

# Amos

1:1 – 2:16

## Introduction

God sent Amos to the religious center of the kingdom of Israel to preach a series of prophetic messages. Each message began with the same words; you see them eight times in chapters one and two. They are, “For three transgressions... and for four, I will not turn away punishment.” Each time you read these words Amos names a nation that God was judging for their sins – eight nations in all.

The first six nations He addressed were the nations that surrounded God’s people – Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. The final two were the nations God’s people were subjects of – Judah and Israel.

The six Gentile nations were disobeying what we call natural law and ignoring their conscience. The two nations of God’s people were disobeying God’s written law and were indifferent to His commandments.

I suggest that you and I find ourselves in similar circumstances even though it is some twenty-seven centuries since Amos preached this series of messages!

1. You and I, as believers, are surrounded by nations that are ignoring their conscience – including, in some instances, our own nation, the United States.
2. And you and I, as believers, are the subjects of what the apostle Peter called “a holy nation, His own special people... who were once not a people but are now the people of God...” (1Peter 2:9-10). Yet more and more professed believers in this “holy” nation seem indifferent to God’s commands.

We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Surrounded By Nations That Are Ignoring Their Conscience, and #2

You Are Subjects Of A Nation That Seems Indifferent To God's Commands.

#1 You Are Surrounded By Nations  
That Are Ignoring Their Conscience  
(1:1 – 2:3)

It was the eighth century BC. God's chosen people, the Jews, were divided into two kingdoms: Israel to the North and Judah to the South. Both kingdoms were enjoying a time of prosperity and peace.

Amos 1:1 The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Amos was from Tekoa, a city in Judah. Tekoa is about six miles southwest of Bethlehem and about twelve miles from Jerusalem. It was and is a small, insignificant town. Amos was called by God to go to Israel, to the royal chapel at Bethel, and prophesy. The citizens of Israel worshipped at Bethel, where King Jeroboam had set up a chapel and appointed a priest. Jeroboam reigned for forty-one years and was the most successful king of Israel. Yet in just two years a great and notable earthquake would shake things up. In the mean time, God would shake things up spiritually by sending Amos to prophesy at Bethel in Israel.

If you are a public speaker – and especially a Bible teacher – you want your introductory remarks to really grab the attention of your audience. Verse two is the introduction to the series of messages Amos preached.

Amos 1:2 And he said: "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters His voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."

The Lord was **roaring** at the audience. Like a lion who had overcome its prey, the Lord's "voice" was resonating through Amos to those that were gathered at Bethel.

The Lord was roaring because His previous attempts to get the attention of His people had failed. The "pastures of the shepherds" mourned; "the top of Carmel" withered. This indicates a drought that was adversely affecting the economy. It was a drought sent by the

Lord to encourage His people to seek Him. They did not seek Him through the drought, so now He comes upon them more dramatically – like a lion seizing its prey. *Seek Him or He'll seize you!!*

After his stunning introduction, Amos wasted no time in delivering God's judgments upon the six surrounding nations. He began in verses three through five with Syria.

Amos 1:3 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*,

The expression "for three transgression, and for four" are a Jewish way of saying "an indefinite number that has finally come to an end." God had been longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. But the sins of Syria and of each succeeding nation had reached their fullness and He must eventually act in judgment against them. The word for "transgression" is a Hebrew word that means *to march or step forward*. These nations had stepped forward across a boundary God had set.

Where was that boundary? It was in their conscience as a matter of natural law. God did not hold these nations accountable for breaking His written law, which they knew nothing about. He held them accountable for violating their conscience. Romans 2:12-14 puts it like this:

Romans 2:12 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law

Romans 2:13 (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;

Romans 2:14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,

Everyone in the world has the witness of God in creation and in their conscience. These Gentile nations were ignoring their conscience.

Amos 1:3 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron.

Amos 1:4 But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad.

Amos 1:5 I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven, and the one who holds the scepter from Beth Eden. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir," says the LORD.

The Syrians had a multitude of sins. Amos singled out their cruelty in taking threshing instruments and using them to defile the bodies of slain Jews at Gilead.

You and I are surrounded by cruelty. More than this, nations are guilty of cruelty – of committing atrocities.

Here is a quote from a July 1998 report from an organization called Human Rights Watch on the cruelty in Sierra Leon:

“Many thousands of Sierra Leonean civilians have been raped; deliberately mutilated, often by amputation; or killed outright in a campaign by the AFRC/RUF between February and June 1998 alone. Men, women and children, probably numbering in the thousands, have been abducted by the AFRC/RUF for use as combatants, forced laborers, or sexual slaves. Women have been actively targeted through sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. Children have been targets of killings and violence and are forcibly recruited as soldiers. In addition to various forms of physical abuse, innumerable Sierra Leoneans suffer from psychological trauma due to intentionally cruel methods of inflicting harm against these individuals and their communities.”<sup>1</sup>

Cruelty is a sin against conscience and God will judge nations for it.

The second nation Amos prophesied against was Philistia:

Amos 1:6 Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver *them* up to Edom.

Amos 1:7 But I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, which shall devour its palaces.

Amos 1:8 I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,” says the Lord GOD.

The sin singled-out here was slavery. Critics like to complain that the Bible allowed slavery in the Old Testament. Yes, it *permitted* slavery; but it also *protected* the rights of those who were slaves.

It is sickening to hear of slavery in our modern world. According to an article by Bruce Gilley published in *Far Eastern Economic Review* (16 August 2001) slave labor is on the increase in China – just in time for the world to enjoy the Olympics! Slavery is a sin against conscience that God will judge.

The third nation Amos prophesied against was Phonecia:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/sierra/>

Amos 1:9 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.

Amos 1:10 But I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces."

Tyre was the main city of the Phoenicians. Hiram, king of Tyre, had been a personal friend of David, and they had enjoyed many years of friendship. No king of Israel or Judah had ever made war upon Phoenicia. Now Phoenicia had broken the treaty. Betrayal of treaty was the sin Amos singled-out.

Here's a quote for you:

"We will take all of Israel with Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine and only of this state, and anyone who doesn't like it can go and drink Gaza sea water... The Jews will leave and go back where they came from..."

That's our friend Yassir Arafat, in a video from the Palestinian Broadcasting Company, after the Oslo Peace Accord!<sup>2</sup> God will judge for the sin of breaking treaties.

The fourth nation Amos prophesied against was Edom:

Amos 1:11 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever.

Amos 1:12 But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."

Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, the sons of Isaac. Edom came from Esau, and Israel from Jacob. The Edomites hated the Israelites and often aided their enemies. Hatred, jealousy, revenge – these all go together and are the sin singled-out.

The fifth nation Amos prophesied against was Ammon:

Amos 1:13 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead, that they might enlarge their territory.

Amos 1:14 But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour its palaces, amid shouting in the day of battle, and a tempest in the day of the whirlwind.

Amos 1:15 Their king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together," says the LORD.

The Ammonites were located over on the east bank of the Jordan, and they joined with the Syrians in fighting against the two and one-

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<sup>2</sup> source: Emanuel A. Winston, Middle East analyst & commentator

half tribes of Israel which were in the land of Gilead. They did it “that they might enlarge their border.” The sin singled-out is ripping open women with children. It is violence against unborn children.

Total abortions in the U.S. alone have surpassed forty million! It is sin which cannot go unpunished by God.

The sixth nation, and final Gentile nation, Amos prophesied against was Moab:

Amos 2:1 Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.

Amos 2:2 But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth; Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting *and* trumpet sound.

Amos 2:3 And I will cut off the judge from its midst, and slay all its princes with him,” says the LORD.

The Moabites desecrated the dead body of the king of Edom. It wasn’t enough that they killed him; they had to “burn the bones.” Sounds weird; but even today we establish rules of war, like the Geneva Convention, and we speak of war crimes. So let’s call the sin that they are singled-out for war crimes. Former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic comes immediately to mind.

You are surrounded by nations, *including our own in some instances*, that are ignoring their conscience. Amos’ series of messages are just as timely today as they were in the eighth century BC.

But the real issue is what comes next as Amos turned his attention to God’s own nation – the Jews of Judah and Israel.

## #2 You Are Subjects Of A Nation That Seems Indifferent To God’s Commands (2:4-16)

Judah and Israel were next in Amos’ notes:

Amos 2:4 Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, *lies* which their fathers followed.

Amos 2:5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”

God's people in Judah "**despised** the law of the Lord" and **disobeyed** His commandments. They were **deceived** by following the "lies which their fathers followed" – a reference to mixing false religion with the truth of God's Word.

Once you mix the *world* with the *Word*, you've become indifferent to the Word! Israel had done the same, but was farther along in the consequences of indifference to God's Word. As we look at Amos' message to Israel, we'll note several characteristics of God's people when they are indifferent to His Word.

The first characteristic of indifference to God's Word is injustice:

Amos 2:6 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals.  
Amos 2:7 They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble...

God's law made provision for the poor to be protected if they got into debt they could not pay. The rich were suing the poor and ensuring favorable judgments by bribing corrupt judges. They were so greedy that they even wanted "the dust which is on the head of the poor" – everything they can confiscate. It's as if they saw no connection between God's law and daily life.

The second characteristic of indifference to God's Word is immorality:

Amos 2:7 ...A man and his father go in to the *same* girl, to defile My holy name.

There are moral standards set in God's Word. The "new morality" that you are always hearing about is really just the old immorality. My friend Jeff Nicholson of *Living Epistles* had a shirt that read, "How can a moral wrong be a civil right?" Immorality is far too common among believers.

The third characteristic of indifference to God's Word is indulgence:

Amos 2:8 They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god.

A very poor man would have nothing to put up as collateral for a small loan except his outer garment, and that is what he needed to

keep himself warm. God said, “You can take it as a pledge, but when the sun goes down, let him have it back in order that he might not be cold in sleeping that night.” Instead, they were bartering the garments in pagan temples to indulge their appetites – especially for drunkenness.

A fourth characteristic of indifference to God’s Word is independence:

Amos 2:9 “Yet *it was I who* destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height *was* like the height of the cedars, and he *was as* strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.

Amos 2:10 Also *it was I who* brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.”

The Jews would have been destroyed by their much more powerful enemies had they not depended upon God. Now they had grown independent of Him. Christians face this same dilemma. In the New Testament book of Galatians Paul asks you, “Having begun in the Spirit are you not made perfect in the flesh?”

A fifth characteristic of indifference to God’s Word is influence:

Amos 2:11 I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazirites. *Is it not so, O you children of Israel?*” says the LORD.

Amos 2:12 “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, ‘Do not prophesy!’

One of the vows of a Nazarite was to not drink wine or touch any fruit of the vine. They were not to eat grapes or even raisins. The Israelites were causing a Nazarite to break his vow when they gave him wine. They were exerting a bad, corrupting influence. They did this to God’s prophets, too, by forbidding them to speak about the Lord.

Christians are so busy guarding their liberties that they are stumbling others by their bad influence. Alcohol is one area this is all too common.

What will God do to those subjects of His who are indifferent to His Word?

Amos 2:13 “Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.

Amos 2:14 Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself;

Amos 2:15 He shall not stand who handles the bow, the swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself.

Amos 2:16 The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day," says the LORD.

When God says He's "weighed down... as a cart full of sheaves..." it means that His people have put Him in a tight spot. If God must judge the Gentile nations who violate natural law, how much more will He have to judge His own nation that has His written law? Israel was indeed destroyed – taken captive by the Assyrians in 720 BC.

## Conclusion

You are a nation – a holy nation of God's special people. Do not grow indifferent to God's Word and you will perhaps influence the nations surrounding you to quit ignoring their consciences and turn to Jesus Christ.