

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 1:2-2:5**

To learn about God's judgments against the nations surrounding Judah and Israel.

“You’ve Got Mail”

My generation, the millennial generation, might be the last to really remember one of the first (and certainly most popular) web portals: *America Online* (later simply called AOL). The company formed in 1983 but really kicked off in the internet age in February of 1991, launching for DOS and then Windows the next year. It also included AIM, the messenger platform, chatrooms, and an array of other features that were, at that time, cutting edge. However, the most iconic part of the platform was the notification one would receive every time they received an email: “*You’ve got mail!*” I can still hear it in my mind. It was so well-known, they even made a romantic comedy in 1998 with the same name (starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan). Every time new communication hit your inbox, you’d be notified.

In the first part of Amos, this is essentially what is happening. God is notifying the nations, particularly the northern kingdom of Israel, through the prophet Amos. Amos says, “The LORD roars from Zion” (Amos 1:2). This may seem rather mundane given the fact that we believe God speaks through all Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but it cannot be overstated how important this is. We serve a God who speaks. We worship a God who is not silent. Anytime God speaks, the only appropriate response is to drop what we are doing and listen. Everything that proceeds from the mouth of God is important, revelatory, life-changing, and binding on reality.

The Roaring Lion

Amos begins his message by declaring who is doing the actual speaking. Below is a breakdown of two important details:

THE LION ROARS

Verse 2 begins with: “The LORD (Yahweh) roars from Zion.” The imagery here doesn’t quite conjure the horror that this would have been present in the ancient world. It isn’t likely that you would ever run into a lion in your

day-to-day life in the west (thankfully). The ancient world, on the other hand, would have. Travel during this time was nothing at all like what we are used to. They didn't have cars, planes, or trains, and so even basic travel could take weeks or even months. Because there was no electricity to power cities or even street lights, most nights were *very* dark. To be en route, either day or night, and to hear the roar of a lion would have been nothing short of absolutely terrifying. Amos' comparison of Yahweh speaking to that of a lion sets the tone for the incoming message. As the writer of Hebrews said: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

THE SOUTHERN VOICE

The other somewhat inflammatory thing that Amos says is about the location from which God is speaking: "(He) utters His voice from Jerusalem" (Amos 1:1b). The significance of this can only be understood if one understands the geographical and political context. Amos is prophesying to the northern kingdom of Israel. After Solomon's sin led to the split (1 Kings 11:1-13). The only tribe that would remain in the Davidic line was Judah, and it alone would become the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom, then, consisted of more people, and was being ruled at Amos' time by Jeroboam II. The capital of the kingdom, however, moved after the split. The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel became *Shechem* (and then eventually, *Samaria*), while *Jerusalem*, God's holy city, remained in Judah's territory. So, consider what is happening: A southerner named Amos comes to the northern kingdom to prophesy and the first thing he says is, "God's voice is coming to you in judgment, not from within your own kingdom, but from Jerusalem in the south." That God is about to judge them is sobering, and that He is doing so from the south adds insult to injury.

The Judgments Begin

Below is a breakdown of the judgments of God through the prophet Amos.

DAMASCUS (CRUELTY)

Damascus was one of Israel's most powerful enemies, and territory disputes over Gilead were a constant concern. Yahweh speaks against their brutality towards the Gileadites in their conquest of the land. The Septuagint (LXX) and the Qumran fragment of Amos include another detail: "They ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to enlarge their border" (Amos 1:3b, LXX). The process of threshing involved separating seed from stalk. The process could involve sledges with iron spikes driven through them to amp up the process. Did the Arameans from Damascus use these sledges on actual people in Gilead? If so, the level of cruelty they perpetrated is unimaginable. Even taken figuratively, it conveys a strong message.

God will bring fire and destruction, to agents of judgment, upon, "the house of Hazael" and, "the strongholds of Ben-hadad" (Amos 1:4). The only Hazael mentioned in the Old Testament became king by murdering the king, and his son, Ben-hadad, took his place (2 Kgs. 8:14-15; 13:3). An Assyrian document also vouches for a king who founded, "the house of Hazael." God will, "break the gate-bar" (Amos 1:5), a move that would render Damascus defenseless against invading fortresses. The judgment would end with God sending them into exile back to Kir, the place from which they originated (Amos 9:7).

GAZA (TRAFFICKING)

The judgment against Gaza is a result of their human trafficking: "They carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom" (Amos 1:6). This is likely the result of a broken covenant that was founded by David with Hiram (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kgs. 5:1). These communities of people may have been Israelites, and thus Gaza along with Edom and Tyre (who Amos also prophesies against) would have been guilty of breaking this covenant. The result? God will again, send fire to destroy their strongholds, rendering them defenseless

against invasion and dooming them to destruction. This judgment will also come against Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and the Phillistines (Amos 1:8). God is not bound to a specific region or people. He reigns over every nation, and brings judgment to anyone He chooses.

TYRE (TRAFFICKING)

Similar to Gaza, the Lord's judgment comes against Tyre because, "they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood" (Amos 1:9). To not remember a covenant does not mean a lapse in judgment, but is a way of expressing wanton disregard for the covenant agreement. Like David, Solomon also had a treaty with Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Kgs. 5:12). Additionally, Ahab's marriage to Jezebel would have likely entailed a treaty with the Phoenicians (1 Kgs. 16:31). Because of this breach, God will do what He has done so far to the other nations: "I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds" (Amos 1:10).

EDOM (BETRAYAL)

Both Gaza and Tyre sold what was likely Israelite people into slavery, and it was Edom who was purchasing them. Edom's role in the Old Testament is significant. Jacob is the father of the Israelites as Esau, his brother, was the father of the Edomites. Thus, the two nations are often referred to as "brothers" (Obadiah 10). This puts in perspective God's words against them: "He pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11). Edom betrays Israel is ultimately judged not only here, but by the prophet Obadiah as well, and though the Edomites were well protected because of the rocky fortress that they dwelled within (Obadiah 3), they were eventually destroyed by the Babylonians once and for all.

AMMON (CRUELTY)

Like Damascus, the Ammonites were especially cruel to the Gileadites. Whereas the Septuagint and Qumran fragments of Amos describe the violence of the Arameans in Damascus towards pregnant women, the Hebrew here describes the Ammonites in this way. Given that the Gileadites were the target as well, it is not unreasonable to suggest that both groups were guilty of such violent and detestable evil. The result will be, yet again, fire that consumes their strongholds. They will also watch their king taken prisoner into exile (Amos 1:15).

MOAB (CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY)

Moab's sin is not too different from the others, as they all have committed crimes against humanity to some extent. What sets Moab's sin apart is that their actions do not affect Israel directly in any way, and yet God still judges them. They, "burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom" (Amos 2:1). Burning a body to that extent is overkill, and shows they viewed human beings as merely material. Though their target was not an Israelite, it does not matter; the fury of God will always burn towards crimes against humanity, because all of humanity is created in His Image (Gen. 1:27; 9:6). The judgment is similar as well, indicating a decisive military defeat ending all royalty and commanding military officers, laying them to complete destruction.

JUDAH (REBELLION AGAINST GOD)

The final group mentioned here is none other than Amos' own people, the people of the southern kingdom of Judah! There are three specific sins that God mentions, and all of them fall under the category of rebellion against God. First, they, "rejected the law of the LORD" (Amos 2:4). The word for "law" here is the Hebrew word, "Torah," which is subsequently the name of the first five books of the Bible (also called *The Pentateuch*). It is unclear, however, whether God is speaking of the the first five books, or specifically the *Ten Words* or *Ten Commandments* as we call them, which can also be shorthanded as, "Torah." Either way, they had rejected it. This was evidenced by, second, the fact that they, "have not kept His statutes" (Amos 2:4). The specific

direction of God through His law has not been followed. Third, “their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked” (Amos 2:4). The NIV translates this, “false gods,” however the word “gods” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied to try and convey the idea of idolatry. This is not a necessary supposition. To be led astray by lies in the same way that their rebellious ancestors were communicates clearly enough. The result is that, like the other nations, God will make them defenseless.

Sin is Sin

The Old Testament often presents God as specifically protective over Israel; God is, after all, a jealous God (Ex. 20:5). However, God is not indifferent to sins committed by other nations that do not oppress Israel, nor is He indifferent to sins committed by His own covenant people either (as we will see next week). Sin is sin in the sight of a Holy God, and judgment awaits. This was true then, and it is true today. God’s wrath burns against sin (Rom. 1:18), so much so that it requires a propitiation (Rom. 3:24-25). Regardless of class, color of skin, gender, or national identity, all are guilty before Him (Rom. 3:23). While Amos teaches us that our sin will be unbiasedly judged, Jesus offers to unbiasedly take that judgment and trade us for His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Amos, in light of the cross, is startling but not defeating.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 1:2. What is the voice of Yahweh compared to? What effect does it have?

2. Read Amos 1:3-5. What is the transgression of Damascus? What judgment will they receive? Who are Hazael and Ben-hadad (Hint: See above notes)?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 1:6-8. What is the transgression of Gaza? What judgment will they receive? Who else will pay as a result of their judgment?

2. Read Amos 1:9-10. What is the transgression of Tyre? What judgment will they receive? What is the covenant of brotherhood a reference to (Hint: See above notes)?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 1:11-12. What is the transgression of Edom? What judgment will they receive? Who does Edom descend from? Why are they called “brothers” with Israel?

2. Read Amos 1:13-15. What is the transgression of Ammon? What judgment will they receive? What will happen to their kings and princes?
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Day Four

1. Read Amos 2:1-3. What is the transgression of Moab? What does this kind of behavior indicate about how they view human beings? Why is this a problem (Hint: See above notes)? What judgment will they receive? What will happen to their people as a whole?
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2. Read Amos 2:4-5. What are the three transgressions of Judah? What judgment will they receive?
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Week 2 Discussion: Impartiality

One of the key takeaways in our study this week is that there is no special group of people or special group of sin that escapes the judgment of God. Sin is sin. God shows no impartiality, and neither should we (Ja. 2:1). Apart from the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:22-32), there are no sins worse than any other, for all sin leads to broken fellowship with God (although some sins *do have* greater *relational* consequences). Talk as a group about what sins seem like less of a big deal, and why that kind of thinking can land you in a lot spiritual trouble.

1. Icebreaker: Are there some sins that seem worse to you than others? Why or why not?
2. Of the list of sins the nations committed, which ones strike you as worse than the others, if any? Why?
3. Have certain sins committed by other people wounded you more than other sins?
4. What is the danger in grading sins on a better to worse basis? What does it do to your view of certain people who struggle with the “worse” sins?
5. How does a grading scale of sin change the message of grace? Does grace cover all of the lesser sins, but only most of the worse sins? If grace covers all sin (which it does), what does that say about impartiality?
6. Is there any sin too large for the blood of Christ to cover? Do you really believe that for yourself?

Takeaways:

1. Yahweh’s judgments are swift and terrifying and come to pass exactly how He says they will.
2. Yahweh judges sin impartially as evidenced by the nations that are named in this passage.

PRAYER REQUESTS: