to the One who gave it to them (3:10). They do not know how to do right, in spite of the fact that God had made it perfectly clear to them. Because of their guilt, now witnessed by the nations, God pronounces His sentence: the destruction of the nation by one of its political enemies (3:11). Assyria would overrun the land and plunder the very fortresses used to hoard the wealth of the nation. They thought they could keep all earthly treasure for themselves, but the Israelites would find it taken away from them instead.

As far as the nation was concerned, its destruction would be nearly total (3:12). To the question, Will the people of Israel be saved? God declares that it will only be saved in the sense that a shepherd "saves" a bit of a sheep destroyed by the mouth of a lion as proof to its owner that it truly was destroyed and not merely stolen. That is, the mutilated remnant which remains could not really be called *Israel*, any more than those two leg bones or piece of an ear could really be called a sheep. Thus God calls out to those who are at ease in their homes in

Samaria and Damascus, lounging on their couches and their beds, to tell them that their privileged positions will not earn their escape from the coming disaster.

As if all of the preceding harsh words were not enough, God graphically describes the type and extent of the destruction that will take place at His hand (3:14). That idolatrous altar at Bethel, erected by King Jeroboam I in order to keep the people from turning their attentions to Jerusalem and the true worship of God, will be destroyed. Furthermore, the destruction of their earthly security will be total. The Israelites will not be able to hide behind the doors of their opulent homes and expect protection. When the judgment of God comes, it comes in totality. The fanciest of homes, the most opulently decorated mansions will be destroyed. Indeed, those who have little in this world will have little to lose. Those who place their trust in wealth will have it all taken away.

Conclusion

These words of God to the nation of Israel are frightening. They cut through any misconceptions we might have of God as being benign or tame, as if He were in some way under the control of humankind as long as we jump through the right hoops. It might be tempting to think that, since the events predicted here were brought to fruition more than 2,700 years ago, they bear no importance for us today. Far from it! The God who foretold Israel's destruction is the same "yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The Law Israel broke is a declaration of the will of the same God who governs the universe today. The judgment pronounced by God against Israel is the judgment of the same God who warns not only of physical destruction, but of eternal destruction to those who turn from Him. There is no question that these words are intended to be as much of a warning to us and our society today as they were for the society of Amos. "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Romans 14:10).

Yet even as we hear the wrath of God pronounced against the wickedness of Israel and against ours as well, the hope of the Gospel is present also. For God reminds Israel that He had chosen the nation as His own and had brought it out of Egypt. Deliverance takes place at the initiative of God and by His hand. Even the warnings of the wrath to come are presented in order to drive

Israel to repentance. So also are they presented to us. For the God of wrath is also the God of grace, the God who sent His Son into this world as Israel's Redeemer and ours. Destruction may be at the hand of God, but so is deliverance.

Concluding Activities

Pray for all who pay lip service to God but show by their works that they are far from Him, that they might come to repentance and trust in His mercy. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.