

Everyone Is Equal Before God Amos 1:3-2:6

Slide 1

How do you think that the Old Testament prophets delivered their messages from God to the people?

Did they just sense that God wanted them to say something, so they stood up in the market and started speaking?

Or was it a sort of a “stream of consciousness” extemporaneous speaking? I don’t think so. God’s Spirit undoubtedly impressed upon the prophets some truth that He wanted them to communicate.

The prophets must have studied the Scriptures that they had access to and thought long and hard about how to craft what they needed to communicate to the people.

We see this in the passage we’re going to study today from the Prophet Amos; the first of the writing prophets.

Remember, he came from the southern kingdom of Judah, but his ministry was primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel.

At this time, both Judah and Israel were enjoying a time of tremendous prosperity, even though there were tension between the two kingdoms.

In today’s lesson, we’re going to examine the prophecy of Amos in which he announced God’s judgment on the surrounding nations as well as the kingdoms of both, Israel and Judah.

If you examine this prophecy, which was delivered in the northern kingdom’s city of Bethel, you’ll discover a carefully prepared outline with repetitive patterns that mark one nation from the other.

There are opening and closing statements, indictments for sin, and punishments promised. It was a wonderful, well-crafted, and powerful message. Let's examine what Amos prophesied, turn to Amos, chapter 1.

Slide 2

In chapter 1, and the first part of chapter 2, Amos shows us that God's judgment falls on all who sin against Him.

As seen in these verses, Amos pronounced God's judgment not only on the six nations surrounding Judah and Israel, but Judah and Israel themselves.

One commentator said, *"If you looked at this on a map of that time, you'd see how Amos was winding a noose around the neck of Israel, because of the arrangement of the nations upon whom judgment was pronounced."*

Regarding each judgment, one also sees a pattern. The judgment against each nation, and also on God's people, Judah and Israel, begins with the statement, *"This is what the LORD says."*

Moreover, the judgment against those nations—though not every nation—concludes with *"says the Lord," "says the Sovereign LORD,"* or *"declares the Lord."*

Furthermore, notice the opening phrase of each judgment: *"For three sins of [the nation], even for four..."*

This poetic expression introduced the judgment upon all the nations, and upon Israel and Judah as well.

It was a way of expressing totality: The number 'three' expresses the plural in Hebrew, and by raising it to 'four' the idea of multiplicity is conveyed.

These words are very significant because Amos was saying that God's no longer going to show mercy but instead was going to pour out His wrath in judgment upon the people.

Now, God is a God of mercy, but people often mistake His slowness to judge as approval of their sin. This isn't the case. God's mercy will be replaced with judgment upon those who don't repent.

Each judgment included an indictment of the sin of the nation, as well as a corresponding sentence.

Slide 3

Amos 1:3-5, "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not relent. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire on the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir," says the Lord."

Even though God's judgment was pronounced on Damascus, that judgement was not just for that city alone.

Since Damascus was the capital of Syria, this was a way of telling the people that the whole nation of Syria was under judgement.

Think about it. Sometimes when we speak of our capitol, Washington, we're referring to the entire United States and not just to the city.

This use of a city to represent a nation is also used for Gaza to represent Philistia, and Tyre to represent Phoenicia.

Now, the sin of Syria was that they threshed the Israelite city of Gilead.

God said in verse 3b, “*she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth.*” The people of Damascus brutally tortured the people of Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.

The Syrians drug instruments of torture over their Israelite prisoners. But to fully understand what Amos was describing, let me tell you what a threshing sledge was. (Open **Slide 4**)

A threshing sledge was made of wood about 7 feet long by 3 feet wide with sharp stones placed in the bottom.

The sledge was pulled was pulled by oxen or another animal around and around over stalks of wheat or barley to cut the stalks into small pieces. It was like a grater we use today.

Because of their brutality against God’s people, the sentence against Syria was that they were to be burned with fire and sent into exile. Amos 1:4-5, “*I will send fire on the house of Hazael,*” and “*The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir.*”

Slide 5

Amos 1:6-8, “*For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not relent. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, I will send fire on the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines are dead,*” says the Sovereign Lord.”

This was God’s judgment on Philistia because they sold His people into slavery. Verse 6b, “*she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom.*”

Prisoners of war usually became slaves. But Philistia’s sin wasn’t just that they sold women and children into slavery as well, the Philistines wanted to get rid of all God’s people.

Therefore, God's judgement in verses 7a and 8b was severe. He said, *"I will send fire on the walls of Gaza..., till the last of the Philistines are dead."* Once again, as it is so often, God used fire as His method of punishment.

The sentence against Philistia was that the fire, which God would send, would devour the palaces of Gaza, and that the inhabitants of the other cities of the Philistines: Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron.

God was going to make a thorough work of them just like they tried to make of God's people when they carried everyone away in captivity. God wanted them to know that even the remnant of them would perish.

God will make an end of those who try to make a full end of his church and people.

Slide 6

Amos 1:9-10, *"For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not relent. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire on the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses."*

Notice God's judgment on Phoenicia. Tyre was a city known for its wealth and strength. It was almost a kingdom unto itself. The sin of Phoenicia was that they betrayed God's people and broke their treaty with them.

Verse 9b, *"she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood."*

The Phoenicians would sell any Israelites that fled to them for shelter to the Edomites. They didn't care what hardships they put upon them, they just wanted to increase their monetary position.

The covenant spoken of here is not God's covenant with His people but was the treaty made between Solomon and Hiram, King of Tyre. The Phoenicians violated that treaty and betrayed God's people.

The sentence against Phoenicia was that their city would be burned. God said in verse 10, *"I will send fire on the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses."* Once again, God used fire in His punishment of this nation.

This prophecy was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar took it after a thirteen-year siege.

Slide 7

Amos 1:11-12, "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not relent. Because he pursued his brother with a sword and slaughtered the women of the land, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire on Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah."

Now, notice God's judgment on Edom. Edom's particular sin was the unmerciful, unwearied pursuit of the God's people.

This bad blood between the two goes back to Numbers 20, when Edom took up arms to oppose the Israelite's passage *through their border*.

Verse 11b, *"he pursued his brother with a sword."* The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, which is why they're referred to as "brother." The Edomites used every opportunity to express their wrath and enmity against Israel.

They didn't have the strength, nor the courage to face them on the field of battle, but, whenever any other enemy had put Judah or Israel to flight, the Edomites would fall upon the rear, kill those that were half dead, casting off all pity.

The sentence against Edom was that their cities would be burned. Again, God used fire to punish, as he said in verse 12, *“I will send fire on Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.”*

Slide 8

Amos 1:13-15, *“For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not relent. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders, I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day. Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together,” says the Lord.”*

Notice Ammon’s sin; verse 13b, *“he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders.”*

This act of cruelty wasn’t done in a brutish rage, but with a devilish design to eradicate the race of Israel by killing not only all that were born, but all that were to be born.

This was worse than the cruelty inflicted upon the Israelites by the Egyptians.

Ammon wanted to enlarge their borders by keeping the land they had stolen from the Israelites. Jeremiah tells us that the Ammonites inherited, or occupied Gad, Gilead, under pretense that Gad had no sons or heirs.

Verses 14a and 15a, *“I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah..., Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together.”*

Some commentators believe the phrase, *“Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together”* was talking about the god of the Ammonites, whom they called Moloch, meaning a king. *His officials*, would be his priests that attended him.

They would all go into captivity. Their god, or idol, would no longer protecting them, but it would go into captivity with them.

Again, the sentence against Ammon was that their city would be burned, and their leadership banished into exile.

Slide 9

Amos 2:1-3, "For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not relent. Because he burned to ashes the bones of Edom's king, I will send fire on Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him, says the Lord."

Next is God's judgment on Moab. 2 Kings tells us that there was war between the Edomites and the Moabites, in which the king of Moab, in distress and rage, offered his own son for a burnt offering, to appease his deity.

Legend says that afterwards the king of Moab, or some of his successors, in revenge upon the Edomites for bringing him to that extremity, seized the king of Edom and burnt him to ashes.

Then they took the bones and ground them to powder and used them for white-washing of the walls and ceilings of his palace, so that he might please himself with the sight of that monument of his revenge.

The actual sin of Moab was that they desecrated graves, showing no respect for the dead. Not content to leave the dead king in his grave, the Moabites got his bones and burned them to desecrate his memory.

To abuse the dead bodies of kings, whose persons and names ought to be respected, is an affront to majesty.

The sentence against Moab was that they would be burned, and their leadership would be killed. People sometimes suffer for the sin of their princes, yet here the princes themselves would not escape judgement.

God said in verses 2a and 3a, *"I will send fire on Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth,"* and... *"I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him."*

Slide 10

Now, let's look at God's judgment on His people.

Amos 2:4-16, *"This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed, I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem." 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."*

Amos' message was directed not only against Israel, but also Judah since both Judah and Israel were at one time united. Both nations had the law of God and knew what God expected of them.

The sin of Judah was that they rejected God's law. Verse 4a, "*they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees.*"

Amos was speaking against his own people. He was an equal opportunity prophet! He noted that the people of Judah didn't live by God's law. They did what they wanted to do.

The sentence against Judah was that they would be burned, and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. God said in verse 5, "*I will send fire on Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.*"

Amos preached this message in 760 BC. His prophecy came true when Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians, and its citizens taken into captivity.

Next, look at God's Judgment on Israel found in chapter 2, verses 6-16. At this point in Amos' message, the people in Israel listening to him must have felt good.

All the nations surrounding them, including their brothers to the south, were going to be punished by God, but here's where Amos turned the table and points the finger at them.

James Boice tells the story of a woman who attended an evangelistic meeting and was delighted when she learned that the preacher would talk about sin.

When he preached against strong drink, she cried, "*Preach it, brother!*" When he declaimed against tobacco, she shouted, "*Amen!*"

The minister's third point was a condemnation of gossip, and she leaned over to her neighbor and said, *"Now he's not preachin'; he's meddlin'."*

The sins of Israel were numerous. They included bribery, cruelty to the poor, immorality, hypocrisy, and tempting the godly to sin.

The sentence against Israel was pronounced in verses 13-16, *"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.*"

God was going to allow their enemies to defeat them. This came to pass less than 40 years later in 722 BC when Israel was defeated by Assyria and taken into exile.

Slide 11

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God's judgment on these nations, we need to commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness.

Remember, none of the surrounding nations had a relationship with God. They didn't have the Law of God, but they did have God's law written on their hearts.

Romans 2:14-15, *"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.*

They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."

God will hold anyone responsible for sins that violate His law that's written on their hearts. God's people had the law of God and yet they rejected His law.

There's a tendency to think that we're fine because we belong to a church, or have made a profession of faith, or claim to be Christians.

However, the root of true faith produces the fruit of righteousness. In other words, a Christian is one who seeks to obey all of God's Word.

This is why we must commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness to Jesus Christ.