

# **A Prophet for Today**

## **Judgment on God's Elect**

*Amos 3:1-15*

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# Judgment on God's Elect

## Introduction

Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, wrote a book in 2009 titled, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century*. In the book, he noted, “When it was hard to be a Jew, people stayed Jewish. When it was easy to be a Jew, people stopped being Jewish. Globally, this is the major Jewish problem of our time.”<sup>1</sup>

I would put it to you that this is not only a Jewish problem. It is a phenomenon that is true of Christianity as well. My anecdote to support this comes from a visit back home to South Africa in 1997. I left South Africa in 1983 to come and study in the United States. That was during the height of apartheid. The years after my departure saw an increase in tensions, uncertainty, and violence in South Africa. Apartheid officially came to an end in 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela and the new government. When I returned to South Africa in 1997, I visited my pastor, Frank Retief, in Cape Town. He was a wonderful pastor and a very gifted evangelist. Under his ministry, the church he planted in 1968 grew to several thousand attendees each week. I asked him how the ministry was going. He said that now that apartheid was gone—which was a very good thing—people no longer had to deal with uncertainty and violence as they did during the last years of apartheid. During the final years of apartheid, people were afraid for their lives and were spiritually attentive. But now that apartheid was gone, people were far less interested in spiritual matters.

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* (Schocken Books, 2009), 51.

Isn't that true today? There are countries in the world where there are severe penalties for anyone who professes faith in Christ. In those countries, people don't pretend to be Christians. When it is hard to be a Christian, people stay Christian. On the other hand, when there are no consequences for being a Christian, people may profess to be Christians. They may want the benefits of eternal life. And there may also be benefits to being associated with a Christian church.

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.

Amos was sent by God to warn the professing people of God of impending judgment. The people of Israel (and Judah) were experiencing tremendous prosperity. And they believed that was a sign of God's blessing on them. So, one can imagine their surprise when the new preacher in town warned them of God's impending judgment on them.

## Scripture

Let us read Amos 3:1-15:

**<sup>1</sup>Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:**

**<sup>2</sup>“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.**

**<sup>3</sup>“Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?**

**<sup>4</sup>Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?  
Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken**

nothing?

<sup>5</sup>Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing?

<sup>6</sup>Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

<sup>7</sup>“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

<sup>8</sup>The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?”

<sup>9</sup>Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, “Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst.”

<sup>10</sup>“They do not know how to do right,” declares the Lord, “those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”

<sup>11</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord God: “An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered.”

<sup>12</sup>Thus says the Lord: “As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.

<sup>13</sup>“Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord God, the God of hosts,

<sup>14</sup>“that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

<sup>15</sup>I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end,” declares the Lord.  
(Amos 3:1-15)

## Lesson

Amos 3:1-15 shows us the significance of four divine calls.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God Calls His People (3:1-2)
2. God Calls His Preachers (3:3-8)
3. God Calls for Witnesses (3:9-10)
4. God Calls for Judgment (3:11-15)

### I. God Calls His People (3:1-2)

First, God calls his people.

Amos said in Amos 3:1, **“Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt.”**

Amos let his hearers know that what he had to say was from **the Lord**. Amos was not concocting a message for his audience. He had received a message from **the Lord**.

Moreover, this message that Amos was declaring to God's people was in fact a **“word that the Lord has spoken against”** them. This was no message of encouragement or delight. Amos was bringing an indictment against the people of God from the Lord.

Amos stated that this word that he was bringing from the Lord was against the **“people of Israel, against the whole family that [God] brought up out of the land of Egypt.”** The Lord was addressing not just the northern nation of Israel but all of Israel, that is, Israel and Judah. God brought the entire family up out of Egypt under Moses.

So, Amos was God's preacher to God's people. The

words that he had just spoken must have gotten their attention. Then Amos began with the words from the Lord, which were, **“You only have I known of all the families of the earth”** (3:2a). Here God made it clear that he was in a covenant relationship with Israel and no other people. God’s people should have remembered what Moses said in Deuteronomy 7:1–11:

<sup>1</sup> “When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, <sup>2</sup> and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. <sup>3</sup> You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup> for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. <sup>5</sup> But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.

<sup>6</sup> “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant

and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,<sup>10</sup> and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face.<sup>11</sup> You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.

I imagine at this point that Amos' listeners sat back and thought to themselves, "Yes, that is right. God has made a covenant with us. We are his people. All is right in the world because we have a special relationship with God. After all, all the prosperity we are experiencing must be a sign of his blessing."

What Amos said next must have stunned his listeners. Instead of God saying that he was blessing them, the Lord said, **"... therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"** (3:2b). What? Was God going to punish his covenant people? Yes. God was going to punish his people because of their sins.

Friends, let us examine ourselves. We profess to be God's people. We claim to have faith in Christ. But are we paying attention to God's word? Do we conform our lives to what God calls us to be and do in his word?

## II. God Calls His Preachers (3:3-8)

Second, God calls his preachers.

At this point, the people of God, struggling with their stunning surprise at what God was promising to do against them, must have thought to themselves, "Who is this preacher? He is just a shepherd and farmer, and now he claims to be a prophet of God. What kind of authority does he have?" Amos even dared to preach uninvited at the king's chapel at Bethel, where King Jeroboam's chaplain told Amos to go home and

preach in Judah (Amos 7:10-16).

Amos continued speaking, arguing from effect to cause. If two people walk together, they do so because they have agreed to a time and place to do so (3:3). If the lion roars, it is because he has caught his prey (3:4). If a trap springs, it means that the bird has been caught (3:5). If the people in a city are afraid, it is because the trumpet has sounded, warning them of impending danger (3:6). These are obvious facts of life that anyone would acknowledge.

Then Amos made his point: *If an untrained shepherd was preaching God's word, then it means that God has called him to do so.* Amos would not have chosen this vocation for himself. He was minding his sheep and tending his figs. But God called him and sent him on a mission to declare the word of God to the people of God, as he said later in Amos 7:14–15, “Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, ‘I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.” ’ ” Here in our text, Amos said in verses 7-8, **“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?”**

When D. L. Moody began to preach, some people said, “What can this uneducated shoe salesman say to us?” And when Billy Sunday began to hold evangelistic campaigns, the sophisticated religious crowd asked, “What can this former baseball player teach us?” But God used Moody and Sunday, not in spite of their humble background, but because of it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Concerned*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1996), 26.



Throughout history, God has called men to speak to his people on his behalf. God used an educated man like Moses, a humble shepherd like David, a priest like Jeremiah, and fishermen like Peter, James, and John. John Calvin was a lawyer, John Bunyan was a tinker (mender of pots and pans), and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a physician when God called them to become preachers.

Amos should be a great encouragement to all believers. God calls people from all walks of life to serve him and speak for him. Amos was a layman. He did not attend Jerusalem Divinity School. But he did know God. He read and studied God's word. He communed with God in prayer. He meditated on the word of God. He was taught by God, and he was willing to obey God when God called by him to service.

Robert Murray McCheyne wrote to a friend, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus."<sup>3</sup> This is not to minimize education. But it is a reminder that God calls those who walk in communion with him.

### III. God Calls for Witnesses (3:9-10)

Third, God calls for witnesses.

Amos pictured a scene in which messengers were sent to two of Israel's greatest oppressors: Philistia (called Ashdod) and Egypt. They were to come to Samaria, which is where Israel was located, and witness Israel's decadence. Amos said in verse 9b, **"Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst."** Amos continued with the word of

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne, *The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter, 1848), 211.

God in verse 10: **“They do not know how to do right,” declares the Lord, “those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”**

The Watergate scandal was a major political scandal in the United States involving the Executive Office of U.S. President Richard Nixon. President Nixon denied involvement in the June 17, 1972 break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Office Building in Washington, D.C. For two years, the Executive Office denied any involvement. But, finally, President Nixon was exposed and he resigned from office.

We tend to hide or deny sin or scandal. What is so interesting is that God does just the opposite. He calls for witnesses—pagan nations—to observe the iniquity of his people. God’s people had become so sinful that it even scandalized the pagan nations. Gordon Keddie rightly observes, “Those to whom Israel ought to have borne witness concerning the righteousness of God now become witnesses of her apostasy!”<sup>4</sup>

Friends, let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that we can get away with sin. Even if we can hide it now, there will come a day when we will stand before our Creator and Judge, and all of heaven will bear witness to our sin and failure.

#### **IV. God Calls for Judgment (3:11-15)**

And fourth, God calls for judgment.

Amos said in verse 11, **“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall**

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *The Lord Is His Name*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), 50.

**be plundered.’ ”** Less than forty years later, in 722 BC, Israel fell to Assyria. They were taken into exile and they never returned to Israel. Judah eventually fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. However, a remnant did return in 516 BC.

Amos also said in verses 13-14: **“Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord God, the God of hosts, “that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.”** The **“horns of the altar”** were the symbols of God’s mercy, to which the guilty may cling (see 1 Kings 1:50-53; 2:28-34) and between which burnt offerings were made and the blood sacrifice for sin smeared, would be destroyed.

As Gordon Keddie observed, “No more mercy; no more grace for the nation—indeed, no more nation!”<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed God’s divine calls in Amos 3:1-15, let us commit ourselves to covenant faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” First, examine to see that you are indeed a Christian.

And second, if you are a Christian, do not presume upon the grace of God. Live in obedience to him every day of your life. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon J. Keddie, *The Lord Is His Name*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1986), 55.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
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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