

Amos 1-2 • The Reason for God's Judgment

Introduction

[Note to Small Group Leaders: This study is much longer than usual.]

Chronologically, Amos is giving the first of what will be a number of prominent lists of pronouncements against specific nations on earth which will come through God's Prophets. The pattern which takes place here is important to understand as we later compare and contrast it with the other lists. But as always, the message is not just limited to those who are assumed to be living apart from God's people, but has multiple and deeper meanings for those who are supposed to be in a right relationship with Him. There are also practical lessons to be learned as to what point the situation becomes unrecoverable and therefore the judgment of God inevitable.

¹The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ²He said,

“The LORD roars from Zion
And from Jerusalem He utters His
voice;
And the shepherds' pasture grounds
mourn,
And the summit of Carmel dries up.”

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What is the meaning of the name “Amos”?

A: “Burden bearer”. Prophecy is oftentimes called an “oracle” in English translations, but the Hebrew can also be translated “burden”. A true prophet of God bears the burden of His Word.

Q: Why might it be particularly appropriate that Amos comes from Tekoa?

A: “Tekoa” means “trumpet blast”. In Old Testament times, this was the literal method a warning was sounded and is often a metaphor in Scripture for sounding the alarm where God's Word is concerned. Tekoa was fortified and situated on a high hill about ten miles south of Jerusalem and was intended to warn Jerusalem of approaching danger. One can actually see the Mt. of Olives from the top of Tekoa.

Q: Why is it important where Amos was from and to whom his message from God was directed?

A: This message is coming from a prophet who resides in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but is being sent to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Q: How did the Word of God come to Amos?

A: Although it states, “The words of Amos” (v.1), it was originally given “in visions”.

Observation: The earthquake mentioned in v.1 must have been a seminal historical event everyone was familiar with, much like Americans only having to mention “the San Francisco earthquake” for everyone to instantly remember the one which took place more than a hundred years ago. The earthquake Amos refers to is also mentioned by Zechariah. (Zech. 14:5)

Q: What is immediately compelling about the opening statement, “The LORD roars from Zion”?

A: The Northern Kingdom of Israel to whom Amos is speaking has centered their counterfeit worship in Dan and Bethel and purposely separated from the true worship in Jerusalem. This would reaffirm the authority of Jerusalem at the same time condemning the counterfeits.

Q: What is probably the greater spiritual meaning of “the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn and the summit of Carmel dries up”?

A: Israel's kings were supposed to be spiritual shepherds to the people. It describes a spiritual drought and resulting famine reflected in the physical.

Application: It begins with God sounding a warning through an **authentic** messenger.

³Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Damascus
and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they threshed Gilead with
implements of sharp iron.
⁴So I will send fire upon the house of
Hazeal
And it will consume the citadels of
Ben-hadad.
⁵I will also break the gate bar of
Damascus,
And cut off the inhabitant from the
valley of Aven,
And him who holds the scepter, from
Beth-eden;
So the people of Aram will go exiled to
Kir,”
Says the LORD.

[Read v.3-5]

Q: In the opening statements for God’s pronouncement on each nation in this chapter, He states, “For three transgressions of _____ and for four”. What thought is being conveyed by this statement?

A: It is a way of describing in the original language of the time sin multiplied upon sin, something engaged in so repeatedly that there is no pardon coming for what has been done.

Q: What is the biblical meaning of “transgression”? How is it different from, say, “sin”?

A: “*Transgression*” describes sin which is not just an act of rebellion against God’s Word, but causes a breach in a relationship. All of the transgressions listed in these chapters have resulted in both a breach between people-to-people relationships as well as people-to-God.

Q: How is Aram related to Israel?

A: This is where Abraham originally came from. Deuteronomy 26:5 specifically stipulates a direct lineage of Israel as Arameans.

Q: What is the object of this pronouncement?

A: Damascus is the capital of Syria. The names and places mentioned in these verses all have to do with Syria.

Q: What is the charge against them?

A: “*Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron*”. (v.1) King Hazeal oppressed and crushed the people to such a harsh degree that it is being likened to grain on a threshing floor being struck with iron teeth weighted down with stones. It describes how harshly the people were separated from the land. (2 Ki. 10:32-33)

Q: What were “the citadels of Ben-hadad”?

A: This refers to the fact that the kings descended from Hazeal were all self-deified as being a god called “hadad”. “*Ben*” literally means “son”, so a very strong spiritual correlation is being made here so that rather than being sons of God, they are “sons of hadad”.

Q: What do “the gate bar of Damascus” and “the valley of Aven” represent?

A: The gate bar represents the source of the people’s trust in a security of their own making as well as in “gods of the valley” which they proclaimed were stronger than the God of Israel. (1 Ki. 20:23) It addresses personal and spiritual false hope and trust.

Q: How is this ultimately reflected in Beth-eden?

A: This literally translates as “the House of Eden”. They had built what amounted to a false paradise.

Q: How was the judgment that they “will go exiled to Kir” carried out?

A: Kir is a region in modern-day Armenia by the river Cyrus which empties into the Caspian Sea. When Ahaz applied for help from Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, the Assyrian king took Damascus, slew King Rezin, and carried away its people captive to Kir. (2 Ki. 16:9) Aram ceased to exist around 732 B.C. and Damascus was absorbed by the Assyrian empire.

Application: Even though they obviously violated God's **Law** where the worship of false gods is concerned, the primary charge God brings against them is their **treatment** of **others**.

⁶Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Gaza and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they deported an entire
population
To deliver it up to Edom.
⁷So I will send fire upon the wall of
Gaza
And it will consume her citadels.
⁸I will also cut off the inhabitant from
Ashdod,
And him who holds the scepter, from
Ashkelon;
I will even unleash My power upon
Ekron,
And the remnant of the Philistines will
perish,”
Says the Lord GOD.

[Read v.6-8]

Q: How is Gaza related to Israel?

A: They are not. The Philistines are a completely unrelated people group who migrated from other areas of the Mediterranean to the coast of Canaan.

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: The whole land of the Philistines, designated as “Gaza”, also implied by naming their remaining main capitals of power and false worship: Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron.

Q: What is the charge against them?

A: They do not enslave or intermingle with Israel, but displace them wholesale from the land by selling them into slavery to Edom, located on the opposite side of Israel away from the Philistines.

Q: How was the judgment carried out?

A: Each city mentioned came under successive attack beginning with Uzziah in the time of Amos and continuing with Hezekiah. Ultimately they suffered likewise at the hands of the Egyptians, Persians, Alexander and the Maccabees.

Q: Did the remnant literally perish?

A: By Christ’s time, they were extinct as a people and those cities still in use were wholly populated by new people groups, largely Hellenistic. What are today referred to by some as “Palestinians”—a reference to Philistia—in reality are of no relation to them whatsoever.

Application: Even though they obviously never **worshiped** anything except their false gods, the primary charge God brings against them is their **treatment** of **others**.

⁹Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Tyre and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they delivered up an entire
population to Edom
And did not remember the covenant of
brotherhood.
¹⁰So I will send fire upon the wall of
Tyre
And it will consume her citadels.”

[Read v.9-10]

Q: How is Tyre related to Israel?

A: They are not, but very often there have been favorable and friendly relations between them.

Q: What is both similar and different about the charge against them as opposed to that just brought against the Philistines?

A: Both are charged with cutting Israelites off from the land by giving them over into slavery to the Edomites—essentially sending them to another nation, but to Tyre is added, “*And did not remember the covenant of brotherhood*”. This most likely refers to the covenant between Hiram as king of Tyre and David as king of Israel which was renewed by Solomon. Whereas there was never any expectation of goodwill or an alliance with the Philistines, Tyre actually gave its word to uphold such a relationship.

Q: How was the judgment carried out?

A: Tyre fell first to the Assyrians, then to Nebuchadnezzar, and finally was wiped out permanently by Alexander. What has been rebuilt is near

the original city, but the original inhabitants have long been extinct and new people groups moved into the area.

Application: The primary charge God brings against them is their treatment of others and the personal covenant relationship they had entered into with others.

¹¹Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Edom and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because he pursued his brother with
the sword,
While he stifled his compassion;
His anger also tore continually,
And he maintained his fury forever.
¹²So I will send fire upon Teman
And it will consume the citadels of
Bozrah.”

[Read v.11-12]

Q: How is Edom related to Israel?

A: These are the descendants of Esau, Jacob's "brother" (v.11), both of whom are descended from Abraham.

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: Teman and Bozrah were Edom's main centers of power and false worship. (2 Chr. 25:14)

Q: What is the charge against them?

A: The charge here is worded on a much more personal level than any of the prior examples. Edom's history was to always quarrel with Israel and attack them when they were most vulnerable. (Num. 20:21; 2 Chr. 28:17; 2 Ki. 16:5; Ps. 137:7-8) Thus this blood relative's anger remained perpetually against Israel.

Q: How was the judgment carried out?

A: Edom was conquered by the Babylonians and eventually their original lands were taken over by the Nabateans. Under John Hyrcanus, the Maccabees conquered them and forced them to rejoin Israel. By Roman times they were in the region known as Idumea from whom the Herods were descended. After Rome's destruction of Israel in 70 AD, the Edomites seem to have ceased as a people as well.

Application: Even though they obviously violated God's Law where the worship of false gods is concerned, the primary charge God brings against them is their treatment of their blood relatives.

¹³Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of the sons of
Ammon and for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they ripped open the pregnant
women of Gilead
In order to enlarge their borders.
¹⁴So I will kindle a fire on the wall of
Rabbah
And it will consume her citadels
Amid war cries on the day of battle,
And a storm on the day of tempest.
¹⁵Their king will go into exile,
He and his princes together,” says the
LORD.

[Read v.13-15]

Q: How is Ammon related to Israel?

A: These were descendants of Lot, so like Edom, they were relatives with the same heritage who should have behaved as such.

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: Rabbah was their principal royal city. (2 Sam. 12:26)

Q: What is the charge against them?

A: In league with King Hazael, this is exactly what they did (2 Ki. 8:12), trying to leave Israel without an heir so that they could seize Israel's inheritance for themselves. (Jer. 49:1) They were not merely murderers, but sought to place themselves in Israel's position by creating the vacancy themselves.

Q: How was the judgment carried out?

A: In the wake of Judah's captivity into Babylon, the last king of Ammon (Baalis) was an accessory to the murder of Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had set over the remnant of Jews left in the land. (Jer. 40:14). This provoked an invasion, the utter destruction of Ammon, and the captivity of the king and all his people by Nebuchadnezzar.

Q: What is different about this judgment from those previous?

A: It does not call for an unrecoverable destruction, but exile, which implies they may return. Their original lands were eventually taken over by the Nabateans and they were conquered and forced to rejoin Israel under John Hyrcanus of the Maccabees. By Roman times they were living in the region known as Idumea.

Application: The primary charge God brings against them is their treatment of others.

[Read v.2:1-3]

¹Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Moab and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because he burned the bones of the
king of Edom to lime.
²So I will send fire upon Moab
And it will consume the citadels of
Kerioth;
And Moab will die amid tumult,
With war cries and the sound of a
trumpet.
³I will also cut off the judge from her
midst
And slay all her princes with him,”
says the LORD.

Q: How is Moab related to Israel?

A: These were descendants of Lot, so like Edom, they were relatives with the same heritage who should have behaved as such.

Q: What is the charge against them? How is this different from all the rest?

A: Rather than being charged with mistreatment of their blood relatives Israel, they are charged with mistreatment of their blood relatives Edom.

Q: To what event is this referring to, this burning “the bones of the king of Edom to lime”?

A: We have no biblical reference to it, so it is most likely a well-known historical event not recorded in Scripture, but widely known nonetheless.

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: The implication of the complete removal of both princes (“slay her princes”) and judges (“cut off the judge from her midst”) would indicate a dual judgment against both the government and the religious system, both of whom encouraged worship of false gods and false relationships.

Q: How was the judgment carried out?

A: Moab would be eradicated by two major invasions, the first at the hands of the Assyrians and then, along with Ammon, at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Application: The primary charge God brings against them is their treatment of others.

Summary

What is the obvious purpose of an application for each of the above nations which is virtually identical? To reinforce the greater point that although this is the first pronouncement against nations chronologically, God's primary charge has almost nothing to do with their treatment of Him but everything to do with their treatment of others. It is an Old Testament indication of what is plainly articulated in the New Testament in the New Covenant that one cannot actually love God if they do not love others.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,

even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
— John 13:34

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
— Romans 13:8-10

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
— 1 John 2:3-11

⁴Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Judah and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they rejected the law of the
LORD
And have not kept His statutes;
Their lies also have led them astray,
Those after which their fathers walked.
⁵So I will send fire upon Judah
And it will consume the citadels of
Jerusalem.”

[Read v.4-5]

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: The Southern Kingdom of Judah from whom the people hearing Joel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel have separated.

Q: What is the charge against them?

A: They have not just “rejected the law of the LORD” and “not kept His statutes”, they went even further by substituting God’s Word with “their lies”.

Q: In v.4, what might indicate the reason that this is completely inexcusable?

A: They should have learned the lessons of the unfaithful who came before them, but still embraced the lies “after which their fathers walked”.

Q: How was the judgment fulfilled?

A: Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would literally carry this out.

Q: Why do you suppose that God does not list specific sinful actions on the part of Judah as He has previous done with the nations listed?

A: They had the Law, and to break even one point of the Law is to break the whole Law.

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*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point,
he has become guilty of all.
— James 2:10*

Application: The primary charge God brings against them is not just forsaking God's **Word**, but making the worst possible **substitution** in its place.

⁶Thus says the LORD,
“For three transgressions of Israel and
for four
I will not revoke its punishment,
Because they sell the righteous for
money
And the needy for a pair of sandals.
⁷These who pant after the very dust of
the earth on the head of the helpless
Also turn aside the way of the humble;
And a man and his father resort to the
same girl
In order to profane My holy name.
⁸On garments taken as pledges they
stretch out beside every altar,
And in the house of their God they
drink the wine of those who have
been fined.

[Read v.6-8]

Q: What might be going through people's minds from the Northern Kingdom of Israel up to this point?

A: They might be thinking that God is pronouncing judgment on all their enemies, making a distinction between them.

Q: Who is the object of this pronouncement?

A: The Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Q: What do the charges in v.6-7 all have in common?

A: They are an even more detailed and egregious listing of sins committed against others.

1. “...**they sell the righteous for money**...” They are guilty of a serious breach in their relationship with those who still obey God's Word, rooted in the desire for financial gain.
2. “...**they sell...the needy for a pair of sandals**”. They are guilty of a serious breach in their relationship with the financially poor for personal financial gain, even if it's a trivial profit.
3. “...**pant after...the helpless**...” They are guilty of a serious breach in their relationship with the helpless due to the grip which greed has upon them and the lengths they will go to enrich themselves at the expense of others.
4. “...**turn aside the way of the humble**...” They are guilty of a serious breach in their relationship with others by allowing their pride to rule themselves.
5. “...**a man and his father resort to the same girl**...” They are guilty of a serious breach in sexual relationships which reflects how deeply corrupted they have become spiritually.

Q: What is especially egregious about this last charge and its result?

A: “*In order to profane My holy name*”. (v.7) It is behavior going beyond that of merely engaging a prostitute or committing adultery. It results in God's name being blasphemed because non-Jews would see it as something their religion taught and encouraged.

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

— 1 Corinthians 5:1

Q: What is the common denominator of the charges in v.8?

A: They are the mistreatment of others in the course of carrying out their service to God, when one would have expected their best, if only artificial, behavior. Their continued breach of relationships with others produced a breach in their relationship with God.

1. “...**garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar**...” What was taken as a pledge from a poor person was supposed to be restored before the sun set. (Ex. 22:26) Since

their altars were mainly for their many false gods, on these garments they slept in the presence of the idols; they literally slept with their false gods.

2. "...**drink the wine of those who have been fined.**" In other words, having falsely found the innocent guilty and extracted a fine, they used their ill-gotten gains to become drunk instead of heeding God's Word to be sober when coming before Him or serving in His name.

Application: God's people are held more greatly accountable for their **treatment** of **others** because they had direct knowledge of God's **requirements**. They are more **guilty** than everyone else around them.

Summary

Where God's people are concerned, the **treatment** of **others** can never be separated from their **treatment** of **Him** because of their having received His **Word** and having entered into a **covenant** relationship with Him.

[Read v.9-16]

⁹"Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them,
Though his height was like the height of cedars
And he was strong as the oaks;
I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below.
¹⁰It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt,
And I led you in the wilderness forty years
That you might take possession of the land of the Amorite.
¹¹Then I raised up some of your sons to be prophets
And some of your young men to be Nazirites.
Is this not so, O sons of Israel?"
declares the Lord.
¹²"But you made the Nazirites drink wine,
And you commanded the prophets saying, 'You shall not prophesy!'
¹³Behold, I am weighted down beneath you
As a wagon is weighted down when filled with sheaves.
¹⁴Flight will perish from the swift,
And the stalwart will not strengthen his power,
Nor the mighty man save his life.
¹⁵He who grasps the bow will not stand his ground,
The swift of foot will not escape,
Nor will he who rides the horse save his life.
¹⁶Even the bravest among the warriors

Q: How would you characterize God's message in v.9-10?

A: He is reminding them of things He has accomplished on their behalf in the past.

1. "...**I destroyed the Amorite...**" This refers to His giving them the Promised Land.
2. "...**I brought you up from the land of Egypt...**" This refers to rescuing them from the old life of slavery.
3. "...**I led you in the wilderness forty years...**" This refers to the process of being refined from a people rejecting His Word to accepting it.

Point: God oversaw every part necessary for the fulfillment of His promises to Israel.

Q: How would you characterize God's message in v.11?

A: He is reminding them of things He has accomplished on their behalf in the present.

1. "...**I raised up some of your sons to be prophets...**" God has given them faithful messengers of His Word.
2. "...**I raised up...some of your young men to be Nazirites**". God has given them faithful examples of what it means to put His Word into practice.

Point: God provides help to do the one thing He requires of His people, to keep His Word.

Q: How would you characterize the response of God's people in v.12?

A: They corrupted the examples God sent to them ("**made the Nazirites drink wine**") and silenced His messengers ("**You shall not prophesy!**"). It reveals how deep is the breach of their relationship with God in their rejection and treatment of those who exemplified the closest relationship with Him.

will flee naked in that day," declares the LORD.

Q: How would you characterize God's message in v.13-16?

A: He is describing the ultimate consequences to come in the future for their past and present behavior. "I am weighted down...as a wagon...filled with sheaves". It is the picture of a cart overloaded with sin to the breaking point to describe the direness of the spiritual situation.

Q: What is the greater point of the predicted failure of "the swift", "the stalwart", and "the mighty" in v.14?

A: No one's personal strength or attributes will allow them to escape what is coming.

Q: What do the characteristics in v.15-16 describe? What is the deeper message?

A: They are all characteristics of soldiers trained for war. Even the strongest and most prepared for adversity will not overcome. "Even the bravest among the warriors will flee".

Application: There is a point when a **breach** in one's relationship with God becomes so great that the only thing left is **judgment**. God proves a **breach** with Him by our breach with **others**.

God's summary for His people:

1. (v.9-10) God reminds them of what He accomplished on their behalf in the **past** to fulfill His **Word**.
2. (v.11) God reminds them of what He provides on their behalf in the **present** to fulfill His **Word**.
3. (v.13-16) God describes the ultimate **future** consequences for a lifestyle of **sin**.

Epilogue

Chronologically, this is the first recorded list of judgments we are given for the nations. Ironically, at the end of this present age as the Millennial Reign of Christ is about to commence, the nations will experience a last judgment.

*"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;
— Matthew 25:31-32*

And what is the criteria by which Christ determines whether someone is a sheep or a goat?

*'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'
— Matthew 25:35-36*

Once again, as always, it will be determined by their treatment of others.