**God: Our Advocate
Opening**

Start the class off by asking everyone to state one sentence on how you are doing RIGHT NOW. This is NOT about what you did this week, but instead, answers the questions; “how’s your soul right now?” Ask youth to start with their name…

Tip: If the class is large, break up into smaller groups.

**Introduction to lesson/series**

We are beginning a study of Amos. Amos is a prophetic book in the Old Testament, and many scholars believe it to be the very first. It marks the beginning of a unique tradition in the history of religion: prophecies of the approaching end of the existence of God’s people based upon God’s judgment of them for failing to live according to the divine standards. The book is known for the power of its language and the passion of its concern for the oppressed.

**Scripture**

* **Amos 1:1-2:16, Superscription (Title) and Initial Oracle & Oracle Against the Nations** [we will only study certain parts, you don’t have to read the entire passage]

**Questions**

1. **Read 1:1. How does Amos identify himself, or who is he? What time period does this prophetic book take place in?**
	* He identifies himself as one of the shepherds of Tekoa, in Judah. The time period is “two years before the earthquakes, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam…was king of Israel.” It is thought that Amos wrote this during a time of relative prosperity, not during a time of strife.
2. **Recall from our study of Ezekiel our discussion of prophecy. Can anyone explain what prophecy is?**
	* Most people would define prophecy as a “prediction about something that is going to happen in the future.” The prophet sees a vision of the future and then comes back and waits for it to happen in real life. But this is not how prophecy works AT ALL! A prophecy is intended to change the way people see things—it is supposed to change our behavior in light of the prophecy.
3. **Read 1:2. What kind of God (characteristics) does Amos present to the reader? What tone does this set for the book? What themes does it introduce?**
	* The God presented is one that has come to judge the earth, waging holy war against the enemies of justice and compassion. Think lion, not lamb. The tone seems to be one of warning (of what is to come), almost ominous. Examples of themes (answers will vary) might be the overwhelming power of God and the mourning of the earth.
4. **Activity:** **Split the class in seven groups and assign each a passage (listed below). In vs. 1:3-2:5, we find the Oracles Against the Seven Nations. Have them read the oracles and discuss the questions below (you may want to write them on the board). If time allows, come back together and have them present their findings (see question 5).**
	* + Against Damascus (Syria/Aram) - 1:3-5
		+ Against Gaza (Philistia) - 1:6-8
		+ Against Tyre (Phoenicia) - 1:9-10
		+ Against Edom - 1:11-12
		+ Against Ammon - 1:13-15
		+ Against Moab - 2:1-3
		+ Against Judah - 2:4-5
		+ Against Israel - 2:6-16
			- **Discussion Questions:**
			- What sins does this nation commit?
			- What will God do to the nation because of these sins?
			- We often use metaphors to describe what God is like, like a father or mother. We discussed that God is presented as a warrior or advocate. Do you think this image of God is positive or negative? Why or why not?
			- What are human beings like?
5. **How does this image of God sit with you? Does it make you uncomfortable, scared? Is it a typical image you think of when you think of the “God of the Old Testament”?**
	* This is a book about Yahweh, and about one particular aspect of the character of God. It is an aspect of God that people sometimes overemphasize, caricaturing “the God of the Old Testament” as a wrathful judge in contrast to the merciful “God of the New Testament.” But this is only one aspect of the personality of God, as Amos is part of an entire canon that conveys to us the person of God. This image of God can also be thought of as comforting. When human beings are selfish, when they mistreat and take advantage of the poor, it might be comforting to imagine a God who will not stand for such behavior—that when we are suffering, God will make it right.
	* **Ask yourself: when you witness an act of injustice, do you not desire a God who will make it right?**

**Wrap-up**

It is important to remember that all the books in the Bible are written from a certain cultural and historical setting. Amos is influenced by the world he inhabits, and that shapes his view of God. It is also important to remember that there are MANY characteristics of God, and this is just one of them! We must always remember that God is *transcendent*, and almost indescribable. We cannot put God in a box or nail God down, because God is beyond our understanding. Of course, not all images of God are useful, and we should often reflect on how we speak of God and whether it is damaging to others. From the image of God Amos gives us (whether we like or dislike it) we can trust that God will be our advocate and call us to make things right when we do not love others rightly.

**Closing**The Lord is my strength and my defense and has become my salvation.
The Lord is my God, and I will praise the Lord’s holy name.

Who among the gods is like you, Lord?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

We trust in you, Oh God, to be our advocate.
That in your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.

Amen.