

Amos

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February 16, 2022



Amos 2:4-16

Vss. 4-5

- If the crowd that gathered to hear Amos' sermon thought his sermon was at an end, having preached judgement on all of Israel's neighbors, they were sorely mistaken. The judgements on Israel's neighborhood enemies were but a precursor to the judgement the prophet was pronouncing on the Jewish people themselves, beginning with the Southern Kingdom and its capital of Jerusalem.
- "For three transgressions of Judah and for four..." Amos does not differentiate between Judah and the judgement pronounced on the surrounding pagan nations. Three transgressions are "enough" and four are "too much, excessive". The idea that the prophet would pronounce judgement on the Southern Kingdom had to come as a shock to his audience in the Northern Kingdom, but not without some satisfaction. The two nations were like rival brothers, so while the idea that the Father would punish either of them was stunning, that punishment would come to the other brother would have a sense of satisfaction with it.
- Judah's crimes are not as specific as the previous judgements on the surrounding nations had been. They had "rejected the law of the Lord and not kept His statutes", but no specific example is offered. Further however, Judah's "lies also have led them astray, those after which their father's walked". Here Amos seems to be referring to the way that the paganism of Egypt and the Canaanites kept infecting Judah generation after generation. If you lay the charges against Judah and Israel side by side, part of Judah's crimes may have been violating the Lord's laws of protections over the poor. The poor and the weak were not to be oppressed (Exodus 22:21-24), interest was not to be charged on loans (Exodus 22:25), and the use of false balances was forbidden (Deut. 25:13-16). But clearly the lies of the fathers had to do with the worship of idols and the practices of the pagans, especially the worship of Baal. This god was a fertility god, a god you would pray to for good crops, a good birthrate of sheep, cattle, and other animals and for children. Of course one could pray to the God

of Moses for these things, but the hedonistic orgiastic worship of Baal held a strong appeal to people's sinful nature.

- As with the other pagan cities, the fire of war would come as judgement on Judah and these would consume the defenses and palaces of Jerusalem.

Vss. 6-16

- If the audience of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was shocked to hear judgement on Judah, they would be speechless to hear Amos speak judgement on them! Were they not prosperous? And is not prosperity the most common mark of God's blessing?
- When Amos again starts with three transgressions and for four, here the prophet is not vague but very specific concerning Israel's crimes.
- First, Israel is guilty of "selling the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of sandals." This may speak to judges taking bribes so that the courts side with the rich against the poor. But in addition, it seems that the wealthy in Israel were sending people into slavery to cover the price of their debts. Indeed, even if their debts were no more than the cost of a pair of sandals, the poor would be forced to surrender their homes, their land, their flocks, even themselves and their families in order for the wealthy to expand their wealth.
- Second, the first two lines of vs. 7 tell us that the wealthy and powerful "pant after", that is, are excited about piling the dust of the earth on the heads of the helpless. Dust on the head was a sign of mourning, thus we are to understand that people were celebrating making the helpless miserable. Further, to "turn aside the way of the humble" refers to corruption in the courts where the poor were turned aside from any hearing in the hall of justice.
- The third crime speaks to Israel's failed morality, where a man and his father use a young girl for their own desires. Some have suggested this refers to the same complaint Hosea 4:14 had about how the pagan practice of temple prostitution had come to Israel. But the word here is not prostitute, but young girl. It seems they

have taken the children of the poor as slaves to do with as they wish, a practice that is clearly prohibited in Exodus 21:7-9 and Deut. 22:28-30.

- The Lord says such practices are done “in order to profane His Holy name”. This affirms Ps. 51 where David prays that God will forgive his sin because the sin was against God and God alone. More about this below. To further offend the Lord, the perpetrators of such acts then stretch out in the Temple, laying in front of the altar and laying on top of garments that people have offered as payment of debts, and then wine that was offered as payment is drunk as if they were at a pub. The law of God is disrespected and disregarded and there is no fear of the Lord or His judgement.

Vss. 9-12

- Here the Lord reminds Israel of what He has done for them, deeds which demand His respect. The Northern Kingdom sat on land that once belonged to the Amorite and God reminds them that it was He who destroyed the whole race of the Amorites, despite the Amorites’ strength. It was He who led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness that they might have the land. During the process, God raised up some of their sons to be prophets and others to be Nazarites, that is “consecrated ones”. These were acts of God’s gifts and blessings. A Nazarite was a holy man who worked alongside the prophet to keep Israel on the right track. They were to abstain from wine and never cut their hair as signs of how they were separated out from the general population. In other words, God gave Israel all it needed to know how to live as His people and be successful. And what did Israel do? They forced the Nazarites to drink wine and shut down the voices of the prophets. They took God’s blessings and trashed them.

Vs. 13

- And here we get back to the realization that all sin is an offense against God and how He is justified in His anger and pain. “Behold, I am weighted down beneath you...” As we have noted, sin is cumulative. It stacks up. For three transgressions and for four...the last straw has fallen, God says. “I am weighted down, heavily burdened, and I will not take anymore! When you sin against the poor, you sin against Me. When you sin against young girls, you sin against Me. And when your disregard and disrespect My law, you disregard and disrespect Me...sin upon sin.”

Vss. 14-16

- Here is the judgement on Israel. All of their wealth and power, all that they are so very proud of, will be reduced to nothing. For nations, wealth buys military power. Wealth enables you to buy armor, and bows, and horses. Wealth allows you to feed and strengthen an army. Napoleon said that an army marched on its stomach. A starving army wasn't going to fight very well or very long, but a wealthy nation like Israel would have many stalwart and mighty men. And it will all come to nothing. The swift will not be swift enough to survive. The strong will lose strength and the mighty man will lose his life. The archer will not be able to stand. The cavalryman will not find a horse fast enough to escape. The most gallant soldier will run away naked, having lost everything on the day of God's judgement.