

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: The Roar of the Lion: Judgment on the Nations

Amos 1:1-2:16

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal stakes of this opening section are enormous. Amos confronts a popular but deadly assumption, then and now, that God's judgment is for outsiders and His favor is automatic for insiders. By indicting the pagan nations first for crimes against conscience and humanity, Amos establishes that God is the moral Sovereign of all the earth, not a tribal deity confined to Israel's borders. The nations are held accountable even though they never received the Law of Moses, because God has written His moral order on every human heart and every nation answers to Him (compare Genesis 18:25; Romans 2:14-15). This guards us against two errors: imagining that vast portions of humanity are simply outside God's moral government, and imagining that covenant privilege exempts us from His standards. Help the class feel the relentless logic of the refrain, 'for three transgressions and for four,' which pictures sin accumulating until patience reaches its limit and judgment becomes certain.

The formational aim is to turn the mirror around. The genius of Amos is that he lets Israel cheer the judgment of her enemies until the circle closes on her own neck. Lead the class to that same self-recognition. We are quick to want justice for others and mercy for ourselves; quick to see the cruelty of distant nations and blind to the way we crush the poor and weak around us; quick to keep up religious appearances while neglecting righteousness. Press the principle of 2:9-12 home: those who have received more, and we who have heard the gospel of Christ have received much, are held to a higher account (Luke 12:48; Hebrews 2:1-3). The aim is not to leave the class crushed but awake, hearing the lion's roar as a mercy that calls us to repentance before the day of reckoning, and ready in the coming lessons to 'seek the Lord and live.'

Question 1

Student Question:

Amos identifies himself as a herdsman from Tekoa, not a trained prophet (Amos 1:1; see 7:14-15). What does God's choice of an ordinary working man as His spokesman teach us about how the Lord calls and equips people for His purposes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book opens by introducing the man before the message. Amos was 'among the herdmen of Tekoa,' a rugged village in the hill country of Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem and overlooking the desolate wilderness that runs down to the Dead Sea. He was a man of the land, a keeper of sheep and a tender of sycamore figs (7:14), not a member of the religious

establishment. Significantly, this man from Judah is sent north to prophesy against Israel, the northern kingdom, an outsider with an unwelcome word.

The historical setting is dated precisely: '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.' This was a time of unusual prosperity and military success for both kingdoms, roughly the middle of the eighth century before Christ. Outwardly things had never looked better. Beneath the surface, society was rotting with injustice, idolatry, and complacency, and Amos was sent to expose it.

The earthquake mentioned here was evidently severe enough to fix itself in the national memory; Zechariah still refers to it centuries later (Zechariah 14:5). That God timed His warning 'two years before the earthquake' reminds us that history is not random. The Lord governs the times, and He often sends His word before He sends His shaking.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God calls and uses ordinary, working people for His purposes; spiritual usefulness does not depend on professional religious training (1:1; 7:14–15).
- The Lord is sovereign over history, dating His warning by reigns and even by a coming earthquake.
- Outward prosperity can mask deep spiritual decay; material success is no proof of God's approval.
- God sometimes sends His message through an outsider precisely because insiders have stopped listening.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it encourage you to know that God called a shepherd, not a scholar, to speak for Him?
- How can a season of prosperity actually make a person or a congregation spiritually careless?
- Why might God send a hard word through someone outside our usual circle, and are we willing to hear it?

Question 2

Student Question:

Amos heard the roar of a lion countless times as a shepherd, and God used that familiar sound as His opening image (Amos 1:2). What 'ordinary' experiences in your own life has God used, or might He use, to make His truth real and urgent to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 2 is the thesis of the whole book: 'The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem.' The image is of a lion, an animal Amos knew intimately as a shepherd. A lion's roar is not a request; it is a declaration that the predator is present and the moment of reckoning has come. When God roars, the prophet implies, the wise will tremble and the foolish will be devoured.

Notice that God roars 'from Zion' and 'from Jerusalem.' The northern kingdom had set up rival sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan to avoid Jerusalem, but Amos insists that the true voice of God still issues from the place God chose. There is no second God in Samaria. The Lord speaks from His own throne, and His voice reaches every nation.

The effect of the roar is devastation even in the most fruitful places: 'the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither.' Carmel was famous for its lush vegetation. If even Carmel withers at His voice, no green and pleasant place is safe from accountability. The whole creation answers to its Maker.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lion's roar is the book's controlling image of God's certain, fearsome judgment (1:2; compare 3:8).
- God's authoritative word goes out from the place He has appointed, not from the convenient substitutes people invent.
- No region or resource is immune from God's judgment; even fruitful Carmel withers at His voice.
- The fear of the Lord is the only sane response to His roar.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of a roaring lion teach us about how seriously we should take God's warnings?
- Where are we tempted to set up convenient 'Bethels' to avoid hearing God on His terms?
- Is there a healthy fear of God in your life, or have you grown deaf to His roar?

Question 3

Student Question:

The refrain 'for three transgressions and for four' recurs against every nation (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). What does this repeated formula reveal about God's patience, the accumulation of sin, and the point at which judgment becomes certain?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The first oracle falls on Damascus, capital of Syria (Aram), Israel's powerful neighbor to the northeast. The crime named is brutality in war: 'they have threshed Gilead with threshing

instruments of iron.' Threshing sledges were heavy boards studded with iron or stone, dragged over grain to separate it; the picture is of human beings crushed and torn as if they were stalks of wheat. It is a charge of savage cruelty against a conquered population.

Here begins the haunting refrain that structures the section: 'For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.' The number formula does not mean literally three or four sins; it is a Hebrew way of saying the cup is full, the sins have piled up beyond counting, and the limit of God's patience has been reached. Judgment is now fixed and certain.

Notice the ground of the charge. Damascus never received the Law of Moses. Yet God holds Syria accountable for crimes of cruelty that any conscience knows to be wrong. This establishes a vital truth: God's moral government extends to every nation, and people are responsible for the light of conscience even where they do not have special revelation (compare Romans 2:14–15).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God judges nations for cruelty and inhumanity in war, not only for offenses against Israel.
- The refrain 'for three transgressions and for four' pictures sin accumulating until judgment becomes certain.
- Pagan nations are accountable to God's moral law written on the conscience, even without the Law of Moses (Romans 2:14–15).
- God's patience is real but not infinite; there is a point at which He will 'not turn away the punishment.'

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God holds even nations without the Bible accountable for basic justice and mercy?
- How does the picture of sin 'accumulating' challenge the idea that small or hidden sins do not matter?
- Where might you be presuming on God's patience instead of repenting?

Question 4

Student Question:

Damascus, Gaza, and Tyre are condemned for cruelty in war and for trafficking human beings (Amos 1:3–10). What does it stir in you to realize that God sees and records acts of violence and injustice that the perpetrators thought they had gotten away with?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The next oracles strike Gaza and the Philistine cities, and then Tyre. Their crime is the slave trade: 'they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom.' This was the wholesale trafficking of human beings, entire communities rounded up and sold for profit, treating image-bearers of God as mere merchandise.

Tyre's guilt is aggravated by a second factor: she did this and 'remembered not the brotherly covenant,' breaking treaty bonds for the sake of commerce. The pursuit of gain had so hardened these trading powers that loyalty, conscience, and the dignity of human life all fell before the profit motive.

God's response is fire: 'I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof.' Fire on the palaces is a recurring image of judgment in these oracles. The strongholds men trust in, their walls and palaces and fortified pride, are precisely what God's judgment consumes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sees and condemns human trafficking and the treatment of people as commodities (1:6, 9).
- Greed that overrides conscience and covenant loyalty is a grievous sin in God's sight.
- God's judgment targets the 'palaces,' the proud strongholds in which people place their security.
- Breaking faith and betraying brotherly bonds for gain provokes God's wrath.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's anger at the slave trade reveal about how He values every human life?
- Where can the pursuit of profit or advantage quietly harden a person's conscience today?
- What 'palaces' of security might you be trusting in that cannot survive God's judgment?

Question 5

Student Question:

God judges the pagan nations not for failing to keep the Law of Moses, which they never received, but for crimes against conscience and humanity (Amos 1:3-2:3; compare Romans 2:14-15). What does this teach us about the moral order God has written on every human heart, and the accountability of all people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The circle continues with Edom, Ammon, and Moab, nations related to Israel by blood through Esau and Lot. Edom is condemned because 'he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually.' This is the sin of settled, nursed hatred, an anger kept burning year after year against a kinsman.

Ammon's crime is appalling cruelty against the most vulnerable: 'they ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border.' Atrocity in the service of territorial ambition, violence against the unborn and their mothers for the sake of a bigger border, calls down God's fire and a whirlwind 'in the day of the tempest.'

Moab's offense is striking because it is not even against Israel: 'he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.' Moab desecrated the remains of an enemy king. God takes account of cruelty and the violation of basic human dignity even when His own people are not the victims. His justice is comprehensive, not partisan.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Nursed, perpetual hatred against a brother is a sin God specifically condemns (1:11).
- Atrocities against the vulnerable, including the unborn and their mothers, provoke God's judgment (1:13).
- God judges cruelty even when the victims are not His covenant people (2:1).
- Family ties and shared history make hatred and treachery more grievous, not less.

Discussion Prompts

- Is there an old anger you have allowed to 'tear perpetually'? What would it take to lay it down?
- Why does God hold us especially accountable for how we treat those closest to us?
- What does Moab's judgment teach about God's concern for human dignity even toward enemies?

Question 6

Student Question:

Edom is condemned because 'he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity' (Amos 1:11). Is there a relationship in your life where an old grievance has hardened into settled bitterness? What would it look like to let pity and forgiveness back in?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the prophet turns toward home. Judah, Amos's own kingdom, is indicted, but notice how the charge changes. The pagan nations were condemned for crimes of cruelty against conscience; Judah is condemned for a different and weightier offense: 'because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err.'

Judah had received what the nations had not: the revealed law of God, the Scriptures, the covenant. To despise that revelation is a sin of a higher order, because it is sin against light. The

'lies' that led them astray are likely the false gods and false teachings they preferred to God's truth, lies inherited and embraced rather than rejected.

This shift prepares the listeners, and us, for the climax. If God judges the nations for sinning against conscience, how much more will He judge His own people for despising His clear revelation? The closer we are to the light, the more accountable we are for how we respond to it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant people are judged for despising His revealed word, a sin against light (2:4).
- To have Scripture and reject it is more serious than to sin against conscience alone.
- Embracing comforting 'lies' over God's truth leads a whole people astray.
- Privilege of revelation increases, rather than decreases, accountability.

Discussion Prompts

- How can familiarity with the Bible tempt us to take it lightly?
- What 'lies' do people today prefer to believe rather than submit to God's truth?
- Why is sinning against clear knowledge more serious than sinning in ignorance?

Question 7

Student Question:

The same God who thunders against Gaza and Tyre turns and indicts Judah for despising His law (Amos 2:4) and Israel for crushing the poor and defiling worship (Amos 2:6-8). What does it mean that God holds His own people to the same, or even a higher, standard than the nations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At last the hammer falls on Israel herself, and her indictment is the longest of all. The social sins come first: 'they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.' Judges took bribes; the innocent were condemned and the destitute were sold into slavery over trivial debts. Justice, which was supposed to protect the weak, had been put up for sale.

The oppression is relentless: 'they pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek.' The powerful so coveted what little the poor possessed that they begrudged them even the dust on their heads. The very systems meant to give the lowly a path were twisted to push them off the road.

Worst of all, this cruelty was wrapped in religion: 'they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.' Garments taken as security from the poor, which the law required to be returned by nightfall (Exodus 22:26-27), were instead spread out beside the altar for drunken feasting. Their worship and their injustice sat side by side, and God was nauseated by the combination.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God fiercely condemns the perversion of justice and the oppression of the poor (2:6–7).
- Corruption that sells the innocent and tramples the weak is a central charge of Amos throughout the book.
- Religious activity offered alongside ongoing injustice is offensive to God, not pleasing (2:8).
- True worship of God and just treatment of neighbor cannot be separated.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do we see justice ‘for sale’ to the powerful in our world, and how should God’s people respond?
- How might we be tempted to keep up worship while ignoring the needs of the vulnerable?
- What does it look like in practice to let our devotion to God shape how we treat the poor?

Question 8

Student Question:

Israel’s sins in 2:6–8 include selling the righteous for silver, trampling the poor, and turning aside the way of the meek, all while attending religious feasts. Where might you be tempted to keep up the appearance of devotion to God while neglecting justice and mercy toward people around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Having stated Israel’s crimes, God recites His grace. ‘Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them... I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness.’ Before Israel ever obeyed, God acted in mighty mercy on her behalf, clearing the land, redeeming her from slavery, and shepherding her through the desert.

He did more than rescue them physically; He gave them spiritual leaders: ‘I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites.’ God provided the means of holiness and the voices of truth in their very midst. They were a people surrounded by grace and instruction, with no excuse for not knowing God’s will.

This catalog of grace is what makes their sin so dark. The greater the gift, the greater the guilt in spurning the Giver. Israel’s privilege was never a guarantee of immunity; it was a summons to gratitude and obedience. The same is true of every people who have received much from God’s hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God grounds His claim on His people in His prior acts of grace and redemption (2:9–10).
- He provides not only deliverance but also prophets and means of holiness (2:11).
- Grace received creates obligation; privilege is a summons to obedience, not a license to sin.

- The greatness of God's gifts increases the seriousness of rejecting Him.

Discussion Prompts

- When you list the ways God has shown you grace, how does that change how you view your obligation to Him?
- How does remembering God's past faithfulness guard us against complacency?
- Why is ingratitude such a serious matter in light of all God has done?

Question 9

Student Question:

Amos closes the indictment by reminding Israel of all God had done for them: He destroyed the Amorites, brought them out of Egypt, led them forty years, and raised up prophets and Nazarites among them (Amos 2:9–12). Why does greater privilege and greater grace bring greater accountability, and how does this principle carry forward to those who have heard the gospel of Christ (compare Luke 12:48; Hebrews 2:1–3)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Israel's response to all this grace was contempt for it: 'ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.' They corrupted the holy and silenced the truth-tellers. The very people God set apart for devotion were dragged into compromise, and the prophets God sent were told to be quiet. This is the heart of the matter and the heaviest issue in the passage: the relationship between privilege and accountability.

God responds with a series of crushing images of judgment. 'The flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force.' Every human resource fails before His justice: speed, strength, weaponry, horsemanship, and courage. 'He that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day.' When God arises to judge, there is no fortress, no army, and no escape.

This climax carries forward to us. The principle that greater privilege brings greater accountability runs straight through the New Testament. To whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48). Those who have heard the gospel of Christ and tasted His grace are the most accountable of all, for 'how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?' (Hebrews 2:3). The roar of the lion still sounds, and it is meant to drive us to repentance while there is time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Israel's deepest sin was corrupting the holy and silencing God's word (2:12).
- Privilege and accountability are inseparable: those who have received and known more answer for more (Luke 12:47–48).

- When God judges, no human strength, speed, or weapon can provide escape (2:13–16).
- The principle reaches its sharpest point for those who have heard the gospel and must not neglect ‘so great salvation’ (Hebrews 2:1–3).
- God’s justice is certain, comprehensive, and inescapable apart from genuine repentance.

Discussion Prompts

- In what ways are people tempted today to ‘tell the prophets, prophesy not,’ silencing the truth they do not want to hear?
- Since we who have heard the gospel are held to the highest account, what does that demand of how we live?
- What is the one specific repentance the roar of God’s word is calling you to make today?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these two chapters. The roar of the lion was meant to wake a sleeping, self-satisfied people. As you have studied God’s perfect justice over all nations and His refusal to excuse His own people, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to wake you up and reshape how you live.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers up everything the roar of the lion has been doing through these two chapters. Amos began with God roaring from Zion (1:2), thundered through eight oracles against the nations, and then turned the spotlight on Israel itself. The teaching point is that the lion did not roar to destroy God’s people but to wake them. As Amos says elsewhere, ‘The lion hath roared, who will not fear?’ (3:8). Help students hear the roar personally, not as a threat aimed at someone else but as the voice of a holy God who refuses to let those He loves sleep through their own ruin.

Encourage students to be specific rather than general. A vague ‘I want to love God more’ rarely changes a life. Press for one concrete area: a relationship that needs honest repair, a habit that has quietly grown comfortable, a place where they have judged the sins of others (like Israel applauding the oracles against the nations) while excusing their own. The genius of Amos 1 and 2 is that the listeners cheered the judgment of their neighbors right up until the prophet said, ‘For three transgressions of Israel, and for four’ (2:6). Self-righteousness is the easiest sin to miss in ourselves.

Tie the application to Christ. The same God who roared against injustice and idolatry is the God who, in the fullness of time, took the judgment of sin upon Himself at the cross. Jesus did not soften God’s holiness; He satisfied it and now calls His people to walk in newness of life. Spiritual formation here means letting the Lord name the specific thing, surrendering it to Him, and

trusting His grace to reshape us. Invite students to write down one sentence they would be willing to act on this week.

Close the lesson by reminding the class that the goal is not merely to feel convicted but to be changed. Conviction that never reaches the hands and feet hardens into the very complacency Amos condemns. Pray with the class, asking the Lord to turn the roar they have heard into a step they actually take.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The roar of the lion as God's loving summons to wake the complacent, not merely a threat of doom.
- The danger of cheering judgment on others (the nations) while excusing the same sins in ourselves.
- God's holiness and justice fully upheld and fully satisfied at the cross of Christ.
- Genuine repentance is specific and active, not a vague wish; faith that does not move the hands and feet is dead.
- Spiritual formation as a daily surrender, letting the Lord name and reshape one concrete area of life.

Discussion Prompts

- As you look back over these two chapters, where has the roar of the lion been aimed at you and not just at the nations around you?
- What is one specific area, named honestly, where you have applauded God's standard for others while quietly excusing yourself?
- What is one step you are willing to take this week so that conviction becomes change?