



## Amos - Chapter Two

### II Amos 1:2-6:14 - Oracles of Judgement (continues)

#### II.a Amos 1:2-2:3 - Judgement on Israel's Neighbours (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Two

Amos delivers judgement on Moab for its sin against its neighbour Edom, before briefly rebuking the southern kingdom of Judah for neglecting the laws of God. His attention then turns on the northern kingdom of Israel, accusing them of sexual immorality and abusing the poor.

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Moab,  
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;  
because he burned to lime  
the bones of the king of Edom.

<sup>2</sup> So I will send a fire on Moab,  
and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth,  
and Moab shall die amid uproar,  
amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet;

<sup>3</sup> I will cut off the ruler from its midst,  
and will kill all its officials with him,  
says the Lord.

## Amos 2:1-3

Moab was Ammon's neighbour to the south, perhaps included here because Moab and Ammon were both descended from Abraham's nephew Lot through his two daughters: <<*The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day*>> (Genesis 19:37-38). The fact that Moab's sin was against neither Israel nor Judah, but its southern neighbour Edom, demonstrates that these judgements are based not on ethnicity but on the universal justice of God.

Because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. Moab was a southern neighbour to Judah, and the last of the six judgements Amos pronounces against the Gentile nations in this section. God promises judgement against Moab because of their cruelty to Edom and her king. Therefore, it could be said that Moab sinned against the past by desecrating the remains of an Edomite hero.

It shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth. Kerioth was a city in Moab, named with Beth-meon and Bozrah in Jeremiah 48:24 and 48:41. It had a sanctuary of Chemosh, to which Mesha says he dragged the altar hearths of Davdoh. It may possibly be represented by the modern Kuraiat, between Diban and `Attarus. Some commentators think it may be another name for Ar-Moab.

### II.b Amos 2:4-5 - Judgement on Judah

Unlike the other nations, Judah is not judged for inhumanity to others but according to a higher standard, the law of the Lord, which they had sworn with a blood oath to keep: <<*Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'*>> (Exodus 24:8).

<sup>4</sup> Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Judah,  
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;  
because they have rejected the law of the Lord,  
and have not kept his statutes,  
but they have been led astray by the same lies  
after which their ancestors walked.

<sup>5</sup> So I will send a fire on Judah,  
and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.

## Amos 2:4-5

For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment. It hurts to see the same judgement formula applied against Judah, the people of God, as was applied against the previous six Gentile nations. It shows that Judah piled 'sin upon sin upon sin' just like the other nations: <<*The Lord has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds*>> (Hosea 12:2). Some Christians find it easy, and comfortable, to expose and rebuke the sins of those who are not the followers of God. That is what Amos did with the first six pronouncements of judgement, but just as Amos went on to look at sin among God's people, Christians should do the same.

Because they have rejected the law of the Lord. Judah's sin was that they despised and disobeyed the law of the Lord: <<*Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced*>> (2 Kings 17:19). This is a higher accountability than God required of any of the six Gentile nations previously mentioned in Amos. God blessed his people with his law and commandments, but he expected them to honour and obey his word.

The same lies is most likely a reference to false gods: <<*He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?'*>> (Isaiah 44:20), <<*O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge on the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit. Can mortals make for themselves gods? Such are no gods!*>> (Jeremiah 16:19-20), and: <<*What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it – a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!*>> (Habakkuk 2:18). The first of the statutes of the Mosaic Law was the prohibition against worshipping other gods: <<*you shall have no other gods before me*>> (Exodus 20:3). Since the Word of God brings truth, when people despise and disobey God's Word they naturally embrace and follow lies. No one can reject the truth without grabbing hold of a lie.

So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem. Because Judah sinned like the other nations, they will be judged as the other nations, with fire against them and their palaces. The repeated use of fire to express judgement is continued in the NT. Without doubt, Amos meant material fire coming against material walls and palaces, but the Bible also uses fire in a spiritual way, to describe the purifying work of God in the believer. The Bible says that God will test the works of each believer with fire, to burn away what is unworthy in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15. The Bible says believers will be tested by fire in 1 Peter 1:6-7. The Bible says there will be judgement by fire in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, James 5:3 and Jude 7. When Christians think of God's purifying fire, they

should think the way Peter expressed it: <<*For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*>> (1 Peter 4:17). They should invite God to burn down whatever ‘walls’ or ‘palaces’ they build against him, so his work can continue in them and through them without hindrance.

## II.c Amos 2:6-6:14 - Judgements on Israel

The introduction (vv.6-16), in which Amos demonstrates that Israel, far from being better than its neighbours, is even more worthy of condemnation than they, is followed by four extended addresses: Amos 3:1-15, 4:1-13, 5:1-17, and 5:18-6:14. The first three are each introduced with the words ‘Hear this word’. They show how desperate Israel’s condition is. The fourth address is characterised by the repetition of the word ‘Alas’ in Amos 5:18, 6:1, and 6:4, identifying this as a funeral dirge for the soon-to-be-destroyed nation.

### II.c.i Amos 2:6-16 - Judgement on Israel

It is easy to imagine that up to this point Amos’ preaching had met with an enthusiastic response. Not only were the pagan neighbours coming in for judgement, but so also was their sister and rival Judah, and for idolatry at that. But here, with the very same introduction that had been given the others, i.e. ‘for three, for four’, the prophet indicts Israel. Significantly, he does not accuse them of idolatry, although that was manifestly the case. Rather, he condemns them for social injustice. Amos 5:18-24 suggests that he considers their entire religious behaviour to be terribly corrupted by their sinful conduct, especially by their hard-hearted injustice toward the poor and oppressed. Verses 6-12 contain the accusation, and vv.13-16 give the announcement of judgement.

<sup>6</sup> Thus says the Lord:

For three transgressions of Israel,

and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;

because they sell the righteous for silver,

and the needy for a pair of sandals –

<sup>7a</sup> they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,

and push the afflicted out of the way;

### Amos 2:6-7a

For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment. The pattern continues. Israel has piled sin upon sin upon sin, just as the previous seven nations.

They sell the righteous perhaps refers to giving false witness for money, but it might also speak of selling someone into slavery for indebtedness over something as paltry as a pair of sandals; this was contrary to the law in Leviticus 25:39-43. Amos saw the injustice of rich against the poor, and how the rich took cruel advantage against the poor. Instead of helping the afflicted as the law commanded in Exodus 23:6-8, the affluent Israelites were crushing them, a theme he will return to: <<*Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat'*>> (Amos 8:4-6).

<sup>7b</sup> father and son go in to the same girl,

so that my holy name is profaned;

<sup>8</sup> they lay themselves down beside every altar

on garments taken in pledge;

and in the house of their God they drink

wine bought with fines they imposed.

### Amos 2:7b-8

Father and son go in to the same girl. It appears that Amos is intentionally linking here the sins of incest (Leviticus 18:6-18 and Deuteronomy 22:30) and of ritual prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17-18). God required sexual purity for at least two reasons: faithfulness in heterosexual marriage was an expression of the unique faithfulness of the Creator, and pagan religions sought to use sexual performance as a way of manipulating the divine power of fertility. To make it appear that the Lord was just like the pagan gods, faithless and capable of manipulation, was to profane his holy name, to defame his character.

Garments taken in pledge refers to a poor person's cloak that was given to a money-lender as security for a loan. It was to be returned to the poor person at night since he or she probably had no other covering: <<*If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down*>> (Exodus 22:26).

In the context it seems likely the wine was payment for an unjust fine: <<*Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey!*>> (Isaiah 10:1-2).

In combination, the whole picture is almost overwhelming. Amos pictures a man committing sexual immorality with a temple prostitute, the same girl his son visited the day before, keeping warm with a garment extorted from the poor, toasting his success with wine bought with money dishonestly gained.

<sup>9</sup> Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them,  
whose height was like the height of cedars,  
and who was as strong as oaks;  
I destroyed his fruit above,  
and his roots beneath.

<sup>10</sup> Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt,  
and led you for forty years in the wilderness,  
to possess the land of the Amorite.

<sup>11</sup> And I raised up some of your children to be prophets  
and some of your youths to be nazirites.  
Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?  
says the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> But you made the nazirites drink wine,  
and commanded the prophets,  
saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'

### Amos 2:9-12

Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them. God reminds Israel of his past power and faithfulness to them. When they first came into the Promised Land, they were afraid of the mighty nations like the Amorites. Yet God conquered them: <<*On the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to the Lord; and he said in the sight of Israel, 'Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon'*>> (Joshua 10:12). How could they reject and despise a God who has done so much for them? This principle, a walk with God based in thankfulness for what he did for them, is important for the Christian, and shows why the believer must continually hear the message of the Cross. They must live their lives in proper thankfulness for what the Lord has done for them.

Not only had God graciously delivered Israel and given them the land of Canaan (vv.9-10), he had also raised up from among them prophets to warn them, and Nazirites to shame them with the example of their commitment; refer to Jeremiah 35:1-19 for a similar example. However, instead of being warned and shamed, the Israelites had tried to shut up the prophets: <<*For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, 'Do not see'; and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions*>> (Isaiah 30:9-10), and: <<*"Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us"*>> (Micah 2:6 NIV), and to compromise the Nazirites; Numbers 6:3 prohibited Nazirites from drinking wine.

The vow of a Nazirite was a special vow of dedication unto the Lord, and God gave the gift of this deeper opportunity to Israel. Instead of receiving this honour with gratitude and humility, they rejected and despised the Lord. The vow of the Nazirite is described in Numbers Chapter 6 and was used to express a special desire to draw close to God and to separate from the comforts and pleasures of this world. Under the Nazirite vow a man would eat or drink nothing from the grape vine, would not cut his hair, and would not go near any dead carcass.

<sup>13</sup> So, I will press you down in your place,  
just as a cart presses down  
when it is full of sheaves.

### Amos 2:13

So or behold signals the beginning of the conclusion. Israel will be flattened in the road like an animal run over by a loaded cart.

God regarded the people of Israel as a weary burden, not as a joy. It is the difference between the pleasure a parent feels in dealing with an obedient child and the drudgery a parent feels in dealing with a stubborn, rebellious child. Any time justice is perverted, any time the rich receive preferential treatment, or the poor are oppressed, it burdens the God who sees from heaven and he promises to set it right. Any time people cheat and manipulate and make money out of others in questionable ways, even if it is legal, it burdens the God who sees from heaven and he promises to set it right. Any time people unfairly profit at the expense of the unfortunate, it burdens the God who sees from heaven and he promises to set it right.

<sup>14</sup> Flight shall perish from the swift,  
and the strong shall not retain their strength,

nor shall the mighty save their lives;

<sup>15</sup> those who handle the bow shall not stand,

and those who are swift of foot shall not save themselves,

nor shall those who ride horses save their lives;

<sup>16</sup> and those who are stout of heart among the mighty

shall flee away naked on that day,

says the Lord.

### Amos 2:14-16

**Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain their strength.**

No one will be able to escape the coming destruction. **The swift** will not be able to run away from it, and **the strong** and **mighty** warrior will not be able to stand before it. One way the judgement of God would express itself against Israel was that they would find themselves unable to succeed in ways they previously thought they were strong. Without the blessing of God, **the swift** are not fast enough, **the strong** are not strong enough, and **the mighty** are not mighty enough to succeed: <<*Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the skilful; but time and chance happen to them all*>> (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Israel was far too confident in their own ability, but God would bring them low: <<*But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last*>> (Job 11:20).

People can escape this judgement by realising now that their own strength is nothing without the Lord. Paul communicated this idea: <<*So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall*>> (1 Corinthians 10:12). People can become more vulnerable in their perceived strengths than in their acknowledged weaknesses.