

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 2:6-16**

To learn about God's judgments against Israel.

The Finale

As a child, I used to love firework shows. Every fourth of July we would go to a place in Arlington called *Lincoln Square* and set out our lawn chairs, and watch the fireworks over what used to be *The Ballpark in Arlington*. Of course, the best fireworks show I have ever seen is still at Walt Disney's *Magic Kingdom*. I have even taken my own kids now, and they can confirm: "Best fireworks." But everyone knows they save the best for last. All of the fireworks are great, but the finale is where the real magic happens. It's what everyone is waiting for, and when it happens, *you know it*. It's just different. It's elevated. There is no question when it begins.

When the southern shepherd Amos came to the northern kingdom at first, I'm sure the people there were pretty suspicious of him. You can just imagine them thinking, "What business does a southerner have in Israel?" But when Amos began to speak, they most certainly loved his message. Last week we read about the many judgments that God was going to bring upon the surrounding enemy nations, nations that the northerners despised. It probably didn't take long for them to begin to applauding him in between statements, and crying out, "Amen!" But then the finale happened, and *they knew it*. After chastising everyone else, Amos spends a sizable time decrying the many sins of the northern kingdom.

The Sins of the North

The sins Israel was being judged for are found in verses 6 through 8. Below is a brief outline of them.

TRAFFICKING

The first major issue Amos addresses is similar to some of the surrounding nations. God says in verse 6, "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." The first line indicates that they saw an economic advantage by selling humans into slavery for a profit. They had become so hardened by their own

sin, that they ceased to see the image of God in their fellow man, and instead saw them as a commodity that would earn them money. The second line mentions, “a pair of sandals,” which at first seems confusing. However, this is likely an expression of payment for land. In Ruth, for example, the purchase of land involves taking off the sandals (Ruth 4:7). In other words, Amos is saying that the Israelites have been using human trafficking as a means to gain silver and land. This is, for obvious reasons, wrong. All men and women, regardless of nationality or class, are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). To reduce anyone to less than their appropriate status in the sight of God is an offense to God Himself.

OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

The second sin that Amos addresses is the oppression of the poor. Currently, issues like social justice are major topics of discussion both in our secular world and in the church. However, we would be foolish to think that social justice is a new concept, and even more foolish to write these things off as political agendas. The concepts of caring for the downcast, afflicted, and poor are found throughout the Old and New Testaments; God cares a great deal about them, and we should too. Verse 7 says that they, “trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth.” They treated the poor people with no regard whatsoever. This is solidified by the next line which is translated literally, “And the way of the afflicted they turn aside.”

In the ancient world, one of the common ways the poor were oppressed was by taking bribes to prevent justice from being pursued on their behalf, a sin clearly spoken against in other parts of the Old Testament (Ex. 23:6; Prov. 17:23). Amos addresses this again in chapter 5, when it is revealed that the poor who show up to the city gate to demand justice are turned away (Amos 5:12). The way a society treats the poor says a lot about the morality of that society in general. The way a church treats the impoverished is also very revealing; it is heinous in the sight of God to treat others with partiality based on any factors (Ja. 2:1-4).

SEXUAL SIN

The third sin addressed is sexual sin. The last portion of verse 7 paints a grim picture regarding the purity of Israel: “A man and his father go in to the same girl.” This kind of perversion was likely the result of using female slaves for sexual activity, which is problematic for many reasons. For one, it is unlawful to sell a woman into slavery (Ex. 21:7-11). Two, sexual interaction is forbidden with multiple partners because it breaks the covenant God has set in place (Lev. 19:20-22). It is also forbidden for family members to have the same sexual partners (Lev. 20:17-21). This passage indicates that sex had become purely carnal, culturally speaking, a reality no different than ours today.

Sexual sin is one of the only sins in the Bible that you can make a case for being unique. All sin is sin, but sexual sin seems to be in a category of its own because, “every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). This is particularly dangerous because, “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (1 Cor. 6:19). Therefore, sexual sin must be treated with the utmost severity. Even Jesus, when teaching on temptation to sexual immorality, issues hyperbolic statements that are very extreme to highlight the severity of the sin (Matt. 5:27-30).

IMPROPER WORSHIP

Finally, they are judged for their improper posture towards worship. For one, “they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge” (Amos 2:8). That they are worshipping at many altars indicates their participation in full-blown idolatry. Secondly, in their own worship services they, “drink the wine of those who have been fined” (Amos 2:8). Wine was not uncommon in worship practice, and in fact was even an element in the drink offering (Num. 15:5). The issue here is not the presence of wine, but the source of it.

Fines were often aimed at providing compensation for damages (Ex. 21:22; Deut. 22:19). However, using those fines for the purchase of wine to instigate drunkenness is not ok, and is the issue at hand.

The Goodness of God

After spelling out the sins that Israel was guilty of, God reminded them of the great things He had done on their behalf. Below is a brief outline of His actions.

OVERCOME THE AMORITES

The first thing He mentions is the fact that He, “destroyed the Amorite before them” (Amos 2:9). The Amorites simply refer to the inhabitants of the promised land prior to Israel’s arrival. The order of actions here at first glance seems a bit puzzling. Why does God mention this *before* He mentions the exodus from Egypt, one of the most monumental actions in the Old Testament? However, the eventual judgment that will come upon Israel is their removal from the promised land (Amos 9:7-8). Perhaps He lists this first, almost ironically, because the very thing He did for them to bring them into the land (overcoming the Amorites), He will now do to them because they have become just as wicked. The Amorites are described as a people, “whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks” (Amos 2:9). This is just another way of saying that they were an extremely sizable group of people, and always have been (Num. 13:28, 31-33).

OVERCOME THE EGYPTIANS

As mentioned above, the second thing God did for them was deliver them from Egypt, lead them through the wilderness, and eventually into the land of the Amorite (Amos 2:10). This is subtle, but it’s an important sequence of events to recognize. God did not simply free the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt, but sanctified them in the wilderness with the goal of eventually leading them to a better place that would be their own land.

PROVIDED SOUND OVERSIGHT

Third, God, “raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites” (Amos 2:11). The prophets historically warned Israel when they were veering off course (like Amos is doing in this oracle), and also enacted judgments on enemies who profaned God’s Holy Name. The Nazirites were a group of men who abstained from alcohol, cutting their hair, and being in contact with corpses (Num. 6:1-21). The immediate Nazirite most people think of is Samson from the book of Judges. Certainly Samson is well-known and for good reason. However, arguably more important than Samson was Samuel, who was both a prophet and a Nazirite (1 Sam. 3:1-18). It was Samuel who anointed both Saul and David as king, solidifying him as a crucial part of Israel’s history. The point of this is that God has always provided sound, Godly, obedient leadership and direction to His people through the prophetic ministry, and the ministry of the Nazirites. God calls His people to obedience through the written word, but always reinforces His written commandments with those He calls and raises up.

Israel’s Response and Judgment

In light of what God had done for Israel, how did they respond? “But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, ‘You shall not prophesy’” (Amos 2:12). The Nazirite vow required full abstinence from alcohol, and so to make them drink desecrates their commitment, and is an affront to God Himself. There were really only two options for Israel: 1. Heed the words of the prophets and repent, or 2. Reject them and shut them up, and face judgment. Israel chose the latter, and so God describes the judgment that awaits them. He will, “press them down” (Amos 2:13), slow them down, take their strength and their lives (Amos 2:14), and strip them of their ability to fight off enemies (Amos 2:15). In essence, they will be totally

vulnerable to attacks from enemy nations, in particular, the Assyrians who will take them captive eventually. Whenever a nation strips the image of God away from other humans, indulges in purely carnal sexual activity, and values materials and comfort over justice, God will bring judgment against that sin, even if it's His own people who are doing it. He disciplines us in this new covenant, but make no mistake; consequences for our sin always come to pass.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 2:6. What is the first transgression of Israel? What is the significance of the pair of sandals? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read Amos 2:7. What are the next two transgressions of Israel?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 2:8. What is the fourth transgression of Israel?

2. Read Amos 2:9. What is the first action of God on behalf of Israel, and why is it significant to this passage (Hint: See above notes)?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 2:10. What is the second action of God on behalf of Israel? How significant is this event in biblical history?

2. Read Amos 2:11. What is the third action of God on behalf of Israel? What was required to become a Nazirite? In the above notes, who are the two Nazirites mentioned? What is the role of the prophet?

Day Four

1. Read Amos 2:12. How did Israel respond to the Nazirites and the prophets?

2. Read Amos 2:13-16. What will God do as a result of their sin? Describe in your own words what these verses are saying.
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Week 3 Discussion: Stay Classy

One of the key issues of not only the surrounding nations, but Israel too, is the reduction of other human beings into commodities. They had begun to see people as things to use, not image bearers of God. They sold off some for silver and land, they used women for sex, and then bribed court officials from bringing charges against them, escaping justice for their crimes. God condemns this behavior emphatically. Talk about how you view certain “classes” of people, and what you need to work on to bring those dishonoring views under the obedience of Christ.

1. Icebreaker: When people speak with ill-formed pronunciation (different regional dialect, southern “twang,” etc.) or use words incorrectly, what is your immediate impression of them?
2. How do you treat people who are dressed nicely versus someone who is obviously poor?
3. Are you more likely to assume someone does drugs or illegal activity based on what they look like or how they speak?
4. Has anyone ever judged you based on your speech or appearance? How did it make you feel?
5. Why must the church treat everyone impartially? What is at stake?
6. What would help you proactively change the way you think about “classes” of people?

Takeaways:

1. Israel was guilty of all of the same sins as the surrounding nations, and were especially wicked because they knew better.
2. God issued judgment over Israel’s sin.

PRAYER REQUESTS: