



## Amos - Chapter Three

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

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

##### Summary of Chapter Three

The sins for which Israel is to be judged are touched upon but not detailed here. Rather, God is simply warning Israel through Amos that judgement is surely coming. The prophet has heard the roar of the lion just as he launches himself on his prey. What can the prophet do but tell what he has heard?

#### II.c.ii Amos 3:1-4:5 - Israel's Guilt and Punishment

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:

<sup>2</sup> You only have I known  
of all the families of the earth;  
therefore I will punish you  
for all your iniquities.

#### Amos 3:1-2

Hear this word introduces the first three messages (Amos 3:1, 4:1 and 5:1). The God of Israel is the Creator who spoke the world into existence and who is characterised from first to last as the God who speaks: *<<For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): I*

*am the Lord, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in chaos.' I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right>> (Isaiah 45:18-19), <<In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God>> (John 1:1), and: <<I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book>> (Revelation 22:18-19).*

The Lord has spoken against you. This statement should bring great fear into the hearts of all who hear it: *<<Ah, inhabitants of the sea coast, you nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you until no inhabitant is left>> (Zephaniah 2:5), because: <<It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God>> (Hebrews 10:31).*

Against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. Israel's rejection and disregard of God is all the more inexcusable in light of God's great deliverance. In his bringing Israel up from the land of Egypt, God proved his love and care for Israel; for God to speak against them shows he must have been sorely provoked. The central act of redemption in the OT is Israel's exodus from Egypt. All through the OT, God calls Israel to look back and remember him as the one who freed them from Egypt. The central act of redemption in the NT, and in God's whole plan of redemption, is the work of Jesus on the Cross. In the same way, Christians today are called to constantly look back and remember what Jesus did on the Cross and to live in light of that great fact.

You only have I known. It seems clear that Israel and Judah believed that their role as the chosen people of God would protect them from harm. Amos says that the very opposite is true. It is precisely because God has known them as he has known no other nation that they are being judged according to a higher standard: *<<But one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded>> (Luke 12:48), and: <<All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law>> (Romans 2:12).*

Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. God makes a clear connection between the great privilege of Israel, i.e. you only have I known, and the great responsibility this privilege brings. If Israel thought that their standing as a specially chosen nation made them less responsible before God, they were tragically mistaken.

- 3 Do two walk together  
unless they have made an appointment?
- 4 Does a lion roar in the forest,  
when it has no prey?  
Does a young lion cry out from its den,  
if it has caught nothing?
- 5 Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth,  
when there is no trap for it?  
Does a snare spring up from the ground,  
when it has taken nothing?
- 6 Is a trumpet blown in a city,  
and the people are not afraid?  
Does disaster befall a city,  
unless the Lord has done it?
- 7 Surely the Lord God does nothing,  
without revealing his secret  
to his servants the prophets.
- 8 The lion has roared;  
who will not fear?  
The Lord God has spoken;  
who can but prophesy?

### Amos 3:3-8

Do two walk together. In this section, Amos connects six statements that are obvious true. In our manner of speaking he might have said, “Is the Pope a Roman Catholic?”

With a series of questions, Amos shows that imminent disaster is for Israel. He points out that in the world of nature, certain sequences of events can lead to predictable outcomes. If a lion roars, then it has taken, or is about to take, its prey. What he, the prophet, is doing is simply telling Israel that the Lord God has

announced judgement and that, unless Israel takes immediate corrective action, the outcome is certain.

**Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?** The trumpet was either sounded to gather the people for festivals or to call them out when danger was near. The latter is intended here and the people would be set in panic: <<*With fierceness and rage it swallows the ground; it cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet*>> (Job 39:24). Ultimately, it will herald the Second Coming of Jesus in judgement when all those who have not accepted him as Lord have the most to fear, but those who have chosen him will have nothing to fear: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

**Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?** The six statements concerning the obvious lead into a seventh statement, with each one reinforcing this final point. When judgement comes against the cities of Israel, everyone should know that it was the Lord who has done it. It will not be an accident, fate, or simply misfortune. It will be the hand of the Lord. This correctly captures the sense of the Hebrew word *ra'ah* as **disaster** in this verse, a word which has a very broad range of connotations. Often translated 'evil,' it is used to express everything from moral evil: <<*The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually*>> (Genesis 6:5) to calamity or disaster as here and in: <<*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it*>> (Jonah 3:10). If there is disaster occurring, the people should not attribute it to misfortune but should take note that God is at work, in his sovereign wisdom, and they should respond accordingly to his judgement.

**Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.** Throughout the OT God often showed the prophets his own perspective on the events of history and revealed to them his purposes and actions, so that the prophets could interpret historical events accurately for God's people.

The context of the prophet Amos should be remembered in order to understand that this does not mean that God does nothing without revealing it to a prophet first. In Ephesians 3:5 Paul describes how God deliberately hid the nature of the church (being a new body, not Israel and not Gentile) from OT prophets: <<*In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by*>>

*the Spirit*>>. This is one example of something that God did not announce or explain until it happened, without giving a prior revelation to a prophet, except the message of the approaching Kingdom of God and his Messiah as announced by the last OT prophet, John the Baptist.

The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy? Amos is saying, “Do not blame me. I’m only the messenger.” As natural as it is for a person to be fearful when a lion roars, that is how natural it is for the prophet to prophesy when the Lord God has spoken.

- <sup>9</sup> Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod,  
and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt,  
and say, ‘Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria,  
and see what great tumults are within it,  
and what oppressions are in its midst.’
- <sup>10</sup> They do not know how to do right, says the Lord,  
those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.
- <sup>11</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord God:  
An adversary shall surround the land,  
and strip you of your defence;  
and your strongholds shall be plundered.

### Amos 3:9-11

Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria. Israel’s capital city of Samaria was a powerful stronghold, located on a high hill in a good position of natural defence. It stood just off the great highway that ran along the Mediterranean coast connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia. If Samaria fell to the Assyrians, there was nothing more to prevent the destruction of the Philistine cities, represented here by Ashdod, and of Egypt itself. However, Israel would fall not because of the superior power of Assyria but because of its own spiritual and social corruption. The stronghold was filled with oppression, and with violence and robbery. Thus, Israel had forfeited God’s protection, and without him all their natural defences were useless: <<*And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it*>> (Isaiah 5:5-6).

An adversary shall surround the land. This was fulfilled in the Assyrian invasion of Israel less than 30 years after Amos made this prophecy. For ten years, Israel was a subject state in the Assyrian Empire.

<sup>12</sup> Thus says the Lord: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.

### Amos 3:12

As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion. Picturesque prose expresses the total destruction that was to be visited upon Samaria and Israel, although a tiny remnant would be left. Exodus 22:10-13 says that if an animal dies in the care of another man, such as a shepherd, that the shepherd must make restitution to the owner of the animal, unless he can bring remains that demonstrate the animal was attacked by a predator. The prophet also alludes to the remnant later: <<***For thus says the Lord God: The city that marched out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which marched out a hundred shall have ten left***>> (Amos 5:3).

So shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued. This was fulfilled in the Assyrian exile of Israel, less than 40 years after Amos made this prophecy. After a little more than ten years as a subject state in the Assyrian Empire, Israel was completely conquered by Assyria and the people of Israel were taken from their land and scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

### Introduction to Amos 3:13-15

The conclusion of the message emphasises in a general way the two factors that would account for the coming destruction: (1) false, ritualistic religion and (2) the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor.

<sup>13</sup> Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,  
says the Lord God, the God of hosts:

### Amos 3:13

The God of hosts. This title for God became increasingly popular among the prophets. Hosts in this context refers to troops of soldiers. Thus the image expresses the unlimited power of God. He is a general with an infinite number of troops at his command. The term sometimes refers to hosts of heavenly beings, for example: <<***Then Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him'***>> (1 Kings 22:19), <<***And Ezra said: 'You are***

*the Lord, you alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you>> (Nehemiah 9:6), <<Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!>> (Psalm 148:2), <<Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?>> (Matthew 26:53), <<And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’>> (Luke 2:13-14).*

<sup>14</sup> On the day I punish Israel for its transgressions,  
I will punish the altars of Bethel,  
and the horns of the altar shall be cut off  
and fall to the ground.

### Amos 3:14

Bethel was not only associated with the patriarch Jacob and his vision in Genesis 28:10-22, it also stood close to the border between Israel and Judah. Thus, Jeroboam I chose it as the site of one of his two golden calves; refer to 1 Kings 12:25-33. It was not by accident that this was the place where Amos chose to deliver his prophecies; refer to Amos 7:12-13. It represented the corruption of the true religion: *<<Come to Bethel – and transgress; to Gilgal – and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; bring a thank-offering of leavened bread, and proclaim freewill-offerings, publish them; for so you love to do, O people of Israel! says the Lord God>> (Amos 4:4-5).* Far from appeasing God’s anger against Israel, the religious practices carried out there would seal that anger. Refer also to Hosea 10:5, where ‘Beth-aven,’ which means ‘house of iniquity,’ is substituted for ‘Beth-el,’ i.e. ‘house of God.’

The horns of the altar were short vertical projections at the four corners of the top of the altar: *<<You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze>> (Exodus 27:2).* They were thought to represent the strength of the altar, just as horns represent the strength of an animal. They had ritual significance as places where God’s protection was available, for example: *<<Adonijah, fearing Solomon, got up and went to grasp the horns of the altar>> (1 Kings 1:50), and: <<When the news came to Joab – for Joab had supported Adonijah though he had not supported Absalom – Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and grasped the horns of the altar>> (1 Kings 2:28),* but the horns of Bethel’s altar would provide no protection whatsoever.

15 I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house;  
and the houses of ivory shall perish,  
and the great houses shall come to an end,  
says the Lord.

### Amos 3:15

I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house. All of Israel's social injustice is represented by the sin of amassing property: <<**Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!**>> (Isaiah 5:8). This was a violation of the covenant that said a family's land was a trust from God to be held in perpetuity by that family. There were legal fictions to get around this, but those fictions did not impress God. Here, Amos does not condemn wealth in itself, but wealth accompanied by injustice toward the poor (Amos 4:1), fraudulent business practices (5:7-12 and 8:4-6), and living in luxury without care for the needy (5:12 and 8:4-6), without concern for sin and evil in the land (6:4-6), and without genuine religious faith (5:21-23). Archæological excavations at Samaria have uncovered fragmentary remains of rich ivory objects, attesting to the luxury built upon the backs of the poor.

The great houses shall come to an end. God's judgement would not stop at places of idol worship; it would also extend to places built and enjoyed through oppression and robbery. In the age prior to Jeroboam II, the houses in Israel's cities were roughly the same size. However, archæologists find a change starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. Ancient cities like Tirzah have a neighbourhood of large, expensive houses and another neighbourhood of small, crowded structures, smaller than the houses from previous years. The larger houses are filled with the marks of prosperity, and the oppressive rich of Israel thought they could find safety there, but God's judgement came against those houses as well, just as Amos promised.