

**HOLY LIT**  
**Part Six: Prophetic Literature**  
**Pastor Rick Henderson** **July 5-6, 2025**

Did you know that you are sitting in a room with some very intelligent, highly educated people? Some of you were educated in prestigious schools and challenging degree programs. Some of you were educated in the school of hard knocks. Wherever and however you got your education, you are a sharp and savvy bunch. It's something I love about you. It also makes you a challenging crowd to preach to. I must read and study a lot to keep up with you all.

I bring this up because there are a couple of dots I want to connect. We've said throughout this series that the Bible is God-breathed. He breathed it out. He breathed it through people, who wrote from their cultural, historical, and linguistic context. It has human fingerprints and personality all over it, yet its origin is the mind of God, and it's made alive by him.

How can it be that serious-minded people take seriously that this is not just historical literature, but holy literature? How can serious-minded people take seriously that this is truly God-breathed?

There are many historical, archeological, and technical reasons that we could nerd out on. But I want to come at it from a different angle. Have you ever sat in a setting like this, and the pastor up at the front was talking about something from this book, but it felt like it was just for you? Have you ever felt that so intensely, it was almost embarrassing, as if someone had told the pastor something about you? To help everyone else out in the room, can you throw up your hand if you've had an experience like that?

Here's what's wild. You don't even have to believe the Bible is holy or God-breathed to have that experience. Devoted people and doubting people have had that experience.

How many of you have read the Bible on your own, and whatever it was that you were reading was the perfect message for what you were experiencing in your life right then? Hold up your hand? Have you ever read something in the Bible in the morning, only to experience what it was talking about later that day?

How do we explain the phenomenon of experiencing the Bible as though it were written for us personally, even though we know the people who literally wrote the words on the page could never have imagined our lives? How do we explain that phenomenon that you and countless others have experienced?

The Bible is a **TIMELESS** message that's always **TIMELY**, even though it's not written about our **TIME**.

This is something that many of us have experienced more often than we can count. The ability of this book to remain relevant, insightful, and personal across centuries and across cultures makes it worth considering; perhaps this isn't just ancient literature. It truly is holy literature.

Will you grab a Bible and find the Old Testament book of Amos?

### **AMOS 5:18-27**

This might be tricky to find. It's the 30<sup>th</sup> book in the Old Testament. It's totally OK to use the table of contents to find the page number. Once you get past Psalms and Proverbs, you will quickly find the books of prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and on it goes. If you see books with those names, keep going. Amos was a minor prophet. That doesn't mean that what he had to say was less important. Major prophets are called major prophets because they wrote more. Minor prophets are called minor prophets because they wrote less. I hope I've given you enough time to find Amos chapter 5.

**AMOS 5:18-27** *Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light— pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?*

The day of the Lord is a way to describe how God engages people, the way that God personally responds to real-life issues, to bring justice. The prophet Amos was telling those folks, you don't want that. You're crazy if you want that. If God brings justice, it will require confronting you for the stuff that you've done. You don't want the pain of accountability and justice. This might be surprising, but this is the message that was given to religiously devout people.

*"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god— which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty.*

That wasn't very fun, was it? Can you believe that God's message to his people was, "I hate your religious practices. When you get together, I think it all stinks! I reject your offerings. And your worship music is obnoxious noise." Can you imagine that? What was going on?

**SERIES THESIS:** There's a **BACKSTORY** to the story.

We can know what the words on the page mean, but we can't comprehend the intended meaning without digging into the backstory. Let's quickly shade in some of those details.

### **BACKSTORY**

- King Jeroboam II: He was successful militarily and economically. Yet, he tolerated idolatry and injustice for the poor.

Let's be honest. He did more than tolerate idolatry and injustice; he encouraged it. Do you think it's possible that people in Israel who wanted to trust and follow God and his ways ever felt conflicted over their king? Do you think that in the privacy of their homes, as they shared good wine and hummus, that they had friendly debates about their king? He makes us strong, and he makes us rich, but what he's contributing spiritually and morally to our nation is grievous. I bet they were divided over whether he was a good king or not. That sounds like what people do.

- The surrounding nations were accused of injustice. Yet, the harshest condemnation was reserved for Israel.

This must have been a shocker. Of course, they expected God to stand opposed to their enemies. They expected God to use prophets to preach against the wrongs of the surrounding nations. They didn't expect God to send a prophet to pronounce judgment on them.

They assumed they had God's favor. These were religious people. They dutifully engaged in all the required offerings and practices. And they were materially prosperous. They were strong militarily and successful economically.

That's a common trap. For all of time, people have equated wealth and strength with having God's favor. It doesn't always work that way. In fact, many times it doesn't.

- God rejected their hypocrisy and pronounced judgment for their **unrighteousness** and **injustice**.
- God promised **restoration**.

In the end, there is good news. We will look at that. I love hope and good news as much as anyone else. But we can't jump to this **[Restoration]** without first double-clicking on this **[unrighteousness and Injustice]**.

Let's say you're scrolling on social media, and you see someone post something from Amos 5, and it's attached to some current event or political controversy. This is a very popular passage that people often quote or reference when they are agitated over a social or political issue. But

if you want to understand what it's about, what do we have to do? We should read what came before it so that we know the context.

We're going to be responsible readers and do that now.

## **AMOS 2:6-16**

Will you turn back three chapters? Amos has specific allegations, and he brings receipts.

**AMOS 2:6-16** *This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines. "Yet I destroyed the Amorites before them, though they were tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed their fruit above and their roots below. I brought you up out of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness to give you the land of the Amorites. "I also raised up prophets from among your children and Nazirites from among your youths. Is this not true, people of Israel?" declares the LORD. "But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. "Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day," declares the LORD.*

Here's a quick summary of their unrighteousness and injustice.

### **UNRIGHTEOUSNESS & INJUSTICE**

- Exploitation of the poor
- Denial of justice and legal representation for the oppressed
- Sexual immorality
- Corrupt religious leaders, institutions, and practices
- Ingratitude and forgetting what God did for them

When we look at this list, it's no wonder that God was sickened and annoyed by their religious hypocrisy. I bet some of us can relate to that feeling. Have you ever had a coworker who was nice to your face, but you knew they badmouthed you behind your back? Just looking at their smile can make your blood feel hot. You know what I'm talking about.

If you know that, then you know how to relate to this on a visceral level. Have you ever wondered...

- How is it that someone can show up to church and do all the right things publicly, and yet cheat their business partner?
- How is it that someone can show up at church and do all the right things publicly, and yet be perpetually unkind to their spouse or children?
- How is it that someone can show up to church and do all the right things publicly, and yet be indifferent to the suffering of people around them?

You probably have your own examples that you've experienced and wonder about? I may not have the full answer, but I think this is a significant part of it.

Religious hypocrisy perpetuates **INJUSTICE** by divorcing the **SPIRITUAL** from the **PHYSICAL**.

In this mindset, if I believe the right things and do enough of the right religious things, all the other things don't matter. We can illustrate it like this.

If God and me are good, what happens between you and me is irrelevant. This is the mindset that explains why prominent Christian ministers in American history, men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, could own and sell enslaved people. The spiritual was divorced from the physical.

And while it's nowhere near the same act, it's the exact same mindset that explains how followers of Jesus engage in ongoing, unrepentant, sexual sin. The spiritual is divorced from the physical. Do you remember when Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was? He said it was to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Then he said the second was equal to it. Love your neighbor as yourself. Later, the Apostle Paul wrote that all the commandments can be summed up in this way: Love your neighbor as yourself.

According to Jesus, it's impossible to divorce the spiritual from the physical. That means we're kidding ourselves if we think we can be righteous without also working for justice. Let's recap the justice passages we read last week. Notice how impossible it is to divorce ourselves from the physical realities of other people.

**PROVERBS 31:8-9** *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

**JEREMIAH 22:3** *This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.*

**PSALM 146:7-9** *He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

It's God's expectation that his people are working for the good of vulnerable people.

- We are to work for the good of those who are not represented or underrepresented.
- We are to work for the good of those who are financially poor and in need.
- We are to work for the good of those who have medical needs.
- We are to work for the good of those who are immigrants.
- We are to work for the good of those who are incarcerated and trying to re-engage after incarceration.
- We are to work for the good of those who don't have someone in their lives and families to protect them and provide for them.

With that in mind, let's read again in Amos 5, what God's desired from his people.

**AMOS 5:24** *But let **justice** roll on like a river, **righteousness** like a never-failing stream!*

God intends that the lives of his people be a marriage of justice and righteousness. Righteousness and justice are very similar concepts, but they're distinct. Tim Mackie is a scholar and fantastic Bible teacher. This is how he explains what they are.

*When you do justice, you are upholding righteousness...Righteous (tsedaqah) at it's core is a relational term meaning a standard of right relationships...it's an ethical standard that consists of people in right relationships...Justice (meshpat) is the actions you stake to display that standard. –Tim Mackie*

Think of righteousness as being who we are. Justice is what we do. The actions of justice are produced by the righteousness that defines us. It's a standard of living and relationships that come from God and is expressed through our lives. And if we take that seriously, we will find it impossible to be indifferent both to the hardships of people and the complex network of causes that contribute to and exploit vulnerable people.

Since we're having so much, let's keep it going and talk about politics.

Trusting the Bible should lead us to think **PROPHETICALLY**, not **POLITICALLY**.

This doesn't mean that we should disengage from politics. By all means, engage. I love that there are politicians in our church. I think it would be great if more of you ran for office at the local, state, and national levels. I'd love it if there were folks from our church holding prominent positions in both major parties. And yet, when it comes to matters of social good, our thinking

should not be shaped or framed by political parties, alliances, or expedience. We are to think prophetically, not politically.

What that means is that we want to evaluate matters thoughtfully, with all the facts, from the disposition of righteousness, and a commitment to do justice as defined by God. And if we do that, we will never fit neatly into a singular party. We will agree with both and must work with both. We will disagree with both and must stand in opposition to both. Whatever political party you might join, and it's not wrong to join one, there will be times that you'll have to acknowledge the just pursuits of the other party and confront the injustice in your own.

Is it safe for me to give two examples?

I think we should care about abortion. If we are going to speak up for the voiceless, we must be advocates for the lives and rights of the unborn. Yes, there are medically necessary and justified abortions. And there are far too many that are not, and we should engage. And if we are going to engage with righteousness and justice, we also must devote ourselves to the factors that lead women to consider abortion. Those factors are largely economic. We should take seriously matters of poverty, healthcare costs, and food insecurity. We should think prophetically, not politically.

Let's talk about immigration. It is right and good for a nation to manage well and secure their border. A nation owes that to its citizens and its neighboring countries. Safety, security, and law enforcement is good. Stopping bad actors who intend to do evil is righteous and just. This also comes with the responsibility of having a fair system. There are many immigrants in our country who entered legally, and for reasons beyond their control or their fault, they lost their legal status. We should be careful to do no wrong to the foreigner. We should think prophetically, not politically.

If you're thinking that this big and complex, it is. There's nothing easy about this. But it's OK for good things to be hard. It's OK for good things to take effort. I don't think I'm smart enough to figure out what to do next. But we do have a good starting point. It's good to start by slowly and deliberately meditating on these passages about righteousness and justice.

The writing and preaching of the late pastor Tim Keller have been a help for me. He said that if we want to be righteous and do justice we should focus on three things.

### **RIGHTEOUSNESS & JUSTICE**

1. Universal Dignity
2. Deliberate Care
3. Radical Generosity

We may not always be right, but we can't go wrong by aiming at pursuing universal dignity, deliberate care, radical generosity. These are things we get to do as a church. These are things

we get to do with our friends and families. What if your friend group, or your family began to look for ways to marry righteousness and justice in these three ways?

I've got a couple of passages from the book of Job that I think will help us ponder this.

**JOB 29:11-17** *Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist them. The one who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. **I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.** I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.*

In this next passage, see if you can connect with the sense of urgency he feels for justice.

**JOB 31:16-22** *"If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless— but from my youth I reared them as a father would, and from my birth I guided the widow— if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or the needy without garments, and their hearts did not bless me for warming them with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I influenced court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint."*

I want to end this with a quote from Tim Keller.

*The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves. –Tim Keller*

The book of Amos ends with hope and promise of restoration.

**AMOS 9:11-15** *"In that day "I will restore David's fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins— and will rebuild it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. "They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.*

As I read that, I immediately thought of the time that Jesus said to a religious crowd, you can destroy this temple and in three days I will build it back. In the Old Testament, there was a time when the temple was ransacked and damaged by invading armies. Those armies took the

Israelites away as exiles. This happened as a judgment because of their sin. They were cut off from their land and cut off from the temple, the place where God made his presence known.

When Jesus said you can destroy this temple and I will raise it back it, yes, he was talking about the resurrection, but it connects back to this. Your sin will lead to the destruction of God's presence, but it's not your righteousness that will bring it back. It's the grace of God alone that restores.

I want to close with this thought.

The goal of justice is not to bring anyone **DOWN**, but to lift everyone **UP**. This was accomplished by the one at the **TOP** putting himself on the **BOTTOM**.