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THE LOOKOUT

MARCH 2023

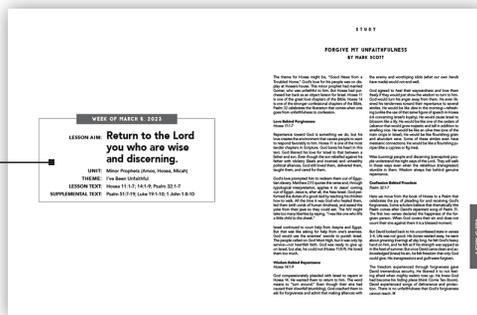
Unit: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

Theme: I've Been Unfaithful

Overview: *Unfaithfulness* is a painful word. It is painful for the wounded party, for sure, but it is also painful for the one who wounded. Recognizing one's unfaithfulness just might be the first step toward grace. The earlier of the Minor Prophets—Amos, Hosea, and Micah—will help us understand that. These eighth-century BC Minor Prophets cried out against Israel's (and Judah's) unfaithfulness. God's punishment for his people's unfaithfulness would come from Assyria and Babylon. Students will learn the progression of returning to God by seeking God's forgiveness and mercy, getting help for one's brokenness, and getting back on the trail of righteousness.

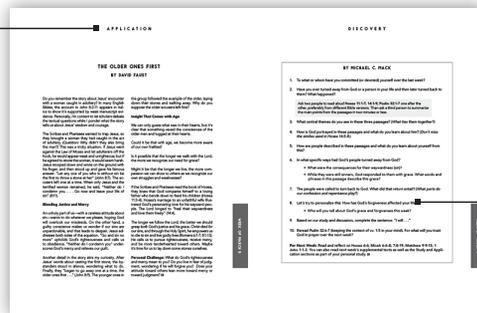
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 19, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Eat of God's garden
in wholeness.**

UNIT: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

THEME: I've Been Unfaithful

LESSON TEXT: Amos 9:5-15

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 10:20-23; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 2:5-7;
3:19-20

MEND MY BROKENNESS

BY MARK SCOTT

In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lucy asked Mr. Beaver, "Is he [Aslan, the lion] safe?" Mr. Beaver said, "No, he's not safe, but he's good." That line fits the content of Amos's prophecy. God is not safe—he comes with a plumb line of judgment—but he is good. And when he judges, he also builds restoration into his judgment.

Amos was not from a priestly family. He was a farmer (fig nipper) from Tekoa, a town 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He prophesied around 755 BC. Uzziah, who was a pretty good king, was reigning in Judah, and Jeroboam, who was a pretty bad king, was reigning in Israel. Amos was from the south but carried on his prophetic ministry in the north—which did not sit well with the northerners. But the nations around Israel (Amos 1–2) and Israel herself were very broken (Amos 3–9). God addressed the brokenness through Amos's oracles and visions.

The Brokenness Was Severe

Amos 9:5-10

How severe was the brokenness? Very! The people of Israel had majored in minors (Amos 5:21-24) and were experiencing the worst kind of famine—one from the Word of God (8:11). They would not be able to escape judgment from the Lord of Hosts.

Through Amos, God appealed to his people about this judgment by leaning back into creation (Amos 9:5-6), reminding them of their redemption (v. 7) and making them aware of his omniscience (vv. 8-10). The *Lord Almighty* is so powerful that when he judges, the earth melts and the people cry. The land goes topsy-turvy when God judges. The Nile River—i.e., the *River of Egypt*—rises for about one month during the spring. Then it falls (recedes) again. The *lofty palace in the heavens* (upper chambers of the firmament) stores up rain, and then, at God's command, floods the *face of the land*. Creation seemed to know that God is in control, but the people of Israel seemed clueless.

God often reminded his people of their redemption when they were in Egypt. But God was not myopic about Israel. He was also aware of other nations. He brought the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete), and he brought the Arameans from Kir (East of the Persian Gulf). God spread his sovereignty over his redemptive purposes throughout the world (Acts 17:26-27).

No one can pull the wool over God's eyes. Nothing catches God by surprise. His eyes search throughout the earth (2 Chronicles 16:9). The *Sovereign Lord* had his gaze fixed on the *sinful kingdom*. He would punish Israel severely. In fact, he would *shake the people of Israel among the nations*. This probably means cause them to be disrespected among the nations. They would be shaken like *grain . . . in a sieve*. Sinners and presumptuous people who thought disaster would not overtake them would die *by the sword* (by enemy armies).

But there is a glimmer of hope in this judgment. God would not totally destroy *the descendants of Jacob* but would have mercy on them because he so desires to mend their brokenness.

The Mending of the Brokenness Was Thorough

Amos 9:11-15

With God, mercy always triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). God wanted to *restore David's fallen shelter*. King David had passed away 245 years earlier. Is the fallen shelter then the tabernacle or is it something else? Whatever it refers to, the restoration will be complete. Broken walls will be repaired, and even the neighboring nations will recognize that God was at work in it all.

God spoke of mending the brokenness in glorious terms. Food will be in abundance (described in terms of simultaneous harvesting and planting—in other words, crops will still be growing when new ones can be planted). Wine will also exist in abundance (John 2:1-12). And the people deported to exile will come home. Cities will be rebuilt. Vineyards and gardens will flourish. Israel will experience security in the land *never to be uprooted again*.

The question remains, "What is being envisioned here?" The first meaning surely includes Israel (and perhaps also Judah) returning from their literal and physical exiles in Assyria and Babylon (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:17-22). Some would suggest it refers to the time of the Jews' return to the "Holy Land" before Christ returns. But in light of James's use of the book of Amos in Acts 15:16-17, it seems it is spiritually (or metaphorically or typologically) referring to the church age where Jew and Gentile experience such goodness. The literalistic interpretation breaks down because God mends our lives in ways that exceed physical boundaries. ■

APPLICATION

THE LOWEST PLACE ON EARTH

BY DAVID FAUST

In Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan it was no coincidence he said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (Luke 10:30). Jericho is located down by the Dead Sea, approximately 1,400 feet below sea level. Residents of Jericho have turned their low elevation into a marketing opportunity, proudly labeling their city "The Lowest Place on Earth." A sign near the beach at the Dead Sea invites customers to buy a drink at "The Lowest Juice Bar on Earth."

Living in Low Places

Moral Low. Joshua 2 tells about a prostitute named Rahab who lived by Jericho's city wall. She was hardly a paragon of virtue, but this morally flawed woman recognized the Lord was with the Israelites and risked her life by hiding two spies. A scarlet-colored cord in the window identified her house so the invading soldiers would spare her family. The New Testament lifts up Rahab as a positive example of faith (Hebrews 11:31) and obedience (James 2:25), and she appears in Jesus' genealogy as an ancestor of the Messiah (Matthew 1:5).

Physical Low. Centuries after Rahab, a blind man named Bartimaeus lived in Jericho, and his physical condition brought him down. Unable to see or work, he sat by the roadside begging until Jesus told him, "'Go, . . . your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road" (Mark 10:52)—the same road where he used to beg.

Social Low. Zacchaeus was short in stature, but not short on funds. His job as a chief tax collector earned him a lucrative income but made him a social outcast in Jericho. Determined to see the Lord, Zacchaeus climbed a tree, and to everyone's surprise, Jesus called him by name and invited himself to dinner at the tax collector's house. Jesus transformed Zacchaeus from a taker to a giver, from a cheater to a benefactor, from a social outcast to a member of God's family.

Circumstantial Low. To this day, the road to Jericho isn't a safe place to hike by yourself at night. In Jesus' story in Luke 10, that road became a crime scene where thieves attacked a traveler and left him half dead. Unwilling to get involved, religious leaders walked past the wounded man, but a good Samaritan stepped in to provide kindness and care.

When you find yourself in low places—morally, physically, relationally, or circumstantially—the God of grace is able to repair your "broken walls" and restore what seems ruined (Amos 9:11).

Stepping Down from High Places

Near Jerusalem today you can see the remains of Herodium (also known as Herodian). King Herod's workers built him an elaborate, well-fortified mountaintop palace there complete with gardens, pools, and a theatre. The imposing fortress towers over the valley below, with Bethlehem a short distance away. Standing on the hilltop at Herodium, with the wind whistling past my face, I thanked the Lord for his willingness to step down from high places.

Jesus wasn't born in a mountaintop palace. He came down to the valley, to a Bethlehem manger. To restore us, Christ stepped down to the lowest place on earth. "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:8). Whatever circumstances bring you down, the Lord's invitation remains: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10).

Personal Challenge: What has been dragging you down lately? Meditate on 1 Peter 5:6-7 and give your worries to the Lord. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

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DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you act justly and show mercy to another person over the past week?
2. What is the best (or your favorite) thing you have built or rebuilt?

Ask two people to read aloud **Amos 9:5-15** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage in two minutes or less.

3. What characteristics of God do you see in or infer from this passage?
4. What traits of humans do you see in or infer from what God says (vv. 7-15)?
5. In what ways can people be presumptuous about how God will work?
6. One word used to describe God in this passage is *Sovereign* (v. 8), which means he has supreme authority and power over all creation as well as the absolute right to exercise his will. How do you see his sovereignty played out in this passage?
7. The Lord has the power to repair, restore, and rebuild. How have you seen (or are you seeing) him do that in your own life or in the lives of others around you?
8. Who among your friends and family needs to hear about the Lord Almighty, the Sovereign Lord, our Creator and Redeemer, who repairs, restores, and rebuilds? (*How will you share the message from this study with them?*)
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What are you seeking and praying for the Lord to repair, restore, and/or rebuild in your life?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Amos 5:6-15, 21-24**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **L**