

**IT'S FOR YOU**  
**Amos 2:4-16**

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***Introduction***

Amos – a God who roars.

Ancient Israel made the mistake of treating a roaring lion like a tame tabby cat. The Israelites became so comfortable in their covenant relationship with God that they felt as if following God's plan was optional. Instead of walking in humble obedience to God's word, they were greedy for luxury, prejudiced against the poor, and hungry for power. Extravagant offerings and ritualistic religion were substituted for a vital relationship with their living Lord.

God, the roaring lion (1:2; 3:8) confronted His people in the person and message of Amos. While we know little about this prophet of the mid-eighth century B.C., we can be sure that God called him to leave behind fig farming and sheep shearing in order to declare God's word. Although Amos claimed to be neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, he preached God's messages with unyielding courage. The entire book of Amos is about God's roaring at His own people—His covenant people. The ancient Israelites had mistakenly counted on their covenant relationship with God as a guarantee that God would always bless them despite their repulsive behavior, especially their mistreatment of the poor. To their surprise, God said they would be held accountable, just as all other nations were held accountable. Through the uncompromising message of Amos, God said that the end was coming upon the nation of Israel.

Yet, even in the midst of all the roaring, God declared that His protection and blessing would remain upon a remnant (9:8). Like grain that is sifted, God would shake this sinful kingdom (the oppressive rich of ancient Israel), keeping only the kernel. Like a rainbow appearing at the end of a thunderstorm, the book of Amos ends with new wine, the grace of God.

The ancient Israelites were so focused upon the sins of their neighboring nations that they failed to see their sin of enriching themselves at the expense of the poor.

Do you remember when Pooh Bear goes into Rabbit's hole, and Rabbit asks him, "Would you like condensed milk or honey on your bread?" And Pooh says, "Never mind the bread!" Pooh just wants the honey.

Well, the lovable bear ate, and he ate, and he ate. Finally, Rabbit gives in and just hands him the whole honey jar. He moves on to another honey jar and yet another. He eats until all of Rabbit's honey is gone.

As the bloated bear tries to exit the Rabbit's hole, he gets his head out, but his hind end will not fit. "Oh bother," says Pooh Bear. "I'm stuck." Rabbit pushes from the rear. He doesn't want Pooh Bear sticking out of his front door—the head outside the cave and the rear inside. But the honey-filled bear just won't budge.

"This situation calls for an expert," Owl says.

Gopher pops up. With his characteristic lisp, he whistles, "Ssssomebody call for an exxxcavation exssspert?"

Christopher Robin finally arrives on the scene and explains that Pooh will just be stuck until he is thin again, implying that Pooh should not eat.

Days pass.

All of a sudden Gopher pops back up with a lunchbox. "A lunch box?" asks the wedged bear. By now, he has not eaten in a long, long, long time.

"It certainly issss," says the Gopher. "Sssswing sssshift you know. Time for my midnight ssssnack."

"What sort of lunch is in that lunch box?" asks Pooh Bear, desperately.

"Let's ssssee here," says the Gopher. "Ssssummer ssquash, sssalmon sssalad, sssuccotash, and honey."

"Honey!" says Pooh Bear.

"Oh no," says Rabbit. He runs out the back door, trying to keep Pooh Bear from eating any more honey so he won't clog up the entrance any longer than necessary.

Next, an interesting thing happens. I think Pooh Bear is just trying to relate to the rodent because he says this to Gopher as Gopher would say it, lisp and all: "Could you ssspare a sssmall sssmackerel?"

The Gopher replies, with a quizzical look, "You ought to do sssomething about that ssspeech impediment, sssonney."

Rabbit puts up a sign that reads "Don't Feed the Bear."

What is so ironic about the story is that while Gopher always speaks with his characteristic "whistle S," he suggests that Pooh Bear needs to work on his speech impediment!

What Gopher could not see in himself, he saw so clearly in Pooh Bear.

Ancient Israel had Gopher's problem. They had the ability to see the sins of all the nations around them but were quite surprised to discover they had some sins of their own.

## **I. Seven Sermons Against Seven Sinful Nations (1:1-2:5)**

If Amos had been a major league pitcher, he would not have been the master of the fast ball. The change up would not have been his best bet. Rather, he would have been the curve ball king. When a pitcher throws a curve ball, the batter thinks the ball is headed in one direction. Then, suddenly, the ball takes a turn in a new, unexpected direction. Amos was a curve ball pitcher.

In Amos 1:1, this prophetic pitcher steps up on the mound. He was from Tekoa, a small rural Judean village about ten miles south of Jerusalem. The text tells us he was among the "shepherders." The word here probably means that he was a manager of shepherds. Also, from 7:14 we learn that he was a sycamore-fig cultivator. Apart from these sermons, we really know very little about Amos. We don't know if he was married or had any children. There is a lot more about Amos that we do not know than we do know.

But we can be sure that he had been called by God to carry a word to the nations. His ministry, despite the fact that he was from Judah in the south, was to Israel in the north. The people of God had been divided into two nations for almost 200 years by the time Amos began his preaching around 760 B.C. His ministry took place during the most prosperous days of ancient Israel, during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Uzziah was on the throne in the Southern Kingdom in Jerusalem at the same time. During this prosperous time in Israel's history, many assumed they were enjoying the blessings of God. This was the setting when Amos heard the word of the Lord.

Like a roaring lion (1:2), God was ready to pounce upon his people, ancient Israel (compare 3:4; 3:8). But before God pounced on his own people, Amos began preaching to the various nations surrounding ancient Israel. He prophesied against the sinful bordering nations as if he were preaching around the points of the compass. He proceeded: Aram in the northeast (1:3-5), Philistia in the southwest (1:6-8), Phoenicia to the northwest (1:9-10), and Edom in the southeast (1:11-12). More importantly, however, we note the movement of the sermons as they began with foreign nations (Aram, Philistia, and Phoenicia) and moved toward blood relatives (Edom, Ammon, and Moab), until the last of the seven oracles is aimed at the sister kingdom (Judah). Strategically, the prophet was moving closer to his real mark, the Northern Kingdom.

Each of these seven sermons against the nations followed a common pattern:

- (1) They begin with the introductory formula, "Thus says the Lord" (e.g. 1:6).
- (2) Next comes a statement of the certainty of judgment, "For three transgressions of ... and for four" (e.g. 1:6).
- (3) Specific charges of guilt follow (e.g. 1:6).
- (4) The pronouncement of punishment follows (e.g. "I will send fire," 1:7).
- (5) The sermons close with the formula "says the Lord" (e.g. 1:8).

Using the sermon aimed at Judah as an example, we can see how the prophet employed this common pattern. He began with the introductory formula (2:4), "Thus says the Lord," and then immediately gives the statement of the certainty of judgment, "For three transgressions of Judah

and for four I will not revoke its punishment.” When the specific charge of guilt follows, we see that Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had broken the law that God had given her. Judah, unlike some of the other peoples, is not chastised for being oppressive against foreign nations. Rather, Judah has disobeyed the commandments that God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. When Amos declared that the inhabitants of Judah rejected the Torah, the law, he was probably referring to the Ten Commandments and, more broadly, the whole first five books of the Bible.

The punishment that will follow for the Southern Kingdom is fire. Just as He declared in Tyre (1:10) and Edom (1:12), God declared fire will be used against his own people. Their breaking the covenant with their Lord is placed side by side with the sins of the foreign nations who went so far as to sell people into slavery.

## **II. One Sermon Against God’s Sinful People (2:6-8)**

As Amos drew attention to the sins of Israel’s enemies, his audience was delighted. When he even had the courage to preach against his own people (remember, Amos was from Judah), they were ecstatic! When the seventh sermon, the sermon against Judah, was complete, the Israelites assumed the prophet was finished. Seven is the biblical number for completeness and finality (notice the statement of certain judgment in 1:3; 6, 11, 13; 2:1, 4 adds up to seven—three sins plus four sins). Like Gopher, who hears clearly Pooh’s lisp but ignores his own, Israel is unaware that she has any sins the prophet might address.

Imagine the surprised look on the faces of Amos’s audience when he started preaching an eighth sermon, when he started with the familiar formula, “Thus says the Lord.” He had already prophesied against seven other nations. “Who’s next? What is he talking about? This sermon is over,” the Israelites thought to themselves.

When he said the name “Israel,” the name of his audience, it must have hit like a clap of thunder. The Israelites had focused on the failures of the other nations and never imagined their own name would be mentioned. They had already sung the hymn of invitation and were ready to go home!

Amos followed his familiar pattern: “For three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not turn away its punishment (2:6).” The specific charges follow (2:6-8). By using the formula employed against her enemies, Amos is saying that Israel will be held accountable to God just like all the other nations; she is no different.

We can only imagine that the “Amen’s” stopped and the “Oh, me’s” started. Each of us thinks that somehow God is going to make a special exception in regard to our own life, in regard to our sin. Amos is saying that God is sovereign over all the nations, over all creation, but He is sovereign over the Northern Kingdom as well. God will call His own people (both Judah and Israel) into account for their sins.

Look at what Israel had done to deserve judgment. First, Israel is charged for putting a price tag on human lives (2:6). While we cannot be certain, perhaps Amos was referring to corrupt judges who were accepting bribes and deciding cases against the poor. Or, perhaps, he was speaking of a practice by which moneylenders were foreclosing on small loans they had extended to the poor.

By using the phrase “selling the needy for a pair of sandals,” the prophet was indicating the ridiculously low price at which the well-to-do, those in positions of power, were willing to turn their backs on the downtrodden. The corrupt court should stop aiding the rich by taking advantage of the poor and selling them into slavery. God’s people should always remember that they, themselves, were freed from slavery by the exodus of Egypt, and they were always to have mercy on the needy.

Secondly, the prophet illustrated the position of the poor by saying that the rich are trampling upon them (2:7). Using the courts to pervert justice, the rich were, literally, treating the poor like dirt. Like the bully on the grade school playground, the rich were pushing the poor aside if they sought justice at the gate of the city (see Exodus 23:6; Proverbs 17:23).

The third accusation concerns both a man and his father having sexual relations with the same girl (2:7). Most likely, the abused girl was a slave who was being pressured to extend sexual favors to the men of the household. For both the father and the son to sleep with the same slave girl would be a breach of the covenant (Exodus 21:7-11; Leviticus 18:7-8; 19:20-22; 20:17-21).

Fourthly, we note that the creditors were not returning garments, which had been used as collateral, to the owners at sunset (2:8). By law, the poor were to receive back their garments so that they might have some protection against the cold night air (Exodus 22:26-27; Deuteronomy 24:12-13). Finally, Amos accused them of drinking wine that had been paid by those who were satisfying a fine. In all cases, the rich were getting richer at the expense of the poor.

### **III. God’s Goodness to Israel (2:9-12)**

Unlike ancient Israel, who oppressed the poor, God had been working on behalf of His people. As a result of God’s helpful hand, Israel had been established as a nation. The use of the pronoun “I” is emphatic in the Hebrew language: “I” destroyed; “I” brought you up. God lists the things that He had done to establish His people Israel (2:9-11).

The “Amorite” refers to the inhabitants of Palestine before God’s people occupied the land. They had a reputation for being strong giants (Numbers 13:28, 31-33). God said the Amorites had the “height of cedars” and were “strong as the oaks.” Notice, however, that they were totally destroyed all the way from the “fruit” to the “root” (2:9). Israel should beware of God’s willingness to completely destroy the Amorites because of their moral decay.

Secondly, Amos referred to the exodus of Israel from Egypt. God liberated the Israelites from slavery and brought them up to give them the land He had promised to their forefathers. When we look at the Old Testament, the Exodus, the release from Egypt, was the most important event in all the history of God’s people.

Thirdly, God had led them through the desert for forty years. Fourthly, God had given them the gift of leaders. Prophets were called to proclaim the message, and Nazarites were called to live as examples of devotion to God. Remember, the Nazarites could neither cut their hair, have contact with the dead, nor drink alcoholic beverages. (Samson and Samuel are examples, Judges 13:5, 7;

16:17; 1 Samuel 1:11.) But Israel's response (2:12) was to prevent the Nazarites from holy living and to silence the prophets who were providing God's word.

#### **IV. God's Response to Israel's Rebellion (2:14-16)**

The Northern Kingdom expected that when the great day of the Lord came it would yield positive results for them. It would be a day of judgment against Israel's enemies. To their surprise, they learn that the day would not bring the long awaited deliverance but, rather, destruction upon God's people.

We are provided with a detailed account of military devastation awaiting ancient Israel on "the day of the Lord." The swift of Israel will not be fast enough to escape. The strong will not have enough strength to be able to stand. Even the bravest warriors will flee away naked in the day of God's judgment; they will drop their weapons and run.

#### ***Conclusion***

The ancient Israelites were taken to task by God because they were so busy focusing on the sins of the other nations. They failed to recognize their own acts of injustice against the poor. Their own greed and materialistic hearts had led them to literally trample on the poor.

We also have a tendency to "shorten the sin list." We live with a national economy that is based upon our insatiable appetites for more. We are privileged to live in the richest, most powerful nation on earth. We police other nations without their consent, employ their workers for a fraction of what we pay our own, and throw away more food every year as Americans than some small nations produce. We must stop focusing on sins that are beyond our backyard and look at our own acts of greed and injustice. If we don't, we too stand to suffer the wrath of God as ancient Israel did.

#### **New Testament Application – The Sermon on the Mount**

Making His way up a hill in order to teach, Jesus told His followers about the kingdom of God. He declared that each disciple would do well to focus on his own sins before he even begins to think about the sins of others (Matthew 7:1-5). We must fight our tendency to minimize our own faults while we exaggerate the faults of others. We must clear up our rosy view of ourselves and remove our jaundiced view of those around us.

I am reminded of the tenant who complained to the landlord, "The people upstairs are getting on my nerves. Last night they stomped and banged on the floor after midnight." The landlord inquired, "Did it wake you up?" "No," the tenant replied. "I just happened to be up practicing my tuba."

What Jesus is really saying is that only those who are willing to submit to judgment themselves are qualified to judge. Only those who have the logs taken out of their eyes can see clearly enough to remove the speck from someone else's eye (Matthew 7:5).