

Amos: Sin Then and Now

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I. A Message from Amos to Us (Am3:1-8)

- Amos likely included this section to justify his position as a deliverer of a message from YHWH; but, it also speaks directly to us and our calling.
- Am3:1-2a God had a special purpose for the nation of Israel – the promises to Abraham (Gn12:3,7, 18:18, 22:17-18) included:
 - A great and mighty nation, the land of Israel, possession of gates of enemies
 - A great name, descendants as the stars of heaven (sand of seashore)
 - A blessing to Abraham, those who bless him, and through him a blessing to all nations
- God intended to fulfill these promises through the physical nation of ancient Israel (Gn18:19, Ex19:5-6a) – a holy nation, a kingdom of priests (will ultimately be fulfilled in WT).
- Am3:2b Israel failed and was punished: Amos warned ancient Israel that the punishment was immanent – these promises and the commensurate responsibility were passed on to the Church, we similarly are to warn the end time world of immanent punishment.
- Am3:3 an aphorism – mutual cooperation is required to fulfill our calling; to live our life walking with God; this is demonstrated by cause and effect: verses 4 & 5 list four contradictions which demonstrate the aphorism.
- Am3:4a אֶרֶיָּה ('areyeh) - an adult lion capable of hunting alone: roars just before it kills its prey
- Am3:4b כֶּפִּיר (kephir) a young lion not yet hunting alone: only roars from the den when the prey is brought back for consumption
- Am3:5a to take a bird in a snare, the snare must be set
- Am3:5b once the snare is set, it springs only when it has a bird
- Am3:6a the same form – a contradiction: the prophets were called as 'watchmen' (Ez33:1-9); we are also called to sound a trumpet of warning to the world (Jl2:1) – only a fool ignores the warning of the watchman!
- Am3:6b reverses the technique by stating the actual, in order to lead into the next two verses: (specifically the city is Samaria (Am3:2b), but the general application is to any city under punishment)
- Am3:7 refers back to verse 3: God's walking with the prophet allows God to reveal his purpose, plan, and message to the prophet. The prophets have recorded God's revelation for us – we must walk with God to understand it and proclaim it to the world.
- Am3:8a God compares himself to the lion of verse 4 (see also Am1:2a, quoted from Jl3:16))
- Am3:8b the purpose of our calling, the same as the prophet – God has spoken and delivered the message, having received the message, one is compelled to proclaim it – this is the 'burden' of being called (Hab1:1, MI1:1, Jr20:9)

II. YHWH's Sovereignty Over the Nations

- Chapters 1: and 2: establish a technique used by subsequent prophets: to demonstrate YHWH's sovereignty over the nations, a specific prophecy deals with each nation – these prophecies were for Israel (and us): they were generally NOT intended to be delivered to the specified nations. God is the God of history. Everything that occurs is according to his knowledge and is under his control.
- When Amos prophesized, Israel was at the height of power – Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south had presided over a golden age rivalled only by the time of Solomon. The major powers (Assyria and Egypt) were in periods of weakness, so Amos had only to deal with the immediate neighbours of Israel. He starts with Damascus (Aram) because it was the last nation to oppress Israel – the elderly would remember, for others it was only a generation removed.
- For each nation, the same formula is used: "For three transgressions of X, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment ...", then one specific sin is mentioned and the subsequent punishment is outlined.
- Am1:3 Damascus had taken territory away from Israel under Jehu apparently with excessive violence.
- Am1:4 Hazael was the progenitor of the current dynasty in Damascus; Ben-hadad was the current king.
- Am1:5 the 'gate-bar' secures the city gate from the inside, breaking the gate-bar allows an attacker into the city – Damascus was destroyed by Tiglath-pileser in 732.
- Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab are similarly dealt with.

III. The Sin of Israel

- Amos is primarily concerned with the northern kingdom, but he includes the southern kingdom in his sweep of nations. With the neighbour nations, God identified a sin against Israel; but with Israel, he identifies spiritual sin, and the punishment is more severe – ‘to whom much is given much is required’: the so-called ‘Christian’ nations of the world have descended into depths of perversion not seen since Sodom and Gomorrah – commensurate punishment is to be expected.
- Am2:4a same formula
- Am2:4b the sin is rejecting God’s law and embracing lies – know anywhere that is happening today?
- Amos now focusses on the northern kingdom – we see the dark side of the golden age. The western world is in a similar situation – we have had more than two full generations of relative peace, prosperity, and technological advancement, but the social sickness of our society is beginning to outstrip the technological advances – we can only pray God will soon act to eradicate the filth.
- Am2:6b **injustice**: the righteous and the needy become targets in a corrupt civilization: the righteous will not stoop to the level of society and the needy are unable to fend for themselves. ‘pair of sandals’ implies taking advantage over even the most trivial matters.
- Am2:7a **unfair advantage**: the ‘poor and afflicted’ are unable to compete with privileged and the powerful – ever tried to challenge a bank or Revenue Canada: as an individual you have no chance!
- Am2:7b **morality**: issues of morality are not even open for discussion any more.
- Am2:8 **religious hypocrisy**: people exhibiting blatantly unethical behavior, openly pretend to be religious. The pledged garment law (Ex22:26) was specifically designed to protect the poor.
- **Corrupt worship**: holding to religious forms with no substance (Am3:14, 4:4-5, 5:21-22) – there is plenty of this today – some may read parts of the Bible, but they won’t do what it says.
- **Social injustice**: (Am3:15, 5:10-12, 6:4-6) governments take more and more while individuals are crushed under the load; criminals are coddled while victims are stigmatized.
- **Greed**: (Am4:1, 6:1a) those with unlimited access to other people’s money feel it is their right to demand more and more for themselves.

IV. God’s Reaction to Sin

- Am4:6-10 YHWH afflicted Israel with the covenant curses in hopes they would repent. Society today is afflicted with so much illness and such grievous social problems that it is a wonder anything works – but it will get worse until God intervenes.
- Am5:5-6, 14-15 YHWH repeatedly called on Israel to repent – this is a big part of our message; but, again until God intervenes people are not doing it.
- Am3:10, 6:8 pride is the basis of sin – then as now people refused to repent; God will break the pride.
- Am5:7, 6:12 calling good evil and evil good – the standard fare of leftist elites, special interest groups, politicians, and perverts – the day will come when this won’t be allowed!
- God will punish: Am2:6,13-16, 5:2, 6:14