

The First Sermon of Judgment to the Northern Kingdom

Amos 3

Amos 3:1-8 – *“Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:*

2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” 3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? 4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing? 5 Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it? Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all? 6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?”

Background Notes

Amos prophesied in the mid-8th century BC, around 760 BC. Here's a brief sketch of Israel's history up to this point. After the Exodus from Egypt and the Conquest of the land of Canaan, there was the period of the Judges for about 350 years. The Judges were followed by the United Kingdom of Israel under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. The United Kingdom began in 1051BC, and lasted for 120 years. (This is easy to remember because Saul, David, and Solomon each reigned for 40 years.) Then after Solomon's death in 931 BC, the United Kingdom split apart. Ten tribes formed the northern kingdom, called Israel, and two the remaining 2 tribes formed the southern kingdom, which was called Judah. Each of these kingdoms had its own set of kings – 19 kings in the north and 20 kings in the south. Amos prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II, the thirteenth king of the northern kingdom, and Uzziah, the tenth king of the southern kingdom. *“The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders 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” (Amos 1:1)*

Amos lived in Judah, the southern kingdom, and he was a sheep breeder. He was more than a shepherd. He was similar to a cattle rancher, but he ranched herds of sheep. God called Amos to leave his “secular” employment in Judah, and become a “foreign missionary” to Israel, the northern kingdom. At this time, the northern kingdom was doing quite well, both materially and militarily. It had regained some of its lost territory, and the people were quite prosperous. But they were morally and spiritually corrupt, and they were characterized by social injustice.

There are many parallels between the northern kingdom of Israel in Amos' day, and our own nation today. Amos spoke out against these sins of corruption and injustice - and we need to do the same. In eight prophecies, three sermons, and six visions, Amos pronounced judgment on the kingdom of Israel for turning away from the ways of the Lord. The first of the three sermons of judgment was recorded in Amos 3.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's judgment is not without reason.

When God's judgment falls on a nation (or an individual), there are good reasons. This point was very clear made in Amos 3:1-6. God had shown favor to Israel. He had brought them out of Egypt (v1), and He had chosen them above all the other peoples on earth (v2). *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."*

But notice what God did **not** say. He did not say that He would overlook their failures and sins because they were his chosen people. No. God said He would have to punish them for all their iniquities.

Privilege increases responsibility. *"To whom much is given, much is required"* (Luke 12:48). That is a biblical principle. Punishment is commensurate with privilege. And *"judgment begins with the household of God"* (1 Peter 4:17). Hebrews 12:6 says, *"Those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines."* These are biblical principles that were also taught by the Old Testament prophet Amos. God's judgment is not without reason.

In verses 3-6, a series of seven questions were given. They were designed to demonstrate the point that God's judgment is not without reason.

For every effect, there is a cause. Things don't just happen by accident or chance. When people disagree (v3), or lions roar and growl (v4), or birds fall into traps (v5), or warning trumpets are blown (v6) – there is a **reason** for all these things. For every effect there is a cause. The point was that, just as there is cause and effect in the natural world, so there is cause and effect in God's dealing with people. God's judgment is not without reason.

Notice also - the particular examples that Amos chose in these verses seem to illustrate the progressive nature of Israel's falling away from the Lord: from disagreement (v3) to the calamity that the Lord must bring on them (v6).

Calamity, or natural disaster, is a good translation of the Hebrew word that is rendered "*calamity*" in verse 6: *"If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?"* Some translations use the English word "*evil*," which is misleading. **God is never the cause of moral evil.** But God can allow disaster, to fulfill His purposes. Calamity or disaster was coming upon Israel for her sins. God's judgment is not without reason.

2. God's judgment is not without warning.

Amos 3:7-11 - *Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.*

⁸ *A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?* ⁹ *Proclaim in the palaces at*

Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say: 'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria. See great tumults in her midst, and the oppressed within her. ¹⁰ For they do not know to do right,' says the Lord, 'who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.'"

¹¹ Therefore thus says the Lord God: "An adversary shall be all around the land. He shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered."

No one can say that God doesn't send a warning before He sends judgment! Notice verse 7. God always sends a warning through His prophets before He acts in judgment. Think of Noah, warning of the great Flood to come. Think of Joseph, warning of the famine to come. Think of Elijah, warning Ahab that his dynasty would fall. And Amos warned Israel that judgment was about to fall. As a roaring lion, the Lord was speaking in no uncertain terms: "*A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken!*"

In verses 9-10, the surrounding pagan nations were invited to assemble on the mountains around Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were invited to assemble and observe the social sins of Israel. Israel had forgotten how to do what was right in God's eyes. It's a sad day when even the world is able to condemn God's people for wrongdoing. We can be sure the news media will make the most of it.

The judgment that was prophesied in verse 11 surely came upon Israel. About 40 years after Amos preached this sermon, the Assyrian Empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. 2 Kings 17:5-6: "*Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria.*" Samaria and Israel fell in 722 BC - but not without warning! God's judgment is not without warning.

3. God's judgment is not without mercy.

Amos 3:12-15 - *Thus says the Lord: "As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria— in the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch! ¹³ Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," says the Lord God, the God of hosts. ¹⁴ "That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions, I will also visit destruction on the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. ¹⁵ I will destroy the winter house along with the summerhouse. The houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end," says the Lord.*

After reading verses 12-15 you're probably thinking, "Isn't the doctrinal point that God's judgment is not without mercy? Where's the mercy in this passage?" It's true that there doesn't seem to be any mercy in this prediction of the destruction of Samaria. If you visit the ruins of ancient Samaria today, you'll see proof of this destruction - including the remains of foundations of some of the palatial houses that were destroyed at that time.

There doesn't seem to be any mercy in view. In fact, the phrase "*and the horns of the altar shall be cut off*" conveys the fact that there would be no mercy (v14), because there was a tradition that guilty people could grab the horns of the altar and plead for mercy. God was saying that if the horns of the altar were cut off, no mercy would be shown.

So where's the mercy? I think a glimpse of God's mercy was seen in the illustration of the shepherd saving a **remnant** from the mouth of the lion that devoured the sheep (v12). Only two legs and a piece of an ear were left. That's not much of a remnant - but at least it's something.

The main point of Amos 3 was Israel's coming destruction - but God's mercy was a logically implied point. God's judgment is not without mercy. The prophecy that was illustrated by the shepherd has certainly been fulfilled. A remnant of the northern kingdom of Israel has been preserved, because **all** the tribes of Israel are represented in the Jewish people today. God's judgment is not without mercy.

Practical Application

Have you heeded God's clear warning?

The kingdom of Israel did not heed God's warning, even though it was as loud and clear as a lion's roar: "*A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken!*"

God has spoken. Have you paid attention to God's warning?

You may ask, "What warning?" What about the warning the Lord Jesus gave in John 3:36: "*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*" Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? If you have, then you have eternal life. But if you haven't, then you do **not** have eternal life. And - according to God's Word - God's wrath or judgment remains on you!

That's quite a warning, isn't it? It's like the roar of a lion! And it's very clear. Don't try to say, "There may be a different interpretation of this verse." No. There is no different way to interpret the Lord's warning in this verse. So if you're not a Christian, are you going to believe - and act upon - this clear warning? Or will you be like the people of Israel, who didn't believe the clear warning that God sent through His prophet Amos - and thus they perished?

God means what He says. Have you heeded God's clear warning?