

Amos Part 2: The Purpose of Biblical Prophecy Proclaim The Truth About God's Grace

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Introduction: One of the most fundamentally flawed understandings of grace is that grace requires the removal of consequences. That is, grace is misconstrued as always protecting me from the consequences of my own actions as well as the consequences of other people's actions. It is falsely suggested that grace means no matter how much damage and destruction my failure creates, you will keep me from experiencing any of its effects, and in some people's minds, that includes protecting me from even having to face the fact that I failed. That is in no way a Biblical or even secularly logical understanding of grace. Let me explain.

Keri and I have tried to be consistent disciplinarians, which included spanking our children for certain things when they were younger. Now, in the growing "gentle" parent concept, that sounds horrifying. To those in that camp, it sounds like an impossible way of communicating God's love and grace to our children. However, when you read the Bible, you find out it's the perfect opportunity to do it. My kids found out that, although on occasion there were short-term painful consequences to the backside of their legs, my love for them was never in question. I didn't spank them out of anger to punish them, but with a very clear constructive purpose for their good. The consequence they received was not coming from a father who hated them or was ashamed of them, but from one who loved them so much he was willing to suffer the agony of inflicting the children he loved with temporary pain so that they could fully understand the consequences of decisions, especially the decision to willfully disobey the authority in their lives.

We do not view the authority we have over children as something that benefits us, but rather as something that benefits them. Our authority is meant to protect them, to mature them, and to equip them to live spiritually and relationally healthy lives with God and others; to make wise decisions that allow them to live this brief life with love and joy; to be able to look back on their lives with as little regrets as possible while looking forward to the day they stand before God with confidence that they will hear, **"Well done thou good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21)**. We are trying to raise our children in a way that gives them the best chance we can reasonably give them to, **"abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming." (1 John 2:28)**

Therefore, when we disciplined our children, including when we spanked them, we did so because we loved them. The consequences we made them suffer were, of themselves, an act of GRACE because they optimized their ability to learn the wisdom and character necessary to live a life that doesn't reap a whirlwind! Disciplining your children is one of the most gracious, loving things you can do. As the writer of Hebrews wrote,

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Hebrews 12:5-7)

Therefore, when we are talking about God’s grace, we need to know for certain that it truly nullifies the eternal damnation of sin through the blood of Christ, but it doesn’t nullify us from every consequence of sin because to do so would be an act of hatred rather than love! The Bible in no way hides this understanding of God’s grace, so it is no surprise that one of the purposes of Biblical prophecy is to make that testimony of His grace abundantly clear. As such, we see Amos doing just that. In the book of Amos, we see a complete picture of God’s grace in how God handled the extreme sinful rebellion against Him by the Jewish people. Specifically,

Proposition: Amos 5 contains two examples of the gracious love of God in His judgment on the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Before we look at the details in these passages, we need to remember some critical context. The covenant of God with the Jewish people did not exclude promises to them as individuals, but it was first and foremost a covenant with them as a people. The primary blessings and curses involved in the covenant were based on corporate obedience. Therefore, although there are certainly obvious applications for individuals, those applications are within the overall context of the judgment of God on the Northern Kingdom of Israel for the extreme levels of its corporate rebellion against God!

The first example of God's gracious love in His judgment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel is found in Amos 5:4-6.

- (1) God was going to permanently destroy the Northern Kingdom, but all who truly repented and sought HIM instead of idols would survive. (5:4-6)**
 - A. 4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; 5 but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing." 6 Seek the LORD and live, ... (5:4-6a)**
 - B. “Seek me” – We will discuss this in more detail in part 3 of our series, but as a people, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was not seeking God! They were foolishly trying to appease God through religious rituals so that they could continue in their blatant, sinful rebellion with a feeling of safety, confidence, and even entitlement to the blessings of God. They were NOT seeking God at all, but rather their own desires, and as such, the Lord calls them to repent from who they are seeking (themselves) and to start seeking HIM!**
 - C. He makes this point more specifically in verse 5, when he tells them to seek Him rather than go to the most beloved centers of religious worship in the northern**

Kingdom. God declares through Amos, “... **do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba.**”

1. Let me work backwards through the places He named. So let’s start with **Beersheba.**
 - a. “Beersheba was in the southern part of Judah’s territory. Evidently northern Israelites crossed over the border to worship at a shrine associated with the patriarchs (cf. Gen. 21:31–33; 26:23–25; 46:1–4).”¹
 - b. As they remembered their patriarchs, they were clearly not there to remember the God who faithfully raised them up and used them to fulfill His promises, but rather to appease their cultural pride and entitle them to live in sin!
2. **Gilgal**
 - a. “Gilgal, with its memorial stones marking Israel’s initial entrance into the land (Josh. 4), remained in the eighth century as a center for pilgrimage and sacrifice (Amos 5:5; Hosea 4:15; 9:15; 12:11).”²
 - b. Interestingly, God says that Gilgal, the place where you formally entered the promised land and escaped exile in Egypt, would be exiled itself!
3. **Bethel**
 - a. Although Bethel had been an important religious center for the people of Israel to gather and worship the Lord, Jeroboam I had turned it into an outright place of idolatry! It was the epitome of religious hypocrisy to go there and claim to be “worshiping” God. Listen to what was taking place in Bethel,
 - b. **27 If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” 28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” 29 And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. (1 Kings 12:26-30)**

¹ Sunukjian, D. R. (1985). [Amos](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1438–1439). Victor Books.

² Sunukjian, D. R. (1985). [Amos](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1436). Victor Books.

- c. It's truly insane that after all God had done for them, they worshiped an idol that clearly had not done a thing for them, and, ironically, it was the same idol the Israelites started worshiping after they left Egypt instead of God, and God severely punished them for it (Exodus 32). The golden calf didn't do a thing for them except bring on the discipline of God, yet they now worshiped it as the god who brought them all their fortune!
- d. "In punishing them, God would destroy the altars of Bethel (cf. 9:1). Bethel was the royal sanctuary of Jeroboam II (7:10–13), the most popular religious center in Israel (cf. 4:4; 5:5). As the site of the golden calf erected by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:26–30; Hosea 10:5), its altars symbolized Israel's continued rebellion against God."³
- e. So God tells them not to seek the experience of Bethel, seek HIM instead, because, oh, by the way, Bethel, which means, "the 'house of God,' was to become 'Beth Aven' (Heb.), a 'house of nothing,' a 'house of spirits.' In Hebrew, the last part of the city's name, 'El,' meaning 'God,' was changed by Amos to 'Aven' (cf. niv marg.; Hosea 4:15; 5:8; 10:5), meaning 'nothing, empty, having no existence,' a word often used to describe the powerless spirits of wickedness (cf. Isa. 41:22–24, 28–29)."⁴

D. 4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me **and live; 5 but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing." 6 Seek the LORD **and live**, ... (5:4-6a)**

- 1. In all of this evil that was going to bring God's severe judgment on them; in all of this blatant idolatry with religion and even outright idols, God still offered them an opportunity to survive! If they would repent from their hypocrisy and their love and trust in religion, and instead actually seek God, He promised them they would "**live!**"
- 2. Therefore, we see God's destruction of the things they trusted in instead of Him, and in doing so, God is rescuing them from the things they foolishly trust in as gods. Whether it be outright obvious idols or religious traditions and cultural customs in His name, these are things that have no power to bless them, protect them, or give them life. But God is going to graciously destroy these powerless idols and give life to all who repent and seek Him instead, if they will only seek HIM instead of that which has no power to do anything at all for them!

³ Sunukjian, D. R. (1985). [Amos](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1435). Victor Books.

⁴ Sunukjian, D. R. (1985). [Amos](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1438–1439). Victor Books.

The second example of God's gracious love in His judgment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel is found in Amos 5:4-6.

(2) God was going to permanently destroy the Northern Kingdom, but for all who truly repented and began to walk in obedience, God would be with them as well as protect a remnant of their descendants. (5:14-15)

- A. On what we are about to read, Bentley writes, “At first sight verses 14 and 15 appear to be similar to verses 4 and 5, but when we look more closely we see that there is a distinct change of emphasis. In the earlier passage, the theme is about seeking God in worship instead of merely wanting to be in a ‘religious place’. Here the driving force is the necessity of right living.”⁵
- B. Nowhere in Amos is there any hint that the Northern Kingdom can escape the judgment God has placed on them. That’s not what Amos is saying here at all. God is going to permanently destroy it as a testimony to His holiness, His sovereignty, and to the necessity of living in submission to Him rather than idols and our sinful desires.
- C. In addition, we will explain more about the Mosaic Law in two weeks, but for now, it’s important to understand that it wasn’t just a law; it was, more specifically, the rules of the Covenant God made with them to prosper them in the land He promised to Abraham and His favored descendants. However, by this point in Jewish history, they had broken that covenant so massively and so many times that any commitment by God to bless the Jewish people would be a blatantly obvious testimony of nothing but His grace! Legally, God had every right to completely destroy them and choose an entirely different group of people! He does indeed issue a massive punishment, but in that punishment, He also provides an opportunity for blessing and the salvation of a remnant that would never be reestablished as the Northern Kingdom but would be restored to the lands God had promised to Abraham and would continue to receive the blessings of being His chosen people. Let’s take a look at Amos 5:14-15,
- D. **14 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. 15 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 the remnant of Joseph. (5:14-15)**
- E. To “**Seek good, and not evil,**” (5:14) necessarily meant that they, “**Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate;**” (5:15).
 - 1. We are going to get into the details of that in part 3 of our series, but for now, I just want you to notice that repentance necessarily entails a change in

⁵ Bentley, M. (2006). *Opening up Amos* (pp. 67–68). Day One Publications.

actions. If my actions don't change, if the path I'm walking on and the life I'm living haven't changed direction, then I haven't repented. It's that simple.

2. At the core, repentance is a matter of the heart, but the heart always bears fruit. Therefore, if our hearts have truly changed, our actions will as well! I'm not suggesting perfection, because we will battle sin our entire lives; however, a person who seeks the LORD as the intent of their life will have a different life than one who doesn't! Again, it's that simple. Calvin notes,
 3. **"He speaks not here of faith, or of prayer to God, but describes repentance by its fruits; for our faith, as it has been stated in other places, is proved in this way; it manifests itself, when sincerity and uprightness towards one another flourish in us, when we spontaneously love one another and perform the duties of love."**⁶
- F. 14 Seek good, and not evil, **that you may live**; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, **will be with you**, as you have said. 15 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 the remnant of Joseph**. (5:14-15)
1. To those who repent, God promises that they will **live**. Like God did in the wilderness, when everyone who lacked the faith to follow Moses into the Promised Land died, God was going to kill every single person in the Northern Kingdom who refused to repent! When God sent the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom, He wasn't going to be with the Jewish people of the northern Kingdom, but He did promise to be **with** all who repented. Being with them wouldn't restore their kingdom or personal fortunes, but it would restore them to a relationship with Him and the life that goes with it, and in this case, it also meant not being killed when He unleashed His judgment on Israel.
 2. "The nation as a political entity was doomed. Deliverance, however, might be possible for the penitent and purified few mentioned by Isaiah and Micah, i.e., those who would be saved after heavy chastisement (5:15b)."⁷
 3. True repentance would also restore the promise that descendants will inherit the blessing of being God's chosen people. Amos wrote that God, **"will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph"** (5:15).

⁶ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Vol. 2, pp. 273–278). Logos Bible Software.

⁷ Smith, J. E. (1994). *The Minor Prophets* (pp. 169–170). College Press.

- a. "Joseph is used as a comprehensive name for the northern kingdom because its tribes were mostly descended from his sons."⁸
- b. "In reality, there would be only a brief respite before their Sovereign would sweep them away in judgment. If a handful, however, would turn and passionately seek the Lord, perhaps the great Suzerain would have mercy on that small repentant remnant of the Northern Kingdom, here called Joseph."⁹
- c. God did indeed keep His word, and there were survivors from each of the ten tribes of Israel that made up the northern Kingdom who, along with Benjamin and Judah, were restored after Cyrus the Great began sending Jews back to Jerusalem from captivity in the former Babylonian Empire.

Now, what about the Covenant we have in Christ? Amos shows us how God displayed His grace to those who repented under the Old Covenant —what about the New? Some people believe that if they are in Christ, there is no discipline from God, as in no consequences for their sin from the Lord. They believe that because Christ died to pay the penalty of our sin (Ephesians 1:7), and that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1), God would never make us suffer because of our sinful rebellion against Him.

To that, let's turn to the book of Revelation and look at what God said to a local church on this matter!

14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. 15 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:14-20)

One of the most direct testimonies to this aspect of God's grace is 2 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul testifies of the massive privilege God had given him to literally

⁸ Motyer, J. A. (1994). [Amos](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 802). Inter-Varsity Press.

⁹ Sunukjian, D. R. (1985). [Amos](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1440). Victor Books.

peer into heaven itself. But, as a sinner, this blessing became a temptation of pride and arrogance that presumably he truly struggled with. So, listen to what the Lord did!

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

God blessed Paul with the grace that not only refused to forsake Paul for being a sinner, but that also refused to not forsake Paul by not disciplining Paul in a way that would rescue him from the destruction of his sinful application of God’s blessings! So, God used a messenger of Satan (vs. 7) to humble Paul! Why? Not because God was mad at Paul, but because God loves Paul! Pride and arrogance are sins, and as such, they will destroy us and others. Therefore, in loving Paul, God rescued Paul from the pride and arrogance that were stirring in his heart; He rescued Paul from the very thing God had given him as a blessing, but which Paul was using for his own glory!

Challenge: Are you embracing God’s work of grace to discipline you into a greater experience of His life, or are you belligerently refusing to repent?

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)