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By Belton Joyner, Jr.

June 7, 2015

Text: Amos 2:4-8  
“Judgment on Israel  
and Judah”

One of my favorite sayings is “There’s enough sin to go around.” The broken human condition shows up all over the place, sometimes where one might least expect it.

Consider the northern and southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah) of the Hebrew people. Things were going swimmingly. This is about eight hundred years before the birth of Christ and the stock market in Jerusalem was bouncing above 18,000. (Okay, so that’s anachronistic, but you get the idea.) Chariots were pulled by Mercedes-Benz horses and restaurants served only the finest, uh, Dr. Pepper.

When the prophet Amos began his list of things that made God angry, I think the nation of Judah and the nation of Israel must have said: “Go, get ‘em! No wonder God doesn’t like those people!”

## bible+study

Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury’s Adult Bible Study Series

First, the prophet blasts the Syrians (Amos 1:3-5). Then (Amos 1:6-8) he takes on the Philistines in Gaza, the ancient enemy of the Jewish people (Remember David and his slingshot victory over the Philistine giant?) Even some cousins of the Hebrew people learn of God’s plan to punish them (Phoenicians (1:9-10), Edomites—descendants of Esau (1:11-12), Ammonites—descendants of Lot (1:13-15), and Moabites—also descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew (2:1-3).

There’s probably not much here to surprise the Hebrew people. It surely helps when God seems not to like the same people you don’t like. (Someone has said that one sign of our creating God in our image is when God hates the same people as we do.) The word from Amos that God plans to punish these evil people might well be music to the ears of the northern and southern kingdoms.

But before his readers can go back to their picnics in the park, Amos continues. “Judah! You have rejected what God had to say to you” ( 2:4). “Israel! You have kept a heavy foot on the necks of the poor” (2:7). God speaks a sound of punishment on those

very people God brought out of Egypt (Amos 3:1). God does not take kindly to those who make their progress at the expense of others. God does not take kindly to a world of “haves” and “have nots.”

Of course, this was written 2800 years ago. Maybe it’s not about us.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Shiny Gods* (Abingdon) Mike Slaughter observes, “Truth to tell, when you consider income levels on a global basis, probably ninety-nine percent of everyone who reads this book is in the top one percent of the world’s wealthiest people.”

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Forgive me, Lord...”

June 14, 2015

Text: Amos 5:14-15,  
18-27 “God Is Not Fooled”

When I read the title of this lesson, I thought, “Why would anyone want to fool God?”

Then, I read the kinds of ways that Amos said we try to trick God: What about “joyous assemblies” (Amos 5:21)? Could this be like our “prosperity gospel” celebrations that offer promises of wealth? What about “festivals” (Amos 5:21)? Could this be like our making sure we show up on Christmas and Easter? What about “offerings of well-fed animals” (Amos 5:22)? Could this be like the big smile I have when I get my statement from the church treasurer—boy! Have I been generous! What about “noise of your songs” (Amos 5:22)? Could this be my pride at knowing all stanzas of the good ol’ hymns or my pride that I can clap my hands with the best of them when we sing contemporary music?

There are strong words in this text to describe how God views our empty efforts: darkness (v. 18), hate (v. 21), reject (v. 21), don’t enjoy (v. 21), won’t be pleased (v. 22), won’t even look at (v. 22); won’t listen (v. 23). But there is an alternative. There is a way to turn this “no” into a “yes.”

Amos says what God prefers is

## vip report

### DEATHS:

ALEXANDER, Frank, (retired) Died May 1.  
Service was held May 5 at Mackey’s UMC.

SMITH, J. Thomas, (retired) Died April 30.  
Service was held May 3 in Coats.

## Children’s Artwork Goes to 2015 AC



As we celebrate 75 years of UMCOR and the mission work done through our Annual Conference, local churches in the NC Conference were invited to collect artwork from children in their congregations. The artwork depicts what they think it means to serve others and what service is. The goal is for every person present at AC 2015 to have a hand-drawn picture to take home with them.

## Where Will 2016 Take You?

Join us on one of our Pilgrimages to the places of our faith. Hear the Scriptures on location in Israel/Palestine, Greece and Turkey!

Israel/Palestine: Jan 9 - 19  
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justice and righteousness. (Amos 5:24). This is no condemnation of extravagant worship or meaningful ritual. It is an insistence that all that is so much foolery unless it is accompanied by lives of right action. What kind of right action?

The text says “justice” and “righteousness” (v. 24). Translators have had a field day with that verse. The King James Version says “judgment and righteousness” which opens up the possibility that the judgment that will flow is God’s, judgment on God’s people because of their emptiness. The Contemporary English Version has “justice and fairness,” a plea for what’s good for the goose being good for the gander. The Living Bible calls it “justice and doing good,” contrasting how sometimes we call our evil, selfish, actions “good” because they are good for us! In *John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*, he speaks of “righteousness and equity,” that is, the equality of all created in the image of God.

As Shalom M. Paul has noted: “The proper divine-human relationship is based upon a correct human-human relationship.”

**What Someone Else Has Said:** In *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton), Nicholas Wolterstorff writes: “The prophets and the psalmist do not argue the case that alleviating the plight of the lowly is required by justice. They assume it....They take for granted that justice requires alleviating the plight of the lowly.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Holy God, who loves justice...”

**June 21, 2015**  
**Text: Amos 6:4-8, 11-14**  
**“Rebuked for Selfishness”**

Every so often, I like to recommend to you ways you can get even with any pompous people you know. (Yes, I realize that doing this is not a fine Christian virtue, but, alas, like so many spiritual foibles it is so much fun!)

All you need to do is ask them to read (unrehearsed) this week’s text. Sit back and enjoy how they pronounce Calneh (v.2), Hamath (v. 2, Gath (v. 2) Lo-debar (v. 13), Karnaim (v. 13), and (my favorite) Lebo-hamath (v. 14).

Truth to tell, I think there is something significant about Amos’ mentioning all these places. Calneh and Hamath are in Syria. Gath was a city in Philistine territory. All three of these places had been conquered by the Assyrians. And now Israel, you are about to get the same medicine (v. 2).

Lo-debar and Karnaim were east of the Jordan River and when Israel boasted how they had conquered these cities, Amos reminds them, in so many words, that it is like the Alabama football team boasting that they defeated the Sixth Grade girls of the Sweet Sisters of the Poor School (v. 13).

Lebo-hamath (in Syria) was to the very north of Israel and Amos says that Israel will collapse from that northernmost point to the deserts in the south (v. 14). In North Carolina, we might say “from Manteo to Murphy.”

Some of the import of these verses is found not just in God’s warning to the Hebrew people,

but is found in God’s awareness of the whole, wide world. For me, it is one thing to value God’s presence in northern Durham County, out here where I live near Bahama. But it is another thing to ponder God’s presence in far places, even ones I cannot pronounce. Running across this text is like seeing God’s light shining on a world map, and there is more to be seen than just my little corner.

**What Someone Else Has Said:** Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt wrote *Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology* (Abingdon Press) and said: “There is no such thing as a believer in Christ who only lives this faith within a private sphere. One’s context for living is now the community of Jesus Christ, which is the entire arena of human existence.”

**Prayer:** : As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Oh God, for whom there are no near and far places, open my eyes to a world beyond where I am. Grant me vision to see Your presence in the unexpected...”

**June 28, 2015**  
**Text: Amos 8:1-6, 9-10**  
**“God Will Never Forget”**  
I don’t know about you, but I’m getting a little tired of it. This is the fourth week in a row in which Amos has picked on the likes of us. Doesn’t he have anything better to do? This eighth chapter of Amos is more of the same.

Some of the power of the warnings in verses 1-3 is lost when translated from Hebrew. “Summer fruit” and “end” sound very much alike in the Old Testament language. It would be like this exchange in English:

“Did you find the sheik?” “No, but I will seek for him.” Okay, maybe Amos was not a prospect for late night comedy, but his readers/listeners would catch this play on words.

What appeared to be a thing of beauty (“a basket of summer fruit”) was actually a sign of the end of things. That judgment would come hard on the hearts of the Israelites. As they looked around they saw prosperity and wealth and comfort and “a new car in every garage.” The problem, Amos said, is that this “summer fruit” has been at the expense of the needy and the poor (Amos 8:4-6).

The caution from Amos is that we are not to measure our well-being by our own comfort and ease. We are to measure our well-being by how we have treated the broken, the injured, the hungry, the tired, the thirsty. We Christians can hear an echo of Luke 4:18-19, when our Lord told why he had come: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Faithful people do not agree on the best ways to be in ministry with the poor. Is it a matter of social welfare legislation? Is it supporting industry so jobs can be created? Is it opening up more soup kitchens and homeless shelters? Is it inviting the down and out to worship and prayer? Is it dividing up the world’s resources? Let’s argue about the best answers, but, if we pay attention to Amos, we won’t argue about whether or not it is important to care for the needy.

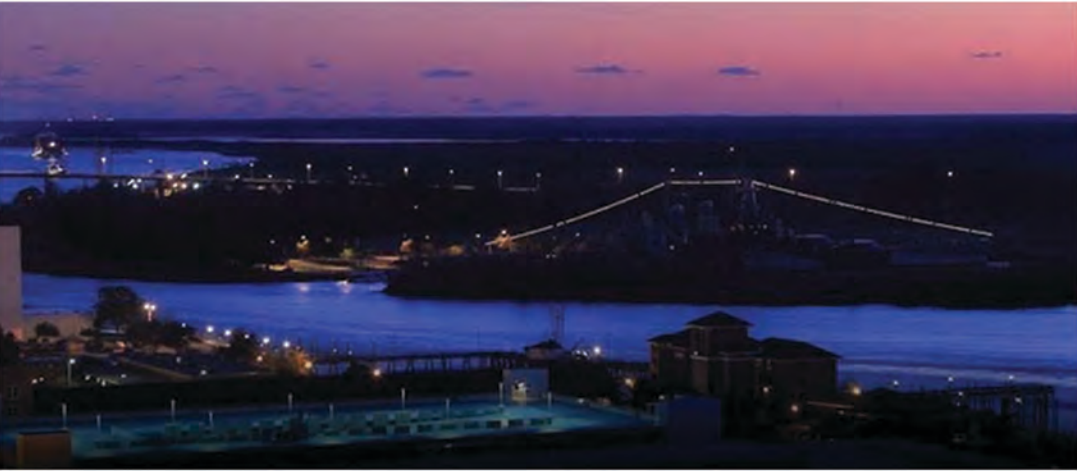
**What Someone Else Has Said:** Theodore W. Jennings (*Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics*, Abingdon Press) observed: “The victims of war and political violence are no more than a fraction of those who perish at the hands of institutionalized greed and indifference.”

**Prayer:** As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Open my heart to Your judgment...”



**Sara Groves Performs at 2015 Annual Conference**

Sara Groves is a mom, wife, singer/ songwriter and recording artist with a passion for justice and a heart of mercy. Sara has been nominated for 7 Dove Awards and has produced a string of successful albums including her latest, *The Collection*, a thoughtful mix of songs from her past 10 recordings. Sara, her husband Troy, and their 3 children (Kirby, Toby & Ruby) reside in St. Paul where they cultivate an artist support community out of a 100 year old church called Art House North.



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## HELP

### Responding with prayer, aid after Nepal earthquake

United Methodists joined Christians around the world in a prayerful response to the earthquake that has claimed thousands of lives in Nepal and neighboring China and India. The United Methodist Committee on Relief is planning to offer assistance through international and local partners, including the United Mission to Nepal, a longtime church partner. Donations to support the response to the earthquake in Nepal and other international disasters can be made by checks made out to your local United Methodist church.

## Church Mice

Karl Zorowski



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