

Prophecies of Judgment, Continued

Amos 2

Amos 2:1-3 – *“Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. ² But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound. ³ And I will cut off the judge from its midst, and slay all its princes with him,” says the Lord.”*

Background Notes

In Amos 1-2 there are eight prophecies of judgment against Israel, Judah and the surrounding foreign nations. The first five prophecies of judgment were pronounced in Amos 1, and the last three in Amos 2. The sixth prophecy was pronounced against Moab (v1-3). (Kerioth (v2) was one of the chief cities of Moab.) Prophecy number seven was against Judah (v4-5), and number eight was against Israel (v6-16). If you locate the six foreign nations on a Bible map, you will see that the prophecies of judgment gradually circled in on the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. That is why those nations were left for last. In fact, Amos left the northern kingdom of Israel to the very last, because that was where his ministry was directed.

Remember, the prophet Amos was like a foreign missionary. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, but the Lord directed him to preach and prophecy to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry was centered at Bethel. A lot of great biblical memories were associated with Bethel - going all the way back to the time of the Patriarchs. But in Amos' time an idolatrous shrine was located there. About 175 years before his ministry, King Jeroboam I had set up a golden calf shrine in Bethel. King Jeroboam II was in power during Amos' time, but the shrine was still there. Israel would be judged for this idolatry - as well as for other sins (v6-16).

But before he proclaimed God's judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel, Amos gave prophecies of judgment on seven other nations, including the southern kingdom of Judah. God allowed all the killing and cruelty that we see in these chapters to judge evil. It's important to understand that God can use evil to judge evil – but this in no way makes God the source of evil.

Doctrinal Points

1. God will judge the spirit of revenge.

The sixth prophecy of judgment was against the nation of Moab (Amos 2:1-3). Notice - the specific sin that God singled

out was: *"Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.* What's that all about? Was verse 1 a comment about cremation versus burial? No. Verse 1 was speaking about the desecration of the king of Edom's grave – in order to take revenge.

Moab and Edom were neighbors, but they were not friendly neighbors. When the people of Moab became strong enough, they took cruel revenge on Edom. They desecrated the king of Edom's grave by digging up his bones and putting them on display. Then they publicly burned the bones, and they may have even included the ashes in the building mortar of a temple to their pagan god.

This was unrestrained wrath and revenge, and it was inexcusable. This was way beyond defending a nation in a "just war." This was the ***spirit of revenge***, and it would be judged. The detailed description of God's judgment on Moab (v2-3) took place under both the Assyrians and the Babylonians, beginning about 25 years after Amos gave this prophecy.

Notice, by the way - this was one pagan nation taking revenge against another pagan nation - and yet God held Moab accountable. Ever since God instituted human government (in Genesis 9, following the great Flood at the time of Noah), God has held all nations accountable for how they treat one another. Bully nations and nations that go beyond the principles of a "just war" will be judged. Whether in the death camps and gas chambers of Nazi Germany or in the killing fields of Cambodia, the spirit of unrestrained wrath and revenge will be judged.

What is true for nations is also true for individuals. God will judge the spirit of revenge. Have you ever been caught up in unrestrained rage, and been filled with a desire for revenge? Your anger may have started out as a legitimate reaction to a wrong - but you didn't check and control that surge of anger, and the end result was unrestrained wrath and a desire for revenge. This is serious. Whether in families or church fellowships, God will judge the spirit of revenge.

2. God will judge the religious apostasy.

Amos 2:4-5 - *Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed. ⁵ But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.*

In the seventh prophecy of judgment, the specific sin for which Judah was judged was **apostasy**. Even though the people of Judah were God's chosen people, Judah would not escape God's judgment. The surrounding pagan nations did not have God's Law, but Judah did. The people of the surrounding pagan nations certainly had moral consciences, and God held them accountable. But Judah had the revealed Law of God! They had received a great privilege, and thus a greater responsibility to obey.

Romans 2:12 says, *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.”* Judah had not only disobeyed God’s law, they despised it and rejected it (v4). They had turned away from the Lord and from His Law. This was religious apostasy, and Judah would be judged.

The judgment of verse 5 was delayed for about 175 years from the time that Amos gave this prophecy. The judgment was delayed because of the good ministries of Isaiah and Micah, and other prophets who followed Amos, as well as the great revivals that took place under King Hezekiah and King Josiah. But overall, the nation of Judah continued to be characterized by religious apostasy - and they would be judged. In 586 BC, the Babylonian armies under Nebuchadnezzar completely conquered the southern kingdom of Judah after a disastrous siege of Jerusalem that lasted for 1½ years. In fulfillment of verse 5, Jerusalem was burned, including the palaces and the beautiful Temple of Solomon. God will judge religious apostasy.

Apostasy is a deliberate turning away from the revealed truth of God that was once embraced. Apostasy is a very serious sin. As we all know, many universities and religious organizations in our own country are now apostate. They have turned away and rejected the truth of God’s Word that they formerly held in the past. In fact, some of them now promote atheistic doctrines! God will judge religious apostasy.

3. God will judge social injustice.

Amos 2:6-16 - *Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name. ⁸ They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.*

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

¹¹ I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is it not so, O you children of Israel?” says the Lord. ¹² “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, ‘Do not prophesy!’ ¹³ “Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.

¹⁴ Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself.

¹⁵ He shall not stand who handles the bow. The swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. ¹⁶ The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day,” says the Lord.

Here we have the eighth prophecy of judgment given by Amos. The noose of judgment had finally tightened around the neck of the northern kingdom of Israel. Down through the years, all the kings of Israel had been evil, and there had been no revivals in the northern kingdom. The nation was ripe for judgment.

The particular sin for which Israel was denounced was the sin of **social injustice**. Justice was perverted for money, even for the price of a pair of sandals (v6)! Humble people were exploited and trampled like dirt. The people of Israel were involved in the immoral practices of religious prostitution (v7). Garments that were taken from poor people as pledges for repayment of a loan were not returned at night for warm coverings (as they should have been, according to God's Law in Deuteronomy 34). Instead they were spread around the pagan altars for people to lie on during idolatrous rituals. Wine that was confiscated as fines was drunk in honor of false gods (v8). For these sins (and other sins), Israel would be judged.

Before the axe of judgment would fall, however, God reminded the nation of all of His acts of mercy toward them throughout their history (v9-12). The people of Israel could not deny God's patience and kindness.

The details of judgment were given in verses 13-16. As a heavy cart crushes and grinds whatever it rolls over, so God would crush the sinful nation (v13). No one would escape the onslaught when the Assyrians overran the northern kingdom. Samaria, the capital, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Even the strong and the swift did not escape, just as predicted in these verses. God meant what He said. He will judge social injustice.

You don't have to look very far to see social injustice in our country. Sadly, it's happening at all levels. Remember - God will judge social injustice.

Practical Application

Don't "stumble a Nazirite"!

Amos 2:12 - *"But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink..."*

The Nazirites were a special group of individuals in Israel. They were committed to serving the Lord, even to the point of taking a special vow before God. (Read about the Nazirites and their vow in Numbers 6.) One of the conditions of their vow was that a Nazirite would never drink wine or any fermented drink. It appears that the Nazirites in the northern kingdom of Israel were tricked or forced or somehow persuaded to break this vow before the Lord. The breaking of a vow made before the Lord was (and still is) very wrong, and those who caused it to happen would be judged.

Is it possible to "stumble a Nazirite" today? In application, we could ask, "Is it possible to cause a committed Christian to 'stumble' today?" Yes, it is. Sadly, many committed young people have been tripped up in their Christian growth by the un-Christ-like lifestyle and talk of worldly believers. For example, I personally know some committed young Christians who were ready to be foreign missionaries, but they were hampered and persuaded not to go by Christians who were not sensitive to what God wanted, or who had a different agenda for the young people. Stumbling a committed Christian is a serious sin. Don't stumble a "Nazirite"!