

Woe To You!

by Bruce Hostetler and Carol Duerksen

FAITH STORY:

Amos 6

FAITH FOCUS:

Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, is the earliest of the prophets whose utterances have been recorded in books that bear their names. The book is composed of three elements: vision, oracles, and narrative; all placing the prediction of imminent ruin at the heart of Amos' ministry. The setting is during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who was on the throne from about 783 to about 745 B.C. The nation of Israel was very prosperous during this time period. The war with Syria had ended which led to the full recovery of Israel's territory.

The accumulation of wealth was concentrated in the hands of the upper classes that had built palaces and summer houses and were indulging in luxurious, extravagant living patterns. All of this ruthless seeking of wealth occurred from gross injustice and oppression of the poor. Careless lust that knew no bounds was woven into the very fabric of national life. This constituted a profaning of the holiness of the God with whom they felt they had a privileged, intimate relationship. God had delivered these people from the oppression of Egypt, only to have them committing much the same kinds of injustice and violent behavior toward their own weak, poor, and vulnerable. All of this atrocious behavior occurred while they were thinking they were safe and secure because Yahweh was watching out for, and blessing, them. Amos is issuing the final proclamation of approaching doom to a people who are totally oblivious to it.

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- Ask someone well in advance of this session to memorize parts of, or the whole chapter of Amos 6, and come present it dramatically to the group.
- Copies of Amos 6 from The Message for each student
- Large pieces of newsprint and markers
- Ashes to place on students' foreheads or hands
- Bibles for each student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS:

Welcome students, check in with them about their week, and during this check in time, your "Amos" should arrive and interrupt the class. He should immediately begin to present Amos 6.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE:

Ask:

Do you know who is being portrayed here?

What's going on?

Hand out the copies of Amos 6 from The Message. Read through it together as a class.

Share a mini-lecture based on the information in the Faith Story.

Read Luke 11:42-52.

Discuss:

- One of the deadly sins Amos points out is the sin of "spiritual ingratitude." From the text, and what you know about the story of the Israelites, what evidence proves are they guilty of this sin?
- The second deadly sin on the prophet's list is "moral corruption." Identify some examples of this malady in the text.
- Next on Amos' list of deadly sins is "spiritual pride". Can you figure out what he means from the text?
- Which of these sins does Jesus address in the Luke passage?

Divide the class into three groups and give them newsprint and markers. Group #1 will work with Amos 6:1-2, Group #2, verses 3-6, and Group #3, verses 12-14. Ask them to write a modern-day version of their verses. What might a prophet be saying to people today? What are the modern-day parallels to the situations Amos is addressing?

APPLY:

Discuss:

- How is it possible to enjoy the blessings of wealth that God gives us without resorting to sin?

- How does it happen that we can become engaged in these sins without being aware of it? In what ways can we guard against these sins?
- Are there church doctrines in your church that could lead to “spiritual pride?” What are they? What would God say about those doctrines?

RESPOND:

Read Amos 6:8 slowly and solemnly.

Then offer this explanation: *God gave his people everything they could possibly need or want. But they worshipped God only in ceremony and not with their hearts. They did not practice what was preached to them by God. Therefore, God despised them for their sins.*

Get the container of ashes and hold them while you continue.

As much as God loves each one of us, God also despises our sins. Wearing ashes is a symbol of repentance and sorrow for our sins. If you want to repent to God and talk to God about your sins, I will place a cross of ashes on your forehead or on your hand, and give you the opportunity to go on a walk or to a quiet space for awhile to talk with God. If you want to be alone but not receive the ashes, that's okay too.

Invite students to come to you for ashes if they so choose. As you trace a cross with the ashes on either their forehead or hand (student's choice), say: *May God hear your prayers of repentance. May God forgive you, and give you peace.*

Encourage students to spend time alone, away from the classroom if possible, and to return on their own time. When they return, send them out with a personal blessing.