

Judgment On God's Elect
Amos 3:1-15

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Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, wrote a book in 2009 titled, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century*.

In the book, he noted, *“When it was hard to be a Jew, people stayed Jewish. When it was easy to be a Jew, people stopped being Jewish. Globally, this is the major Jewish problem of our time.”*

This is not only a Jewish problem, it’s a phenomenon that’s true of Christianity as well. When it’s hard to be a Christian, people stay Christian.

There’re countries in the world where there are severe penalties for anyone who professes faith in Christ. In those countries, people don’t pretend to be Christians.

On the other hand, when there are no consequences for being a Christian, people may profess to be Christians, wanting the benefits of eternal life, as well of any benefits to being associated with a specific Christian church.

Now, when Amos was written, the people of Israel and Judah were experiencing tremendous prosperity which they believed was a sign of God’s blessing.

But this was far from the truth, because Amos was sent by God to warn them of impending judgment.

Can you imagine their surprise when the new preacher in town informed them of God’s judgment on their sins.

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Amos 3:1, *“Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the LORD has spoken against you—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt.”*

Amos let his hearers know that what he had to say was from God. Amos wasn't just concocting a message for his audience; he had actually received a message from God.

This was no message of encouragement or delight. Amos was bringing an indictment against the people of God from God.

Amos stated that this word he was bringing from the Lord was against the *“whole family I brought up out of Egypt.”*

So, even though Amos was in the northern kingdom, he let the people know that God was addressing not just them but both Israel and Judah; the entire family God brought out of Egypt under Moses.

Then, in verse 2, Amos began with God's message, *“You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth.”*

Here God made it clear that He was in a covenant relationship with Israel and no other people as seen in Deuteronomy 7.

Deuteronomy 7:7–11, *“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*

But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.”

I imagine at this point that Amos’ listeners sat back and thought to themselves, *“Yes, that’s right. God did make a covenant with us. We’re His people. All is right in the world because we have a special relationship with God. After all, the prosperity we’re experiencing must be a sign of His blessing.”*

What Amos said next must have stunned his listeners. Instead of God saying that He was blessing them, the Lord told them, in the last part of verse 2b, *“therefore I will punish you for all your sins.”*

What? Was God going to punish His covenant people? Yes! God was going to punish His people because of their sins. This is why we need to constantly examine ourselves.

We profess to be God’s people. We claim to have faith in Christ. But are we paying attention to God’s Word? Do we conform our lives to what God calls us to be and do in His Word?

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At this point, the people of God, struggling to comprehend what God was promising to do to them, must have thought to themselves, *“Who is this preacher? He’s just a shepherd and farmer, and now he claims to be a prophet. What kind of authority does he have?”*

Amos continued speaking, arguing from cause to effect. If two people walk together, they do so because they have agreed on a time and place to do so. If the lion roars, it’s because he has caught his prey.

If a trap springs, it means that the bird has been caught. If the people in a city are afraid, it’s because the trumpet has sounded, warning them of impending danger.

These were obvious facts of life that anyone could acknowledge. Then Amos made his point: If an untrained shepherd was preaching God's Word, then it means that God has called him to do so.

Amos 3:7-8, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?"

Amos was telling the people that he didn't choose this vocation for himself. He was just minding his sheep and tending his figs when God called him and sent him on a mission to declare God's judgment.

When D. L. Moody began to preach, some people said, *"What can this uneducated shoe salesman say to us?"*

When Billy Sunday began to hold evangelistic campaigns, the sophisticated religious crowd asked, *"What can this former baseball player teach us?"*

But God used Moody and Sunday, not in spite of their humble background, but because of it.

Just like He used an educated man like Moses, a humble shepherd like David, a priest like Jeremiah, and fishermen like Peter, James, and John.

John Calvin was a lawyer, and John Bunyan was a tinker, a mender of pots and pans, when God called them to become preachers.

Amos should be an encouragement to all believers. God calls people from all walks of life to serve Him and speak for Him.

Amos was a layman. He didn't attend Jerusalem Divinity School, but he did know God. He read and studied God's Word. He communed with God in prayer. He meditated on the Word of God.

He was taught by God, and he was willing to obey God when God called him to service.

Robert Murray McCheyne wrote to a friend, *“It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus.”*

This is not to minimize education, but it’s a reminder that God calls those who walk in communion with Him.

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Amos 3:9-10, *“Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses of Egypt: “Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people.” “They do not know how to do right,” declares the Lord, “who store up in their fortresses what they have plundered and looted.”*

The Israelites are again convicted and condemned for the crimes of which they’ve committed.

In fact, the sin of Israel had been so notorious that the neighboring nations were summoned to come in witnesses against them.

Verse 9b, *“Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria; see the great unrest within her and the oppression among her people.”*

Amos was ordered by God to publish a summons in the palaces of Ashdod, one of the chief cities of the Philistines, and in the palaces of Egypt.

This summons was for all men, who were inquisitive concerning the affairs of their neighboring nations, to assemble on the mountains of Samaria to view God’s judgment of Israel.

They were summoned to attend, not only to witness Israel’s sins, but to see that God deals fairly with all nations.

They were also to attend so that they themselves might take warning; for, if *judgment begins at the house of God*, as they see it does, what will be the end of those that are strangers to Him?

The Watergate scandal was a major political scandal involving the Executive Office of President Nixon.

President Nixon denied involvement in the June 17, 1972, break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Office Building in Washington, D.C.

For two years, the Executive Office denied any involvement, but finally, President Nixon was exposed, and he resigned from office. It's just human nature to hide or deny sin or scandal.

But what's so interesting here is that God does just the opposite. He calls for witnesses—pagan nations—to observe the iniquity of His people.

God's people had become so sinful that it even scandalized the pagan nations.

Gordon Keddie writes, *"Those to whom Israel ought to have borne witness concerning the righteousness of God now become witnesses of her apostasy!"*

Don't deceive yourself into thinking that you can get away with sin. Even if we can hide it now, there'll come a day when we'll stand before our Creator and Judge, and all heaven will bear witness to our sin and failure.

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Then Amos announces God's judgement in verse 11, *"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "An enemy will overrun your land, pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses."*

When sin is harbored and indulged in the midst of a people, they can expect nothing less than that adversaries should surround them, so that, go which way they will, there will be no escape.

Less than forty years later, in 722BC, Israel fell to Assyria. Their cities were destroyed, and the people taken into exile never to return.

Now, Judah wasn't spared either. It eventually fell to the Babylonians in 586BC, however, a remnant did return in 516BC.

This should be an example for us to heed today; palaces offer no protection to fraud and oppression; but the greatest of men, if they have ruined others, shall themselves be ruined.

Power, which is made into an instrument of unrighteousness, will be brought down and broken.

Amos continues in verses 13-14, *"Hear this and testify against the descendants of Jacob," declares the Lord, the Lord God Almighty. "On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground."*

These *"horns of the altar"* were symbols of God's mercy. When someone was accused of sin, he could go to the temple, cling to the horns on the altar, and receive mercy.

Some commentators suggest that today *"the horns of the altar"* are those things which people in trouble flee to for refuge, trust in, and which they make their sanctuary other than God.

Amos 3:15, *"I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished," declares the Lord."*

The nobility, gentry, and rich merchants, had winter-houses in the city and summer-houses in the country.

They were used against the inconveniences of the winter when the country was thought too cold, and in the summer when the city was thought too hot.

Amos was telling the rich that God will, either by war or by earthquake, smite both their winter-house and the summer-house.

Neither location will shelter them from His judgment. The houses of Israel's great men will no longer be, or at least no longer be theirs.

As Gordon Keddie observed, *"No more mercy; no more grace for the nation—indeed, no more nation!"*

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Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God's message against sin here in Amos 3, we must commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:5, *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"*

We can speak of God's faithfulness, but it takes times like these to experience it and know it. We can speak of God's provision and care, but it takes trials and tests, to experience it and know it.

Paul tells us to fight the good fight of faith, but sometimes you never really know you have faith, until you're in a good fight.

Knowing Christ doesn't exempt Christians from illness or calamity, but knowing Christ makes all the difference in the world as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Knowing Jesus means we'll fear no evil – BECAUSE HE IS WITH US. His rod and staff, they comfort us.

So, we need to examine ourselves to see that we are indeed a Christian, and if we are a Christian, don't presume upon the grace of God. Live in obedience to Him every day of your life.