

Amos was called by the LORD to be a prophet, despite his lack of a prophetic lineage, with a message for Israel (Amos 7:14-15). Israel was far from the LORD and the message Amos was given to deliver was one of repentance and judgment. The LORD spelled out the sins of Israel and the declared the judgment that was coming as a result of their lack of repentance. Israel was conquered by Assyria some 30-40 years later.

Amos 1

1 The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa” – Amos introduces himself as the writer and tells us a little bit about himself. He is a “herdman” (a raiser of sheep) from Tekoa, a small village about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. Later we are told that Amos was also “a gatherer of sycomore fruit” (Amos 7:14). Amos came from a humble background with no experience or family history of being a prophet and yet God chose him.

“which he saw concerning Israel” – Even though Amos was from Judah, the LORD gave him a message concerning Israel and their sins.

“in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” – Amos gives us the time frame in which the LORD spoke through him. It was during the reigns of Uzziah, the king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, the king of Israel. Amos also references an earthquake, an apparently memorable event that occurred two years later.

2 And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.

“And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem” – Zion refers to Jerusalem, particularly the temple mount, and represents the place where the LORD resided. Amos declares that the LORD will “roar,” expressing His anger over Israel’s sin.

“and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither” – Amos uses the imagery of the countryside hearing the roar of the LORD and the sound is so intense and intimidating that shepherds living in the countryside will cower in fear and mourn over what is coming. Carmel refers to a mountain range in northern Israel that was known for its bountiful trees and lush vegetation. The roaring of the LORD will cause the trees and vegetation of Carmel to wither from the heat of His wrath.

Amos 2

6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

“Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four” – Amos will list more than four transgressions of Israel, so the phrase “for three...and for four” was likely an expression referring to the abundance of sins that Israel was committing, sin on top of sin. It is as if the cup of transgressions was full with three transgressions and yet Israel overflows the cup with a fourth transgression.

“I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof” – Israel’s sins are so grievous that the LORD is not going to excuse them or “sweep them under the rug.” They have crossed the line nationally with the abundance of their sins and judgment must be executed.

“because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes” – Amos lists some of the sins of Israel, beginning with their greed. They have betrayed or taken advantage of righteous people for the sake of money. Their greed is so enormous that they would even do the same to poor people for something as insignificant as a pair of shoes.

7 That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the *same* maid, to profane my holy name:

“That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor” – The phrase “pant after” refers figuratively to having an intense desire. The picture here seems to be that these people are so desirous of their ill-gotten gain that they are willing to trample the poor and leave them with their heads in the dust.

“and turn aside the way of the meek [poor; needy; weak]” – The “way” refers to anything that the meek has a right to or would benefit from. These people have no qualms in taking advantage of the meek and preventing them from anything that would benefit them.

“and a man and his father will go in unto the *same* maid” – Another sin prevalent in Israel was the sexual immorality. Some commentators believe that the “maid” refers to temple prostitutes, which would be bad enough but not surprising that father and son might utilize the same prostitute. This maid may refer to a slave girl being used for sexual gratification without any intention of marriage. Thus father and son could both use her without creating jealousy or contention between themselves. Such a sin was borderline incest and was offensive to the LORD.

“to profane [to pollute; desecrate] my holy name” – This phrase could refer to all of the sins named so far, or it may refer in particular to the sexual immorality just mentioned. Such behavior from God’s people was a desecration of His holy name, much like David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:14).

8 And they lay *themselves* down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god.

“And they lay *themselves* down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar” – They have taken their neighbor’s clothes as a pledge for payment of their debt but have not obeyed the commandment concerning such a pledge (Ex. 22:26-27 “If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious”). Instead of returning the garments at sundown, they have kept them and used them to lay on as they prostrated themselves in idolatrous worship.

“and they drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god” – Wine was usually given to condemned criminals before execution as an act of mercy (Prov. 31:6 “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts”). However, these people instead had used that wine to become drunk during the worship of their false gods.

9 Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. 10 Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.

The Amorites dwelt in the land of Canaan and were guilty of these same sins before the LORD used Joshua to lead Israel into the conquest of the land. The descriptive language in v. 9 speaks of how strong and powerful the Amorites were. Yet the LORD protected Israel for 40 years in the wilderness and then enabled them to destroy the Amorites and possess their land under the leadership of Joshua.

11 And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. *Is it* not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD. 12 But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.

“And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites” – The LORD did not leave them to their own devices once they were in the land, but He guided them by sending prophets and men who were willing to take Nazarite vows. Some, such as Samson and Samuel, were Nazarites from their mother’s womb and the LORD used them to rescue Israel in their times of need.

“Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD” – Israel had to admit that what the LORD was saying was true.

“But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink” – Despite all of these things that the LORD had done for them, Israel had rejected them.

Illustrating their rejection, the LORD states that they gave Nazarites wine to drink, which would violate their Nazarite vow (they were not allowed to drink anything that came from the grape vine, to cut their hair, or touch dead bodies).

“and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not” – Israel also forbade prophets from speaking in the name of the LORD.

13 Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed *that is* full of sheaves. 14 Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself.

“Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves” – The LORD’s patience had been worn thin under the weight of Israel’s sins. He had become weary of waiting for them to repent and was now going to take action.

“Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself” – Verses 14-16 declare the form that the LORD’s wrath would take. In this verse the “swift” who would seek to escape would not succeed, the strength of the strong will fail, and the mighty would not be able to protect themselves from God’s judgment sent through Israel’s enemies.

Amos 4

6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

The expression “cleanness of teeth” refers to having clean teeth because they had not eaten. Israel had not repented and returned to the LORD despite the famine and food shortages He was using to discipline Israel.

7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when *there were* yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. 8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

The LORD had caused droughts in certain parts of Israel, leading to ruined crops. The people from the drought stricken cities had traveled to cities that had water but still had not been able to satisfy their thirst. Despite all this, Israel had still not repented and returned to the LORD.

9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured *them*: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

The LORD had afflicted Israel’s crops with “blasting” (blight from a hot east wind) and “mildew” (the result of parasitic worms such as the palmerworm). Anything that their vineyards and fruit trees had produced were ruined by infestations of insects. The loss of their crops still had not compelled Israel to return to the LORD.

10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

“I have sent among you the pestilence [plague] after the manner of Egypt” – God had sent plagues similar to what He sent upon Egypt when Moses confronted Pharaoh. The LORD had warned them that this would happen if they didn’t obey His commands (Deut. 28:21, 60; Lev. 26:25).

“your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses” – God had caused young men and horses to die in battle.

“and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils” – The stench of death from these things was unavoidable.

“yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD” – Despite the LORD fighting against them, they still had not repented.

11 I have overthrown *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

While some in Israel had been destroyed (“overthrown”) like He did Sodom and Gomorrah, God had mercifully saved Israel from complete destruction, like plucking a firebrand from the fire before it was completely burned. Despite God’s mercy, Israel had still not repented.

12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: *and* because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

God is drawing the proverbial line in the sand, warning them that the chastisement will continue until they either repent or are destroyed. It will be a battle of wills that God will obviously win. He loved them too much to allow them to continue in sin.