

## Prophetic Faith

### Reading

Amos 1:1–9:15; Matthew 5:20, 38; Romans 3:21-26

### Teaching

What did Amos teach people about how to live?

Amos exemplified how Old Testament prophets challenged how the people of their day lived. Amos wrote of his country-people: “They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that God’s holy name is profaned” (2:6-7).

In the face of this injustice, Amos offers a corrective. “Seek the Lord and *live*... you that turn justice to [bitter poison]” (5:6). Turn away from the acts of injustice which happen way too often. “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have [been claiming].

Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to [you]” (5:14-15).

The solution to Israel’s crisis is made clear: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). God’s justice. Let it shape your lives. Let God’s justice determine how you people relate to one another.

It is crucial for us to look at the biblical teaching on God’s justice within the context of the *biblical* worldview,

and not necessarily the worldview of our modern world. Jesus told his followers in the Sermon on the Mount that unless their justice exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will never enter God’s kingdom (Matt. 5:20). He then speaks of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (5:38), which is certainly a big part of the *world’s* understanding of justice. But not so with you. Godly justice has to do with *loving* enemies, *refusing* to fight back, *rejecting* the desire to punish and coerce.

Paul writes in Romans about the fullest expression of God’s justice. The *justice* of God is revealed in the salvation-giving death and resurrection of Jesus. God’s justice has been revealed *separate* from the legal realm, *apart* from the law (Rom. 3:21-26). God’s justice, expressed toward sinners, has ultimately to do with providing a way of *salvation*.

Likewise, when Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters, he is calling for Israel’s society to enhance life, especially to enhance life for those who are depersonalized and exploited. To do justice is to support life. Amos adds, by way of emphasis, let “righteousness [roll down] like an ever-flowing stream.” For a desert people, an “ever-flowing stream” is an amazing resource, a stream which contains water *all* the time, which doesn’t dry up. God’s justice, God’s righteousness, is an even more amazing resource. Even in the face of *faithlessness* by the people, God doesn’t quit. God’s love perseveres, it doesn’t dry up. And God keeps working to make things right. God keeps working to heal brokenness.

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