



On your marks

We don't often look at the stories in the minor prophets with our children's group or as part of an all-age celebration. The complex historical references in these books, the violent imagery and the themes are largely too sombre and heavy. They're not easy to digest whatever our age! However, these spokespeople for God, living as they did in faithless times, dared to speak out for justice and for God's truth. In their day, these prophets weren't popular. They were voices from the edge that no one wanted to hear. Nevertheless, they tackled important issues at the heart of what faith is all about, then and today: they challenged empty religious practices, the neglect of the poor and marginalised; they reminded people of the need for honesty and integrity in public affairs, and that loving your neighbour is at the heart of loving God.

Traditionally, passages from the prophets help us to get ready for the season of Christmas during the time of Advent. Their message is one of warning and judgement but also hope, promise and love. Their words remind us that God does not turn a blind eye to the mess we have made of our lives and his world, and they recognise that this will need to be accounted for one day. Nevertheless, God's love for us is so great that he wants us to turn away from what is spoiling everything and find instead his power to help us change. This power to begin again is wrapped up in the gift of himself as Jesus at Christmas and so these prophets, in a way beyond their knowing, are also pointing to the coming king who will change everything.

Get set

This is part of a mini Advent series that offers a way to get ready for the events of Christmas by exploring the messages from three of the minor prophets in a way that is accessible for all-ages. This session focuses on Amos, the prophet of judgement and justice. See also [Hosea - judgement and love](#) and [Micah - judgement and hope](#).

Each prophet's story contains material for a session and includes: background on the prophet; a key passage to read together; some questions; an idea for a visual aid; an activity; a prayer idea; a key verse to take away; and a link to the mystery of Christmas. This material could be used for a session with your children's group or as inspiration for an all-age celebration.

Go!

Background

So often in life God chooses to speak through the unexpected. Amos was a shepherd - not a trained priest. Not surprisingly, he was unpopular with the priests in Jerusalem, especially as he challenged corrupt worship at some of Israel's shrines. Further, he was angry about the way in which money and power had made people think more about what they possessed and how they looked rather than spiritual truths.



You may relate to one of his watchwords – *It's not fair!* However, this fairness isn't just a matter of our own personal preferences but rather about the way in which we behave towards each other.

Key passage

The Lord keeps saying, 'Israel, turn back to me and you will live! Don't go to Gilgal or Bethel or even to Beersheba. Gilgal will be dragged away, and Bethel will end up as nothing.' Turn back to the Lord you descendants of Joseph, and you will live... You people are doomed! You twist the truth and trample on justice.

You people hate judges and honest witnesses; you abuse the poor and demand heavy taxes from them. You have built expensive homes, but you won't enjoy them; you have planted vineyards, but you will get no wine. I am the Lord, and I know your terrible sins. You cheat honest people and take bribes; you rob the poor of justice. Times are so evil that anyone with good sense will keep quiet.

If you really want to live, you must stop doing wrong and start doing right. I, the Lord God All-Powerful, will then be on your side, just as you claim I am. Choose good instead of evil! See that justice is done. Perhaps I, the Lord All-Powerful, will be kind to what's left of your people.

I, the Lord, hate and despise your religious celebrations and your times of worship. I won't accept your offerings or animal sacrifices – not even your very best. No more of your noisy songs! I won't listen when you play your harps. But let justice and fairness flow like a river that never runs dry.
Amos 5: 4-7; 10-15; 21-24 (CEV)

Questions

- Even though the people had been travelling to holy places (Gilgal, Bethel and Beersheba), what had they been doing wrong?
- In what ways had the people been unfair?
- What things had been more important to them than seeking God?
- How can they put things right?
- What injustice is there in the world today?
- How can we change things?

Visual aid

The Lord uses a measuring line as his visual aid to show how crooked the people have become (Amos 7:7-9). Make your own 'plumb line' with some string and a heavy weight, and use it to check how straight various items are around you.

Activity idea

Put together a bowl of fresh fruit while asking people what their favourite fruits are. Now mix in some fruit that has begun to go off – you might have to prepare one or two that are rotten on the inside by injecting them with some food dye beforehand. This is how the people are described in



Amos 8:1-2. Injustice made them rotten on the inside. What sort of things spoil us as people?

Prayer idea

Talk about the purpose of a sieve - this imagery is used in Amos 9:9 - then illustrate its purpose by sieving a mixture of pepper corns and sugar. God wants to clean us of all that is unfair by separating the good from the bad. For each pepper corn left in the sieve, name some of the bad things you want God to help you put away. For the sugar below, name the good things that you want help to start doing.

Key verse

Choose good instead of evil! See that justice is done...

Amos 5:15

The Christmas link

Because the world was in a mess - full of injustice and lies - God sent Jesus to take away all that is bad in us and help us to overcome the evil in the world with good. The angel said this to Joseph about the baby to be born:

Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21