

A Prophet for Today

Everyone Equal Before God

Amos 1:3-2:16

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Introduction

How do you think that the Old Testament prophets delivered their messages from God to the people? Did they just sense God wanting them to say something and so they stood up in the market and start speaking? Was it a sort of a “stream of consciousness” extemporaneous speaking?

Hardly. God’s Spirit undoubtedly impressed upon the prophets some truth that he wanted them to communicate. The prophets must have studied the Scriptures that they had access to and thought long and hard about how to craft what they needed to communicate to the people. We will see this particularly clearly in the passage we are going to study today from the Prophet Amos.

Amos was the first of the writing prophets. He came from the southern kingdom of Judah but his ministry was primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel. Both Judah and Israel were enjoying a time of tremendous prosperity, even though there were tensions between the two kingdoms.

In today’s lesson, we are going to examine the prophecy of Amos in which he announces God’s judgment on the nations surrounding the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. But, surprisingly, he announces God’s judgment on Israel and Judah as well. As one examines this prophecy, which was delivered in the northern kingdom’s city of Bethel, one discovers a carefully prepared outline. There are repetitive patterns that mark one nation from the other. There are opening and closing statements, indictments for sin, and punishments promised. It was a wonderful, well-crafted, and powerful message.

Scripture

Let us read Amos 1:3-2:16:

³Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. ⁴So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Benhadad. ⁵I will break the gate-bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir,” says the Lord.

⁶Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. ⁷So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds. ⁸I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,” says the Lord God.

⁹Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. ¹⁰So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds.”

¹¹Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. ¹²So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.”

¹³Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. ¹⁴So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour her strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; ¹⁵and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together,” says the Lord.

^{2:1}Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. ²So I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet; ³I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its princes with him,” says the Lord.

⁴Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. ⁵So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.”

⁶Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—⁷those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; ⁸they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

⁹“Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and

who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. ¹⁰ Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹ And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the Lord.

¹² "But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'

¹³ "Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. ¹⁴ Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; ¹⁵ he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; ¹⁶ and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," declares the Lord. (Amos 1:3-2:16)

Lesson

Amos 1:3-2:16 shows us that God's judgment falls on all who sin against him.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God's Judgment on the Nations (1:3-2:3)
2. God's Judgment on His People (2:4-16)

I. God's Judgment on the Nations (1:3-2:3)

First, let's look at God's judgment on the nations.

Amos pronounced God's judgment on six nations surrounding Judah (in the south) and Israel (in the north). One commentator shows on a map how Amos was winding a noose

around the neck of Israel, as it were, because there was a pattern of nations upon whom judgment was pronounced.

Regarding each judgment, one also sees a pattern. The judgment against each nation (and also on God's people, Judah and Israel) begins with the statement, **“Thus says the Lord”** (1:3; 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:13; 2:1; 2:4; 2:6).

Moreover, the judgment against the nations—though not every nation—concludes with **“says the Lord”** (1:5; 1:15; 2:3), **“says the Lord God”** (1:8), or **“declares the Lord”** (2:16).

Furthermore, you probably noticed the opening phrase of each judgment: **“For three transgressions of [the nation], and for four...”** (1:3; 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:13; 2:1; 2:4; 2:6). I think the note in *The ESV Study Bible* has the most helpful explanation of what this phrase means: “This poetic expression is used to introduce the judgment upon all seven of the neighboring nations, and upon Israel as well (2:6). It is a way of expressing totality: ‘three’ expresses the plural in Hebrew, and by raising it to ‘four’ the idea of multiplicity is conveyed.”¹ These words are very significant because Amos is saying that God is no longer going to show mercy but is instead going to pour out his wrath in judgment upon people. God is a God of mercy and people often mistake his slowness to judge as approval of their sin. But that is not the case. God's mercy will be replaced with judgment upon those who do not repent.

Each judgment includes an indictment of the sin of the nation, as well as a sentence against each nation. I am not going to spend time doing a deep dive into all that is said in the judgment against each nation. I want to summarize each sin and each sentence of judgment against the nation. At the end of the message, I will suggest two closing thoughts.

¹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1659.

A. *God's Judgment on Syria (1:3-5)*

First, notice God's judgment on Syria.

Amos says in verse 3, **“Thus says the Lord: ‘For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.’ ”** First, notice judgment is pronounced on **Damascus**. The city of **Damascus** was the capital of Syria. So, the judgment is not just on **Damascus** but on all of Syria. We sometimes speak of “Washington” to refer to the entire United States and not just to the city of Washington. The use of the city to represent the nation is also used for Gaza (to represent Philistia) and Tyre (to represent Phoenicia).

The sin of Syria was that they threshed the Israelite city of Gilead. God said in verse 3b, **“they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.”** The people of Damascus brutally beat the people of Gilead with **threshing sledges of iron**.

The sentence against Syria was that they were burned with fire and sent into exile. God said in verses 4a and 5b, **“So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael,... and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir.”**

B. *God's Judgment on Philistia (1:6-8)*

Second, notice God's judgment on Philistia.

The sin of Philistia was that they sold God's people into slavery. God said in verse 6b, **“they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom.”** Prisoners of war usually became slaves. But Philistia's sin was that they sold women and children into slavery as well.

The sentence against Philistia was that they would be torched and

the remnant of the Philistines would be killed. God said in verses 7a and 8b, **“So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza,... and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish.”** Once again, as it is so often, God uses fire as his method of punishment.

C. *God’s Judgment on Phoenicia (1:9-10)*

Third, notice God’s judgment on Phoenicia.

The sin of Phoenicia was that they betrayed God’s people and broke their treaty with them. God said in verse 9b, **“they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.”** The **covenant** spoken of here is not God’s covenant with his people but is rather a treaty. The Phoenicians violated that treaty and betrayed God’s people.

The sentence against Phoenicia was that their city will be burned. God said in verse 10, **“So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds.”** Once again, God used fire in his punishment of this nation.

D. *God’s Judgment on Edom (1:11-12)*

Fourth, notice God’s judgment on Edom.

The sin of Edom was that they bounded Israel with the sword. God said in verse 11b, **“he pursued his brother with the sword.”** Edom was the descendants of Esau, which is why they are referred to as **“brother.”** The Edomites used every opportunity to express their wrath and enmity against Israel.

The sentence against Edom was that their cities will be burned. Again, God used fire to punish Edom, as he said in verse 12, **“So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.”**

E. *God's Judgment on Ammon (1:13-15)*

Fifth, notice God's judgment on Ammon.

The sin of Ammon was that they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead to enlarge their territory. God said in verse 13b, **“they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border.”** Apparently, Ammon wanted to enlarge their borders. In their war against Gilead, they killed pregnant women and their children.

The sentence against Ammon was that their city will be burned and their royal leadership will be banished into exile. God said in verses 14a and 15a, **“So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, ... and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together.”** Fire is again used by God as punishment.

F. *God's Judgment on Moab (2:1-3)*

And sixth, notice God's judgment on Moab.

The sin of Moab was that they desecrated graves, showing no respect for the dead. God said of Moab in verse 1b of chapter 2, **“he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom.”** Not content to leave the dead king in his grave, the Moabites got his bones and burned them to desecrate his memory.

The sentence against Moab was that they will be burned, and their leadership will be killed. God said in verses 2a and 3a, **“So I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and... I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its princes with him.”**

II. **God's Judgment on His People (2:4-16)**

And second, let's look at God's judgment on his people.

Amos' message was directed against Israel. However, I am including Judah as the people of God because both Judah and Israel were at one time united. And both nations had the law of God and knew what God expected of them.

A. God's Judgment on Judah (2:4-5)

First, notice God's judgment on Judah.

The sin of Judah was that they rejected the law of God. God said in verse 4a, **“they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes.”** Here Amos was speaking against his own people, for he was from Judah. He noted that the people of Judah did not live by God's law. They did what they wanted to do.

The sentence against Judah was that they will be burned and the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed. God said in verse 5, **“So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.”** Amos preached this message in about 760 BC. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, and its citizens were taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

B. God's Judgment on Israel (2:6-16)

And second, notice God's judgment on Israel.

At this point in Amos' message, the people listening to him must have felt good. All the nations surrounding them, including their brothers to the south, were going to be punished by God. But here is where Amos turned the tables and pointed the finger at them. James Montgomery Boice tells the story of a woman who attended an evangelistic meeting and was delighted when she learned that the preacher would talk about sin. When he preached against strong drink, she cried,

“Preach it, brother!” When he declaimed against tobacco, she shouted, “Amen!” The minister’s third point was a condemnation of gossip, and she leaned over to her neighbor and said, “Now he’s not preachin’; he’s meddlin’.”²

The sins of Israel were numerous, and they included bribery (2:6), cruelty to the poor (2:7a), immorality (2:7b), hypocrisy (2:8), and tempting the godly to sin (2:9-12).

The sentence against Israel was that their enemies will defeat them. This is seen in verses 13-16. Israel was defeated by Assyria and taken into exile in 722 BC, less than 40 years after Amos’ prophecy to them.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God’s judgment in Amos 1:3-2:16, let us commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness.

Let me set down two closing thoughts.

First, none of these surrounding nations had any relationship with God. They did not have the Law of God. But they did have God’s law written on their hearts (Romans 2:14-15). And the point is that God will hold them responsible for sins that violate his law that is written on their hearts.

Second, God’s people had the law of God and yet they rejected God’s law. There is a tendency to think that we are fine because we belong to a church or have made a profession of faith or claim to be Christians. However, the root of true faith produces the fruit of righteousness. In other words, a Christian is one who seeks to obey all of God’s word. Let us commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness to our God. Amen.

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 169.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org