

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Lesson 8: The Roar of the Lion: Judgment on the Nations -- Amos 1:1-2:16

He was not a prophet, and he was not a prophet's son. He was a man who smelled of sheep. Out in the rough pastureland around Tekoa, a few miles south of Bethlehem, a herdsman named Amos spent his days counting flocks, doctoring scabby ewes, and tending the bitter little figs of the sycamore tree. He had calluses, not credentials. He had no school, no platform, no title. And then, one ordinary day under that wide Judean sky, the word of the Lord came to him, and the shepherd became a thunderstorm.

The first thing you hear in this book is a sound. Not a sermon, not an argument, a sound. 'The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem.' Anyone who has spent a night in open country knows what that roar does to a flock. The sheep freeze. The shepherd's blood runs cold. A lion is near, and a lion does not roar to ask permission. Amos had heard that sound in the dark a hundred times, and now he tells us that God Himself has begun to roar, and the comfortable nations of his day had better understand what is coming through the grass toward them.

What follows is brilliant and terrifying. Amos starts with the enemies everyone in Israel loved to hate. Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab. Imagine the crowd in Bethel nodding along, even cheering, as God's hammer falls on Syria for its cruelty and on the Philistines for their slave trade. 'For three transgressions and for four,' the refrain tolls like a bell, 'I will not turn away the punishment.' The circle of judgment tightens, nation by nation, like a noose drawing closed. And the listeners cheer, never noticing that the circle is closing on them.

Then the trap springs. After Israel's neighbors comes Judah, and then, at last, Israel herself, and the indictment against her is the longest and sharpest of all. The God who judges the cruelty of pagan empires will not wink at the sins of His own covenant people. In fact He holds them to a stricter account, because they have known more. That is the heart of this opening. The God of Amos is no tribal deity who plays favorites. He is the moral Sovereign of every nation on earth, and His justice is coming. The only question is whether we will hear the roar in time to turn.

Group Discussion: Amos begins with judgment on the surrounding pagan nations before turning to Judah and Israel. Why do you think God starts there, and what does it tell us about how He governs every nation, not just His covenant people?

Personal Reflection: When you read about God's judgment, is your first instinct to picture it falling on other people rather than on yourself? Where in your own life might you be cheering the indictment of others while quietly excusing the same sin in your own heart?

Read Amos 1:1-2:16

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 2:1–16, God judges every person according to truth, Jew and Gentile alike; Luke 12:47–48, to whom much is given much is required; Hebrews 2:1–4, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; Genesis 18:25, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right; Amos 3:8, the lion has roared, who will not fear.

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