

# Amos 3 - Prophecies of Judah and Israel; The Myth of the "10 Lost Tribes"

III. Three sermons of judgment (Amos 3:1—6:14)

(1) Fact of Israel's destruction (3:1-15)

(A) Sin (3:1-10)

(a) Israel's privileged position (3:1-2)

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(B) Judgment (3:11-15)

(a) God will use another nation to judge Israel (3:11)

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(i) National idolatry (3:13-14)

(ii) National prosperity (3:15)

III. Three sermons of judgment (Amos 3:1—6:14)

After announcing that God would judge Israel, Amos delivered five messages in which he explained more fully why God would judge the Northern Kingdom. These five messages expand on what he had said in 2:6-16.

Appeals for repentance and explanations of how to avoid judgment appear within these messages. The first three begin with the word, "Hear" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1; Cf. Prov. 8:32), and the last two begin with "Alas" (5:18) and "Woe" (6:1), both being translations of the Hebrew word *hoy*.

## Amos 3

(1) Fact of Israel's destruction (3:1-15)

(A) Sin (3:1-10)

(a) Israel's privileged position (3:1-2)

**1** Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the **entire family** which **He brought up from the land of Egypt:**

**1** Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt:

**1** "Listen to this message that the LORD has spoken about you, people of Israel. It concerns the entire family that I brought from the land of Egypt:

**1** Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying,  
- "...entire family" - Amos addressed this message initially to both Israel and Judah (v1-2)—both kingdoms needed to hear it—but he focused it mainly on Israel (v9,12)  
- "...He brought up from the land of Egypt" - deliverance from Egyptian slavery is cited as a foundation of His relationship with the nation Israel (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6; Ps 78:12-16)  
— He redeemed them; they belong to Him. Special privileges made them more responsible than their ignorant heathen neighbors.

**2** **"You only** have I **known** among all the families of the earth; **Therefore I will punish you** for all your wrongdoing."

2 "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

2 'You alone have I known from among all of the families of mankind; therefore I will hold you accountable for all your iniquities.'

2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

- "You only" - in the emphatic first position in Hebrew

— God reminds them through Amos that Israel has a special relationship with the Lord

— The Lord had revealed Himself to the Israelites in a way that He had not done for any other people

— This relationship is an allusion to the covenant that God had made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Cf. Ex 19:3-6; Deut 28:1-14)

- "...known" - *yada'*, God had "known" the Israelites in that He had made a commitment to them, as His vassal in a covenant relationship

- "...Therefore" - light creates responsibility. An enlightened nation has a greater responsibility than a nation which is in darkness.

— But Israel had been brought into the place of privilege, and so of responsibility, and the Lord's indictment is detailed and unsparing (Cf. Matt 11:23; Luke 12:47-48)

- "...I will punish you" - God will punish them for their wrongdoing because their sins were against His unusual blessings (Cf. v14)

— Verses 2 & 14 both contain promises that God would punish His people, forming in *inclusio* (literary envelope) around the passage in between

— The oracle stresses not Israel's covenantal accountability, but God's. He must punish Israel for their sins. This was a concept which the average Israelite of Amos' time apparently found hard to understand (Cf. 5:18-20). A God should protect and benefit his nation at all times, should he not? Why would a God want to harm his own people who worshiped him regularly (5:21-23)?

## Israel's Inevitable Judgment by God

Amos asked seven rhetorical questions in v3-6 in order to help the Israelites appreciate the inevitability of their judgment. In each one, the prophet pointed out that a certain cause inevitably produces a certain effect. The five questions in v3-5 expect a negative answer, and the two in v6 expect a positive one. Verses 7-8 draw the conclusion. The comparisons start out peacefully (two people walking together) but increase in intensity (to a city under attack). This creates an ominous rhetorical tone.

### (b) Divine announcement of judgment (3:3-8)

3 Do two people walk together unless they have agreed to meet?

3 Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?

3 "Will a couple walk in unity without having met?

3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

- Two people do not travel together unless they first agree to do so

— By implication, God and Israel could no longer travel together toward God's intended destination for the nation, unless the Israelites agreed to do so on His terms

4 Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*?

4 Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*?

4 Will a lion roar in the forest without having found its prey? Will a young lion cry from its den without having caught anything?

4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?

- A lion does not roar in the forest unless it has found prey; young lions do not growl in their dens unless they have captured something they are about to eat

— Here, the lion appears to be God, who has Israel within His inescapable power

5 Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no device in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?

5 Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?

5 Does a bird fall into a snare on the ground without any bait in the trap? Will a trap snap shut when there is nothing to catch?

5 Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?

- Birds do not get caught in traps unless there is bait in the traps that attracts them; animal traps do not snap shut unless something triggers them  
— Israel had taken the bait of sin and had become ensnared; now it was impossible for them to escape

6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will the people not tremble? If a disaster occurs in a city, has the LORD not brought it about?

6 If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?

6 And when an alarm sounds in the city, the people will tremble, won't they? If there is trouble in a city, the LORD has brought it about, has he not?"

6 Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

- People do not tremble at the news of coming danger unless someone warns them; calamities do not occur in cities unless God has either initiated or permitted them

— Amos is sounding the alarm of Israel's coming destruction, and now the only sane response was to repent

7 Certainly the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret plan To His servants the prophets.

7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets.

7 "Truly the Lord GOD will do nothing he has mentioned without revealing his purposes to his servants the prophets.

7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

- A similar inevitable connection exists between two other events: God does nothing to His people unless He first warns them through one of His prophets (Cf. Ps 25:14; Jer 23:18,22)

— God meant that He would do nothing by way of covenant-lawsuit judgment without first telling His people. God does, however, do some things without giving a special revelation to His people that He will do them.

— In the past we find in Scripture no considerable deed or great judgment has happened except the Lord has first prepared the world, and particularly the believer, for it.

8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can *do anything* but prophesy?

8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?

8 A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who will not prophesy?

8 The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

- Amos alludes to his previous illustration about a lion (v4)

— The message of judgment coming from the LORD that Amos now brought the Israelites was like the roaring of "a lion." Who would not fear such a Lion as the sovereign God? Indeed, how could the mouthpiece of the Lion not prophesy, since God had spoken?

(c) To be witnessed by the pagans (3:9-10)

9 Proclaim on the **citadels** in **Ashdod** and on the citadels in the land of **Egypt** and say, "**Assemble yourselves** on the mountains of Samaria and see *the* great panic within her and *the* oppressions in her midst.

9 Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see *the* great tumults within her and *the* oppressions in her midst.

9 Announce this in the fortified citadels of of Ashdod, and in the fortified citadels of the land of Egypt. Tell them, 'Gather together on the mountains of Samaria; look at the great misery among the citadels, along with the oppression within Egypt.'

9 Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof.

- "...citadels" - *'armon*, any fortified building higher than an ordinary house (Cf. Ps 48:3; Is 34:13; Jer 9:21); they made good places to announce news

— Those who lived in citadels were for the most part the wealthy and leaders of their local cities, towns or districts; they were also often attachments to the palaces of kings

- "...Ashdod...Egypt" - the Mosaic Law required two witnesses for cases involving the death penalty (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:5)

— Ashdod (in Philistia) and Egypt are called to witness Israel's death sentence

— Both of these nations previously antagonized and oppressed the Israelites

- "...Assemble yourselves" - Amos calls on Ashdod and Egypt to come and stand on the mountains surrounding Samaria; from that vantage point, they will see "great panic," not the peace and order that should have prevailed

10 But they do not know how to do what is right," declares the LORD, "these who store up violence and devastation in their citadels."

10 But they do not know how to do what is right," declares the LORD, "these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels."

10 Because they do not know how to act right," declares the LORD, they are filling their strongholds with treasures that they took from others by violence into their fortified

citadels."

10 For they know not to do right, saith the LORD, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.

- The Israelites had plundered, looted and terrorized each other so long that they no longer knew how to do "right"

— The Israelites were different from their aggressors because they plundered and looted *their own* fortresses rather than those of a foreign enemy

— It was as though the Israelites hoarded up "violence and devastation" while others, and they themselves, hoarded material wealth

— Now the wealthy foreigners, infamous for similar sins, would see that the Israelites behaved even worse in their own citadels

#### (B) Judgment (3:11-15)

(a) God will use another nation to judge Israel (3:11)

**11** Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD says: "An enemy, one surrounding the land, Will take down your fortifications from you, And your citadels will be looted."

**11** Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "An enemy, even one surrounding the land, Will pull down your strength from you And your citadels will be looted."

**11** Therefore this is what the Lord GOD says: "An enemy will surround the land. He will pull down your defenses, and plunder your fortified citadels."

**11** Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.

- God announced that an enemy would surround the land of Israel and destroy and loot its impressive fortresses

— That enemy proved to be Assyria, which besieged and destroyed Samaria and overran all Israel in 722 BC

(b) The judgment will be comprehensive (3:12)

12 This is what the LORD says: "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 living in Samaria be snatched away— With *the* corner of a bed and *the* cover of a couch!

12 Thus says the LORD, "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— With *the* corner of a bed and *the* cover of a couch!

12 This is what the LORD says: "Just as a shepherd might save from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a scrap of an ear, the Israelis will be saved in a similar manner— those in Samaria who sit on the remains of their broken beds, and those in Damascus who lie on the edge of their couches."

**12** Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.

- God predicted that only a small remnant would survive

— The situation would be similar to when a shepherd snatched a remaining fragment of a sheep, a couple of leg bones, or a small piece of an ear, from the mouth of an attacking wild animal. Similarly, it would be like when someone stole everything in a house and the owner could only hold onto a fragment of his bed or a bedspread.

(c) The coming judgment will alter national idolatry and national sin (3:13-15)

(i) National idolatry (3:13-14)

**13** "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," Declares **the Lord GOD, the God of armies.**

**13** "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," Declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts.

**13** "Listen and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of the Heavenly Armies,

**13** Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts,

- "...the house of Jacob" = all 12 Tribes...

- "...the Lord GOD, the God of armies" - *Adonai YHWH elhe hassebaot*: "the Lord GOD, the God of armies"

— This is the longest form of the name of God in the Bible, and it occurs only here in the OT

— It emphasizes in a special way the omnipotence of God for the purpose of magnifying the effect of predicted judgment

**14** "For on the day that I punish Israel's offenses, I will also punish the **altars of Bethel**; The **horns of the altar** will be cut off, And will fall to the ground.

**14** "For on the day that I punish Israel's transgressions, I will also punish the altars of Bethel; The horns of the altar will be cut off And they will fall to the ground.

**14** "because on that day I will lay out the charges against Israel. I will also bring judgment upon the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the ground.

**14** That in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground.

- "...altars of Bethel" - God now promised to destroy the pagan altars that Jeroboam I had erected at Bethel & Dan, 150 years earlier (1 Kings 12:26-33)

— These altars had taken the place of the one in Jerusalem for most Israelites

- "...horns of the altar" - representing the strength of its deity, would be cut off and fall to the ground, showing its impotence

— The horns of an altar were also places of asylum in the ancient Near East (1 Kings 1:50), so their cutting off suggests no asylum for the Israelites when God's judgment came

(ii) National prosperity (3:15)

15 "I will also strike the winter house together with the summer house; The houses of ivory will also perish, And the great houses will come to an end," Declares the LORD.

15 "I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; The houses of ivory will also perish And the great houses will come to an end," Declares the LORD.

15 I will wreck both the winter house and the summer house, and the ivory houses will fall. These palaces will surely fall," declares the LORD.

15 And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.

- God also promised to destroy the Israelites' winter and summer homes

— The fact that many Israelite families could afford two houses, and yet were oppressing their poorer brethren, proved that they lived in selfish luxury

— They had embellished their great houses with expensive ivory decorations (Cf. 1 Kings 21:1,18; 22:39; Ps 45:8)

— The two great sins of the Israelites, false religion (v14) and misuse of wealth and power (v15), would be the objects of God's judgment