

Message #2

Amos 1:2-2:5

Most of the time when you visit a zoo, the lions are very docile and mellow. They look so well-fed and rested that it seems you could just go right out with them and pet them. But that is not always the case. Years ago in a zoo, some people were walking by a lion cage and the lion charged the people. Now fortunately it could not get to the people, but the first glimpse they got of the lions was a very scary perspective. If you would have happened to be walking by that cage when that happened, it would have been a scary proposition.

As we go through the Bible, we get many different glimpses of God. Sometimes God appears as a loving and gracious God, but sometimes He appears as a ferocious judgmental God. Once God decides to charge and attack, there is no stopping Him. No walls can ever prevent God from demolishing His target.

As the book of Amos begins, we get our first introductory portrait of God. It is not a loving portrait; in fact, it is scary. In **verse 2**, Amos gives us our first glimpse of God and the first glimpse we get of God in the book is that He is “**roaring from Zion**” and it is not having a positive affect on the people.

Now the word “roar” describes the “roar” (yish-ag) of a lion that is about to pounce on its prey (Job 4:10; Jer. 2:15; Zech. 11:3). **The implication of the opening statement is that a righteous, ferocious judgment of God is on the way and it is about to pounce on His own people.**

Amos says in **verse 2**, that when God sends this judgment, “the shepherds will mourn” because judgment will destroy rich pasture lands, and even the fertile wet grain lands of the Mt. Carmel ridge would dry up and turn into a barren, non-fruit producing area. Mount Carmel was known for its luxurious and abundant growth (Song of Sol. 7:5-6). It was a wealthy “crown” area in Israel.

Israel thought she was so secure and self-reliant and successful, but she had turned away from God and His Word and God says I am about to level you and you are about to be hit with inescapable horror.

So the book of Amos opens with God roaring like a Lion out of Israel and specifically Jerusalem. When we analyze the verses, what we will conclude is this:

AFFLUENT RELIGIOUS PEOPLE IN ANY LOCATION NEED TO REALIZE THAT THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD IS COMING, BECAUSE HE HAS KEPT TRACK OF ALL THE EVIL SINS THAT HAVE BEEN COMMITTED AND WHEN IT REACHES A CERTAIN LEVEL, IF PEOPLE DO NOT GET SERIOUS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING AND OBEYING HIS WORD, HE WILL SEND FEROCIOUS JUDGMENT.

Now we will observe that there is a numerical formula that is used in all of the opening judgment oracles. The formula is “for three transgressions...and for four” (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). If you add the three and the four, you get seven and we know that seven is a number God uses for completion. **So when the sin of a city, a state or a nation, or individual or church reaches a certain complete level, God will turn from offering grace as a Lamb to giving judgment as a Lion.** God is a sin-counting God. He counts sins one, two, three, four. He has the complete record.

Now as this book of Amos begins, God starts targeting cities and groups with a judgment based on the sin He has calculated. He has kept a record of multiple sins committed by each specific group. He has the record and He has kept the list. One commentator said what this formula means is that God has kept the record of all crimes and sins that have been committed. However, as we will see, in each case, He really zeroes in on one particular sin that apparently pushes Him over the edge.

Now the specific word that Amos repeats for sin is the noun “transgressions” (pish-ay). This is not the normal word used for sins or transgressions. **This word has in mind specific defection and turning away from God and His Word** (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 695). So the emphasis here is that the people heard of or knew of the Word of God and they defected away from it time and time again.

In each case He promises He will “send fire” (1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5). Now this has an immediate application to the fact that God would send in some military force to dominate the people as a direct judgment from Him and they literally would burn much of the city with fire. But beyond this there may be a greater prophetic point in that during the Tribulation God literally will send fire from heaven down to destroy these very areas (i.e. Rev. 8).

What we may conclude from this is that God has the record of all sins committed by all people, but really only one is needed to bring about His wrath. We want to examine seven of the oracles today.

Now in these first seven oracles, God reveals that He has kept the record of the surrounding nations of Israel and what they have done against His people. God promises He will curse those who curse Israel and this text proves He is a God of His Word. Any city, state, nation, church or individual that demeans Israel will pay. God will target these people with His judgments. In fact, I am certain that when Israel first heard Amos give these oracles, they probably said—“we like this guy and what he is saying” because he is telling us that God is about to wipe out all those people and places who sinned against us.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #1 – The judgment against Damascus, modern day Syria. 1:3-5

Now Damascus was the capital of Syria and it was located north of Israel. It was a center of culture and influence. God held this city and country responsible for doing many negative and horrible things against Israel.

One particular sin that God recorded was that she “threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron” (v. 3).

Now the specific episode being referred to here occurred under the authority of Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad, who were Syrian kings who had brutalized God’s people (II Kings 10:32/13:7). Hazael of Damascus took much of Israel’s territory including sections of Gilead.

Apparently what they did was to force prisoners of war to lie down while an iron threshing sledge was drawn over their backs. An iron threshing sledge was an agricultural implement, like a plow. Parallel boards were fastened together and iron points were driven through the boards so they could plow the fields.

What these Syrians did was to force these defenseless people to lie down and then they brutalized them by driving the plow over them. **God kept track of every bit of it. Now these events occurred well over 200 years before Amos.** What this tells us is that **God saw it and did not forget about it and it was now time for Him to do something about it.**

Now it appears from this section that God does have certain rules of war. In war people die. However, a wise winning military does not do unusual painful, degrading things to their POW’s. God takes notice of it if they do.

What God promised to do is described in **verses 4-5**. He would send fire, which sometimes refers metaphorically to military action in which they would burn cities during war (II Kings 8:12; 25:9). He would also destroy their stronghold city and permit all of Syria, including cities and valleys, to be overrun. All of their major cities and leaders would be destroyed.

Just because God does not punish a city, state or nation immediately does not mean He will not eventually. For Damascus, it took about 200 years and then His judgment came.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #2 – The judgment against Gaza, modern day Gaza Strip. **1:6-8**

The judgment named here is a judgment against the Philistines and, specifically, four of the big five cities of the Philistines (Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Gath).

The one city of the pentapolis that is left out of this list is “Gath,” which Uzziah destroyed (II Chron. 26:6), probably a couple of years before Amos prophesied in 765 B.C.. David and Solomon had pretty much kept the Philistines in check, but they still rose up and did bad things to the Israelites. Amos begins by telling the Philistines that God has kept track and has counted the sins you have committed against His people.

We know according to II Chronicles 21:16-17, the Arabs and Philistines raided Judah actually as a judgment led by God. God used them to judge His own people.

However, according to **verse 6**, what **the Philistines did that would ultimately bring about His wrath was that they sold God's people into slavery for the sake of money. They deported many Jews out of their land and sold them as slaves for commercial purposes.**

What God promises He would do in **verses 7-8** was to totally and absolutely destroy these cities and these people. He would make them extinct. According to historical records the Egyptians and Assyrians attacked this area just a few years after Amos made this prophecy and the only thing that has been found to this date of the Philistines is the remnants of one Philistine temple (Merrill Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1005). **Every corporation, every city, state and national government should realize that if you harm God's people, He does keep the record and He will eventually destroy those who did it.**

JUDGMENT ORACLE #3 – The judgment against Tyre, modern day Lebanon. **1:9-10**

Tyre was a rich commercial trading city that dominated the Mediterranean world. During the days of Solomon, he made a covenant with Hiram, king of Tyre, in order to do good business (I Kings 5:1-12*; 15-26; 9:11-14). But after the days of Solomon, the city of Tyre became proud of itself and started doing negative things against God's people.

God says I have kept the count of the specific transgressions and what you specifically did in **verse 9** was you broke the "covenant of brotherhood." They broke the agreement they had with Israel. They decided to go back on their word and they went in cahoots with the Arabs of Edom and turned the whole population of Jews over to them. They completely went back on their word and they mistreated the people of Israel. They broke their covenants and their promises, so God says I have seen it all and I will break you.

When a political leader promises something and then says I got reelected so forget the promise, God doesn't forget it. You promise as a politician that you will stand with Israel and then go back on your word and stand with Israel's enemies, and God will hold you accountable. You have lied to His people.

When we make a promise or a treaty with a nation or an individual or a bank and then go back on our word, God takes notice of that and, ultimately, if it is not resolved He will settle the score. We need to be people of our word.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #4 – The judgment against Edom, modern day Jordan (south).
1:11-12

We may remember that Esau was called Edom, which means red. He sold his birthright to Jacob for some red stuff and there has been bitter hostility between the Arabs and Israelis ever since. What is described here is Arab hatred for Israel.

God has kept the complete record of the Arab hatred for Israel and has counted all the transgressions she has committed against her. What ultimately led God to judge Edom, the straw that broke the camel's back, is in **verse 11**; he chased his own brother with a sword and showed no compassion at all and continually maintained his fury against Israel. Isn't this true? Have not the Arabs continually hated Israel?

The Edomites, who are Arabs, pursued his own brother the Israelites with a sword. There was no compassion but a total hatred and hostility. At least when there was a civil war in this country, we put a stop to it. There came a point when the nation needed to be healed and that happened under President Lincoln. But the Arabs have always hated Israel and they do to this day.

So God says I will send my judgment against two of its key cities: Teman and Bozrah. God says, "I will consume them." Now both of these cities were destroyed; however, there are people today who still live in these areas. So we believe God is still holding these people accountable and during the Tribulation, He will wipe them all out.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #5 – The judgment against Ammon, modern day Jordan (north).
1:13-15

The Ammonites were also distant relatives of the Israelites. The book of Genesis traces the ancestry of the Ammonites to one of Lot's two sons by incest with his daughters (Gen. 19:38). But the Ammonites were never really Israel's friends and they invented false religion.

God says to these Ammonites, I have counted your transgressions. What is described in **verse 13** is horrible and brutal. Just to get more land and enlarge their boundaries, they literally attacked women and ripped out helpless babies who were still inside the pregnant Gileadite women located to the northeast. They did not even do these terrible things because of war; they did this out of greed. They simply wanted more land and they attacked innocent pregnant women to get it.

God says in **verse 14**, I will bring a ferocious military against you and I will destroy Rabbah. Rabbah was the chief and sacred city of the Ammonites (Deut. 3:11; II Sam. 12:26; 17:27; Jer. 49:2; Ez. 21:20). It was a fortress city with a wall and citadels. The Assyrians and the Egyptians did conquer this area, but this city is still in existence and is known by its modern name "Amman," the capital of Jordan.

Notice that God predicts the complete fulfillment of this prophecy "on the day of tempests." There can be no doubt that God is going to target this very city for its evil against Israel during the Tribulation and He will bring her down along with their king and political leaders.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #6 – The judgment against Moab, modern day Jordan (central).
2:1-3

Now Amos makes a prediction concerning the people who live to the southeast of Israel. God has kept the record of their sins and one in particular He just won't let go. Moab desecrated the grave of the Edomite king. They dug up his body and burned it to lime.

There is an outrageous incident recorded in II Kings 3:26-27 that occurred about 200 years before Amos that may be the time when this happened. Moab went to attack the King of Edom, who was an ally of the Israelites, but he and his men were turned back, so he sacrificed his own son as a human sacrifice to his false deity and went home.

Apparently sometime later, because of his hatred for Israel, he dug up the body of the Edomite king who had allied himself with Israel and burned it to lime. Now who would keep record of what happened to a dead body some 200 years ago? Who would keep track of the fact that you so hated Israel that you dug up a grave? God kept track of every bit of it.

God says I will bring you down. God used the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III to fulfill this just 20 years after Amos made this prediction. He did attack these very places and he did destroy the people. However, there are some things predicted here that still have not been fulfilled. You can be certain they will be.

JUDGMENT ORACLE #7 – The judgment against Judah, modern day Israel. **2:4-5**

Now to this point, these prophecies have been leveled against surrounding enemies of Israel and I am sure that God's people said—praise God this is good. God is going to judge our enemies and bring them all down. But as we come to **verse 4**, God says I have been counting the transgressions of my own people.

But now God turns His target to Judah. And the specific sin that God holds them accountable for is specifically stated: they rejected the Word of God and did not obey the Word of God and they listened to the lies of false religion.

Now do not overlook what is said here. **The sin of not carefully studying the Word of God is contextually equated for God's people with these other horrific sins committed by these surrounding heathen nations.**

According to **verse 4**, God's own people rejected the Law of the LORD; they did not purpose to obey God. The fathers did not teach their children to carefully understand and apply God's Word to their lives. In fact, their fathers led them away from a focus on God and His Word.

The parents did not teach their children the importance of the Word of God. They taught them the importance of religion, but not the importance of the Word of God.

So God says I will bring Jerusalem down, and just a little over one hundred years later God used the Babylonians to do just that.

Now I want us to think for a moment about the seriousness of accurately understanding and applying God's Word. God puts the sin of not being serious about His Word in the same context with ripping open pregnant women and digging up dead bodies and burning them.

We are a country that is mocking God. We mock Jesus Christ. We mock the Bible. We mock morality. We mock prayer. We are a God-mocking country. We have politicians who will go on TV and lie to your face and go back on their word. Here is what Amos says—God has record of it all and He will bring it all down and He will send His judgment.

But the thing we better be doing is making sure we want to know God's Word so we can obey God's Word. Because God watches His people and Amos says He is a Lion who can roar against them.