

The Book of the Twelve: Amos (“To Bear/To Place a Load Upon”)

- 1. Historical Setting:** Written by Amos, a shepherd/herdsman and dresser of sycamore figs (7:14) from Tekoa (not far from Bethlehem) during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah (792-740 BC) and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-753 BC). While Amos lived in Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel), he was called to preach to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Amos also completed his ministry two years before a notable earthquake which occurred most likely in 760 B.C (1:1). Jeroboam II was successful in returning Israel to a position of prosperity and wealth, though it came at the expense of the poor and faithfulness to YHWH. Amos’ work appears to be centered around the temple of Bethel in the region of Samaria (this is the Northern Kingdom of Israel), particularly addressing their wealthy citizens.

More of the historical background for Amos can be found in 2 Kings 14:1 – 15:7 and 2 Chronicles 25-26.

- 2. Author:** Amos, as indicated in 1:1.
- 3. Summary:** Through the prophet Amos, the Lord warns Israel of their coming judgment by Assyria, and their coming deliverance when the Davidic monarchy is restored in the coming Messiah.
- 4. Primary Theme:** Judgment of people who abandon God’s promises.
- 5. Important Definitions in Amos:**
 - I. Justice (in Hebrew *mishpat*). Hard to translate into English. It has the sense of several ideas combined together: justice, judgment, verdict, what is right and proper, righteousness. It is not merely ethical, as we think of the word today, but also deals with one’s standing before God. Justice and righteousness are God’s judgments, or pronouncements. In this way of understanding the word justice, it is only possible through YHWH’s gift of justification – see Genesis 15:6 and Romans 3:21-31.
 - II. Righteousness (in Hebrew *zedekah*). Righteousness is treated here in Amos as somewhat synonymous with Justice. It also has the understanding behind it of our standing before God. As well as the idea that righteousness is the right ordering of the world by God. In Jeremiah 23:5-6, we hear how God’s righteousness will be revealed and given to us here on earth, namely, in the form of the Messiah, the righteous Branch, the new David, Jesus.
- 6. Main Theological Themes:**
 - I. God’s judgment on Israel for exploitation and injustice.
 - II. Destruction of Israel by conquest and dispersion.
 - III. God’s requirement of justice and righteousness in Israel.
 - IV. Call to seek God in order to live.
 - V. Hope of future reunion and blessing (9:11-15)
- 7. Purpose(s):**
 - I. To announce God’s sentence of death upon Israel (5:1-2)
 - II. To explain the reasons for it (3:1-2)
- 8. Structure/Outline:**
 - I. Superscription and introduction: 1:1-2
 - II. God’s wrath against his seven enemies: 1:3-2:16

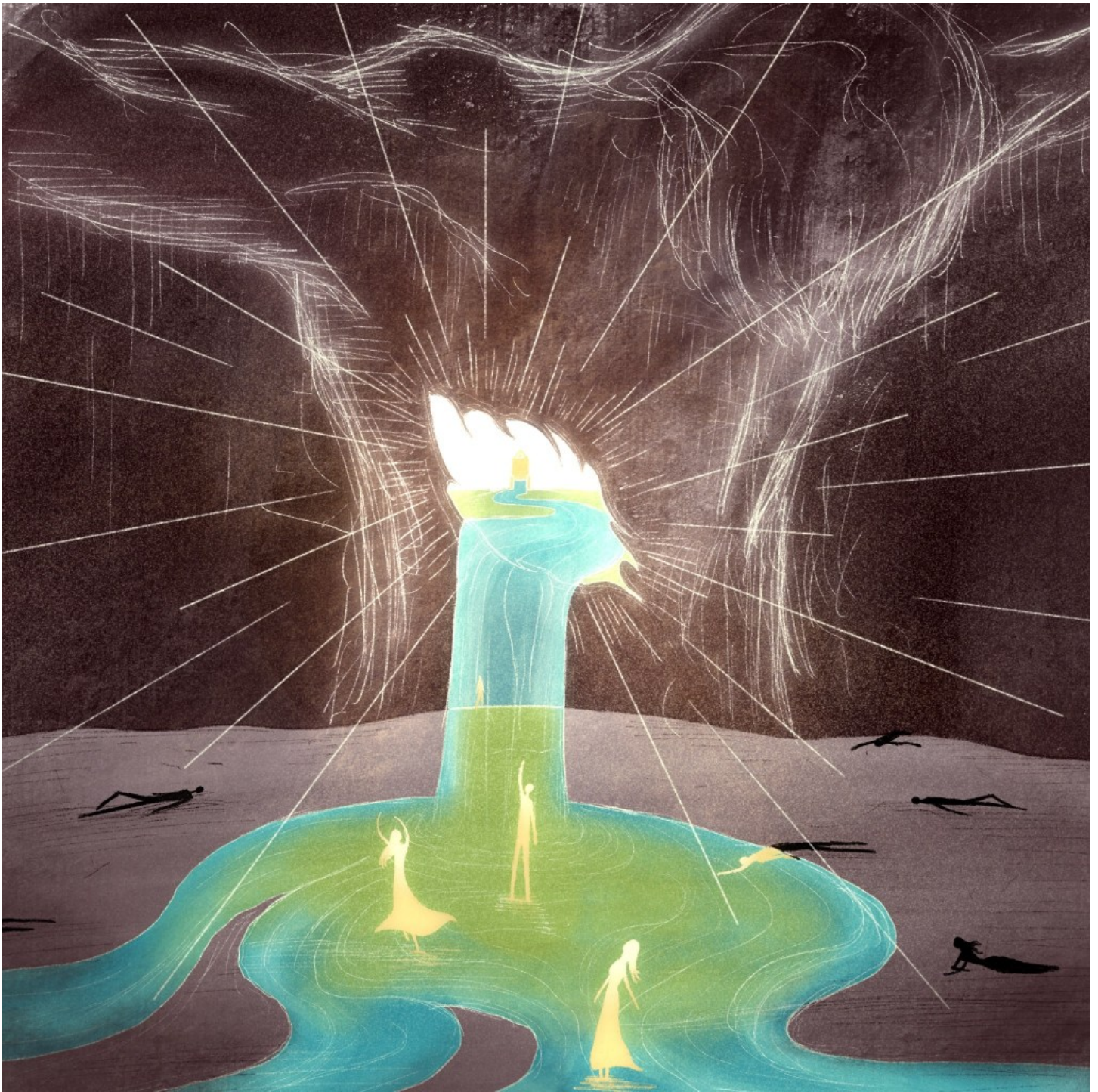
- III. Oracles of Judgment against Israel:
 - i. God's judgment of the chosen people: 3:1-15
 - ii. God's judgment on the unrepentant citizens of Samaria: 4:1-13
- IV. Announcement of Israel's death:
 - i. Dirge for Israel: 5:1-3
 - ii. Call to seek God to escape death at the deserted sanctuaries: 5:4-15
 - iii. Woe to perverted worship (5:16-27) and for the complacency of Zion and Samaria (6:1-7)
 - iv. God's decision to destroy Samaria (6:8-14)
- V. Five visions of Israel's end
 - i. Locust plague averted by intercession (7:1-3)
 - ii. Fire averted by intercession (7:4-6)
 - iii. The plumb line and crooked wall (7:7-17)
 - iv. Basket of rotten fruit (8:1-14)
 - v. Earthquake and the temple (9:1-10)
- VI. Hope of restoration
 - i. Restoration of the Davidic monarchy (9:11-12)
 - ii. Prosperity of the land (9:13-15)

9. New Testament References:

- I. Amos 5:25 quoted in Acts 7:42 in Stephen's preaching before his martyrdom.
- II. Amos 9:11, 14 quoted in Acts 15:15-17 in James' proclamation of the Gospel being for the Gentiles at the Jerusalem council.

10. Liturgical Use:

- I. Proper 27A (Nov 6-12): Amos 5:18-24
- II. Proper 10B (July 10-16): Amos 4:6-7, 10-15
- III. Proper 20C (Sept 18-24): Amos 8:4-7
- IV. Proper 21C (Sept 25-Oct 1): Amos 6:1-7



Explanation of the image above from “Full of Eyes” (www.fullofeyes.com)

Amos 5:21,23-24, *“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*

God's people are worshipping Him with feasts and sacrifices and assemblies and all the other outward expressions that the Mosaic law prescribes, and yet He says that He hates and despises their practices, why? At least two reasons, but they are connected.

The first is that the worship the Israelites were offering YHWH was syncretistic, it was a melding of YHWH-worship and paganism. We see this in that they were sacrificing to Him at Bethel and Gilgal (5:5), both places other than the prescribed place of worship in Jerusalem.

However, the second and primary reason that the Lord hates the worship of His people is that their worship is not accompanied by nor is it generative of a YHWH-like character. They "worship" the Lord, and yet their worship is proven false by the conduct of their lives (which flows from the passion of their heart), a conduct that looks nothing like the One they profess to worship. It is a universally applicable principle that the human creature takes on the image of its god (negatively, Ps. 115:8 and positively, 2 Cor. 3:18). As GK Beale has said, "we become like what we worship." Therefore, when God's people purport to worship Him and yet look nothing like Him, it is manifestly clear that He is not the true object of their worship.

This is why the text cited above concludes with YHWH's call to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." What are Justice and Righteousness in this context? Do they just mean, "do the right thing"? Well, in one sense, yes, but that is not specific enough to be helpful.

I think we see something of an exposition of Amos' view of Justice in 5:15, "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate." I think we might read the last section of that verse as "and so establish justice..." What then is Justice? It is what happens when we hate evil (ie, what opposes the character of God) and love good (ie, what consents with the character of God). According to Paul in Romans 12:9, this view of Justice might be glossed simply as "genuine love." What is Justice, then? It is to know the character of YHWH, to know what He abhors and to know what He values, and to make His abhorrence and valuation ours....which will look like Love; love that gives itself up for the needy, love that pours itself out for the afflicted, love that spends itself to lift the hopeless from the ashes; love that wars against oppression, love that rages against deception and cruelty and self-exaltation and idolatry....Love as defined on Calvary.

And what is righteousness? Bruce Waltke gives a helpful definition of OT righteousness as: using advantage to serve the disadvantaged. This is, of course, quintessentially manifest in the incarnation and crucifixion of God the Son (Phil.2:6-9). There eternal and infinite righteousness is definitively revealed

within time and space be the self-outpouring of the divine Son who comes as a servant and descends to the depths of damnation that He might lift His fallen people up from the ash heap of sin and make them to sit with Him on His throne. Righteousness is the use of advantage to serve the disadvantaged, it is the outpouring of self to fill up the empty...it is—like Justice—Love as defined on Calvary.

So, what is Justice and Righteousness? They are Love....but not love as anyone wants to define it, love as it is defined for us at the cross of Jesus Christ, love as it is communicated to us with infinite perfection as the unspeakable weight of divine wrath is willingly, obediently, mercifully swallowed up in the unspeakable wonder of divine self-giving....What is Justice and Righteousness? It is the Character of YHWH, it is the Name of our God. And it is fitting that when the definitive work of Justice and Righteousness took place—the work that both perfectly achieved Justice and Righteousness on behalf of God's people and perfectly revealed Justice and Righteousness to God's people—the Sovereign Author of history ordained that a literal flow of water should roll down from the heart of the incarnate Son...a spatial and temporal manifestation of the ever-flowing river of cleansing and conforming love that eternally flows from the throne of God into the midst of His people (John 19:34 + Revelation 22:1).