

Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets

Amos: The Radical Justice of God

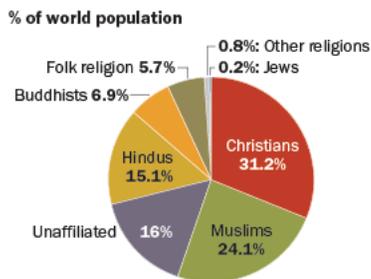
Message 3: What God Thinks of Religion

God and Religion:

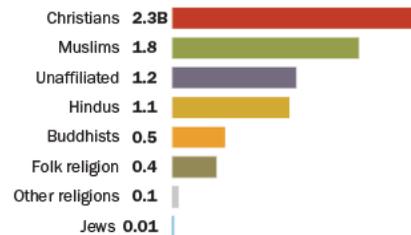
People _____ religion!

_____ % of the people in the world are religious.

Christians are the largest religious group in 2015



Number of people in 2015, in billions



Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections.
See Methodology for details.
"The Changing Global Religious Landscape"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Myths:

_____ religion is preferable to _____ religion.

God is basically _____ with _____ religions.

God _____ religion!

Amos 5:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Why? And what does that mean for us today?

'Bethel'

Amos 4:1-5 (ESV)

¹“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring, that we may drink!’ ²The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. ³And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon,” declares the LORD. ⁴“Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; ⁵offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel!” declares the Lord GOD.

A little history on Bethel ...

Genesis 28:10-19 (ESV)

¹⁰Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹²And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

¹³And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” ¹⁷And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” ¹⁸So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

1 Kings 12:26-33 (ESV)

²⁶And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. ²⁷If 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.” ²⁸So 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.” ²⁹And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. ³¹He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. ³²And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices

on the altar. So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. ³³ He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he had devised from his own heart. And he instituted a feast for the people of Israel and went up to the altar to make offerings.

The message of 'Bethel'?

God says, "I am _____."

'Gilgal'

Amos 5:1-5 (ESV)

¹ Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel: ² "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel; forsaken on her land, with none to raise her up." ³ For thus says the Lord GOD: "The city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel." 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."

A little history on Gilgal ...

Joshua 4:1-9 (ESV)

¹ When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, ³ and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'" ⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. ⁵ And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, ⁶ that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' ⁷ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." ⁸ And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. ⁹ And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.

Joshua 5:1-12 (ESV)

¹ As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. ² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time."

³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. ⁴ And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵ Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed.

⁹ And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you."

And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. ¹⁰ While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

The message of 'Gilgal'?

God says, "I am _____."

'Beersheba'

A little history on Beersheba ...

Genesis 21:22 (ESV)

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to **Abraham**, "God is with you in all that you do."

Genesis 26:23-25 (ESV)

²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD and pitched his tent there. And there **Isaac's** servants dug a well.

Genesis 46:1-4 (ESV)

¹ So **Israel** took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "**Jacob**, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³ Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

The message of 'Beersheba'?

God says, "I will _____."

Their sins:

Amos 5:7 (ESV)

⁷ O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!

Amos 5:10-13 (ESV)

¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. ¹¹ Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. ¹³ Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time.

Disregard for the _____

Oppression of the _____

_____ in the face of all sorts of evil

His judgements:

Amos 4:6-13 (ESV)

⁶ "I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places, yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD.

⁷ "I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest; I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city; one field would have rain, and the field on which it did not rain would wither; ⁸ so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be satisfied; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD.

⁹ "I struck you with blight and mildew; your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD.

¹⁰ “I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, and carried away your horses, and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD.

¹¹ “I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD.

¹² “Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!” ¹³ For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth— the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!

Their **response**:

“yet you would not return to me ...”

Timeless Lessons:

Active ‘religion’ can co-exist with widespread _____. _____ and ‘religion’ can exist quite peacefully alongside each other.

That makes a mockery of God and His Word.

In their ‘worship’, there was no sense of _____ on the part of the worshipper. They brought their “thank offerings” and their “freewill offerings” (and bragged about them).

What offering was missing?

What does that say to us?

They were ‘religious’, but they didn’t really _____.

They were into religion because it brought the _____, made them feel _____, and/or because it gave a convenient _____ for how they really lived.

‘Religion’ that is empty and focused only on _____ and _____ and not on _____ and His _____ is worthless (or worse.)

Next week: Seek Me – and Live