

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 3:1-15**

To learn about how Israel became even worse than those who persecuted them.

Two-Face

One of my favorite movie directors is, undoubtedly, Christopher Nolan. His creativity and vision for film is unmatched in my opinion. He also crafted, to this day, the best set of comic book based movies ever made: *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. Beginning with *Batman Begins* (2005) and ending with *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), Nolan set the standard for what a comic movie should be. Standing in between the book ends of that trilogy was arguably the most celebrated of them all, *The Dark Knight* (2008). Starring the late Heath Ledger as the harrowing villain, *The Joker*, *The Dark Knight* received all kinds of attention. A lesser but equally important character, however, was Harvey Dent, who later became known as *Two-Face*. Dent began as the people's champion, a district attorney in Gotham City, but was eventually brought down after suffering burns on his face (thus, the name) in a fire that subsequently killed the woman he loved. One of the best quotes from that movie is about Dent: "You either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain."

In chapter 3, God calls Ashdod (who were Phillistines) and Egypt to come and observe the violence and oppression that Israel was committing (Amos 3:9-10). The irony of the passage cannot be missed: the Phillistines and Egyptians, who once oppressed the people of Israel and terrorized them with violence, is now coming to learn from Israel who has become more adept at it than they were. Israel did not die a hero, and because of pride, they missed that they themselves had become the villain.

A One of a Kind

Chapter 3 begins with God's spoken word against Israel, whom He calls, "the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt" (Amos 3:1). He goes on to call them, "the only I have known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). This highlights Israel's one of a kind relationship with Yahweh. No other people group has experienced the covenant love and protection from Yahweh that Israel experienced. They are a chosen people

(Deut. 10:15). God decided from early on to bless the Abrahamic family (Gen. 12:1-3). God here, through the prophet Amos, is reemphasizing this truth. However, with special privileges in a relationship comes a special kind of accountability as well. Because God has called and covenanted with the Israelites, they are not given special protection, but they are called to a special expectation as well. The other nations are still held accountable for their sin, as we saw in session 2, but Israel is held to an even higher standard. God says to them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; *therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). Because they are the only family in an intimate covenant relationship with Yahweh, they will be held accountable to a greater degree because they *should* know better than any of the other nations.

Seven Questions

Verses 3 through 6 are a series of almost rhetorical questions meant to be easily answered. Below is an outline of each of them.

DO TWO MEN WALK TOGETHER UNLESS THEY HAVE MADE AN APPOINTMENT?

The first rhetorical question involves the coming together of two individuals who agree to walk in the same direction. The idea here is that this will not happen unless they both agree with one another to do so. This is the only question of the seven that occurs alone. All of the other questions come in pairs. What is the significance of this? Perhaps God is aiming to highlight the reality that Israel and Yahweh covenanted together to walk together. They agreed to walk in the same direction, and yet now, Yahweh is judging Israel because they have broken that covenant and chosen to walk in a different, immoral direction.

DOES A LION ROAR IN THE FOREST WHEN HE HAS NO PREY?

The second and third rhetorical questions involve a habits of a lion. Again, to the modern reader, these details may seem foreign to us. To Amos’ audience, however, lions were well-known predators of their day. This question is a fairly simple and straightforward one that anticipates, “no” as an answer. Lions would not just roar in the forest for no reason. The practices of a lion would be to hunt silently so as to not give away their position. A lion roars only prior to their attack in order to scare and subsequently freeze their prey in its tracks.

DOES A YOUNG LION GROWL FROM HIS DEN UNLESS HE HAS CAPTURED SOMETHING?

This question, like the one before it, anticipates, “no” as an answer. After the kill, a lion will drag the victim back to its den and let out a growl for victory, signifying his alpha status to the other lions and animals in his proximity. It should also be noted, that the LORD has already compared His actions in this prophecy to that of a lion. This comparison is not by accident, as we will find out.

DOES A BIRD FALL INTO A TRAP ON THE GROUND WHEN THERE IS NO BAIT IN IT?

The fourth and fifth questions move from lions to birds, and again, anticipate very obvious answers to the ancient reader. The trap described here has been discussed at length in commentaries. Some have suggested a cage like trap, while others posited that it is a wooden boomerang or dart of some kind, since the bird must “fall” into it. However, the kind of trap is irrelevant to the point being made. The bird only faces the negative consequences of entrapment when it is enticed by bait. Perhaps this is a nod to the sin that Israel has been engulfed in. They would not face judgment had they not been enticed by the sin they were so committed to.

DOES A TRAP SPRING UP FROM THE EARTH WHEN IT CAPTURES NOTHING AT ALL?

Again, this point is magnifying the previous one being made. Traps do not spring unless they are set off. The judgment coming for Israel has not been set off by nothing; Israel has walked into it, metaphorically speaking, because of their rebellious way of living and unrepentant hearts. They had engaged in the same sins as the surrounding nations, perhaps even to a further degree.

IF A TRUMPET IS BLOWN IN A CITY WILL NOT THE PEOPLE TREMBLE?

The sixth rhetorical question really begins to hit home. For one, the first five questions have anticipated the answer, “no.” This one changes direction, and anticipates, “yes.” Secondly, while it is not as clear in English, the first five questions begin with a different interrogative marker than this one does. This question *looks* different than the previous ones, marking it as somehow unique. Blowing a trumpet is a known practice in the ancient world when a city comes under siege (Ez. 33:1-6). It is also this imagery God uses in the Old Testament in other places for coming judgment (Joel 2:1). Ultimately, it is the imagery God uses to bring final judgment on the kingdom of the dragon (Rev. 11:15-18). The idea here is that, by asking this question, Israel will begin to tremble themselves, as they prepare to blow their own trumpets.

IF A CALAMITY OCCURS IN A CITY HAS NOT THE LORD DONE IT?

Last, the seventh question caps off God’s point. This question has provided a great deal of angst because of what it seems to say: “God causes calamity.” That is, in fact, what it says, but here is an example of how careful interpretation is necessary here. God is indeed saying that the calamity that comes upon cities because of their rebellious and sinful ways is directly caused by Him. This is how He judges; by bringing destruction and calamity upon a people.

However, is this how God operates today? When Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, was it because God was judging them? The answer to that, from the New Testament, is no. Paul writes in Romans 9:22-23, “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.” Catch that? What if God really wanted to judge those who were wicked, just like He always has? But what if instead of doing that, He instead was waiting with great patience so that more of those that He predestined would have time to come to faith? That’s what Paul is asking, and it’s a rhetorical question. That *is* what God is doing. He *is* waiting. He is *not* judging. He is enduring sinners with *patience* in order to give time for *repentance*. God does, after all, desire all to come to faith (1 Tim. 2:4).

Understanding the Old and New Testaments is so important for this purpose, that we don’t apply the actions of God in the Old Testament to the New, and vice versa. There IS coming a time when the trumpets will be blown, and the final judgment will be given (See: Revelation), but that time has not yet fully come to pass. The idea here for the Israelites, however, is that calamity *is* about to come for them and it will be God Himself who brings it.

A Remnant

The scenario is bad. God declares, “But they do not know how to do what is right” (Amos 3:10). This is how hard their hearts have become. So judgment will fall on them through war and looting (Amos 3:11). However, God also revealed to them that He would not fully decimate them, although the imagery given is anything but hopeful: “Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, So will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away” (Amos 3:12). In the ancient world, if some livestock were attacked by a lion, there was rarely anything left. The shepherd would need to find a piece of the animal to show to the owner as proof that the animal was, in fact, attacked. If they could not provide proof, they would be required to pay for the animal. The LORD has already connected Himself to a lion (Amos 1:2). He is now about to attack Israel and rip them to shreds, and yet, there will be an ear or a leg left. This must have been terrifying.

These kinds of passages can seem harsh to the modern reader. However, I would submit to you that it is not so much harsh as sin is soft to us. If we truly marveled at the depravity of sin, this would seem like a consistent judgment. When we allow sin to varying degrees, the punishment always seems worse than it should be. It's an issue with our hearts, not God's punishment.

Idolatry and Riches

The final two verses speak to the idolatry and wealth that will be destroyed as well. Though the people of God had already been chastised for a literal gold calf (Ex. 32:1-29), Jeroboam I decided to erect one at Bethel and one at Dan for their worship anyways (1 Kg. 12:28). It was a consistent problem throughout the people's history (2 Kg. 17:16). God says, "I will also punish the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and they will fall to the ground" (Amos 3:14). Additionally, the wealth in the land must have been significant because it seems like many of them had two houses, a summer and a winter house (Amos 3:15). God intended to destroy their wealth as well. They would be totally humiliated in every meaningful manner.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 3:1-2. How does God describe Israel in verse 1? How does He describe them in verse 2? What significance does He place on them? Does this significance amplify or tone down the judgment He will bring down on them?

2. Read Amos 3:3. What is the point of this first question? According to the notes, who does it likely illustrate?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 3:4. What do the second and third questions illustrate? Why is the imagery of the lion significant? Who does it refer to?

2. Read Amos 3:5. What do the fourth and fifth questions illustrate? What does the bait likely refer to?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 3:6. What do the final sixth and seventh questions indicate? What does it mean that God will cause the calamity? According to the notes, does He still operate that way today?

2. Read Amos 3:7-10. Will this judgment be a surprise to Israel? Why or why not? What does it mean that, “the lion has roared?” What does he call Ashdod and Egypt to come and do?
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Day Four

1. Read Amos 3:11-12. What will God do as an act of judgment? How does God describe His mercy to leave some left alive? What is the significance of this illustration, historically speaking, according to the notes?
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2. Read Amos 3:13-15. What else will God do in His judgment? (Hint: See above notes)
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Week 4 Discussion: Cause and Effect

A major portion of this week’s passage is a series of seven rhetorical questions, questions that have very obvious answers. These questions lead to a climactic question that essentially clarifies for Israel: “Destruction is coming up on you and it is God who will bring it.” Why? Because they had long been engaged in a string of sins and were unrepentant of them. God gave them prophets to warn them and they did not listen. Now, in their rebellion, they will be judged. While God doesn’t operate quite like this anymore (see the above notes for why), it is true that our sin has consequences. We live a cause and effect kind of life. Talk as a group about the good and bad causes and the good and bad effects in your own lives.

1. Icebreaker: What is one good thing you did that brought a positive outcome? What is sin you have committed that has brought about negative consequences?
2. Does sin ever go unnoticed?
3. Read Galatians 6:7-9. How does this passage illustrate what we are talking about?
4. Do you believe that the good things might not be noticed by others? Does that worry you? Does it motivate what you do and what you do not do for other people?
5. How does understanding the law of reaping and sowing help you take responsibility for some of the problems in your life?
6. If you could change one thing you’ve done in the past, along with its consequences, what would it be?

Takeaways:

1. God was going to judge Israel because they deserved judgment.
2. God’s judgment would be catastrophic and overwhelming, but not complete; a remnant would remain.

PRAYER REQUESTS: