

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 54
Week 54 – Amos; Micah

Key Concepts: The key concepts in these two books are that God demands faithfulness from God's people in terms of ethical treatment of others and abhors pride and empty rituals.

Stories: Amos (who is prophesying against Israel) is divided into three main sections: prophecies against Israel's neighbors (1-2); indictments against Israel for their mistreatment of the poor (3-6); prophecies of Israel's coming doom, even in the face of current peace and prosperity (7-9). Micah (who is prophesying against Judah) contains an indictment of both Israel and Judah for errant worship (1-3); a restoration of Judah following its punishment (4-5); a condemnation of the ruling classes of both kingdoms for the injustices they have brought upon those who are powerless (6-7).

Brief Summary: We are now listening in on the prophetic pronouncements which were made during the times about which we have been reading. Amos, who was a shepherd called by God, prophesied during a time of great peace and prosperity in Israel under Jeroboam II. The people assumed that this moment was a reward for their faithfulness. Amos reminds them that it is not and that unless they change, God will destroy them. Micah was a prophet in the Southern kingdom of Judah. He was not well connected, but still felt called by God to remind the people just how far astray they had wandered in terms of their worship and ethical treatment of others.

Amos begins by speaking words of condemnation against Israel's neighbors. Even though God had given the Law only to Israel, the nations around her were going to be judged by the same criterion with which Israel would be judged. They are primarily condemned because they attacked God's people and committed atrocities against them. Judah will be condemned because it ignored God's Law and followed in the wicked ways of their fathers. Israel itself will be condemned because they "sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted." The punishment for these actions will be destruction.

The people are therefore called to "Seek God and live; but do not seek me at Bethel." What this means is that they are to seek God in how they live out God's commands and not in and through the rites and rituals performed at the sanctuary sites. They are to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." If the people do this God will have mercy on them and ultimately restore them and they will re-inhabit their ruined cities.

Micah, though writing a bit later than Amos, picks up on the same basic themes. He castigates the political and religious leaders of the nation for willingness to sell-out the poor in order to gain power and influence. "Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand." Micah also charges them with improper worship. "All her images shall be beaten to pieces, all her fires will be burned with fire, and her idols I will lay waste."

Micah, like Amos, does believe that ultimately God's faithfulness will not allow the nations to disappear. The prophet tells the people that one day the people will "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" and that from Bethlehem will come forth "one who is to be a ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old...and he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord." In other words both nations will be restored.

1. What parallels can you draw between the times of Amos and Micah and ours today?
2. How do you help justice roll down like waters"?
3. What idols do you see in our society? How might we avoid "worshipping" them?