

THE BOOK OF AMOS
Lesson 2, Chapter 1 continued

Overriding all that the prophet Amos tells us is that only Yehoveh, God of Israel, is sovereign over all the earth. So, as we continue today in Amos chapter 1, it is paramount that we keep in mind as the backdrop for the entire book that Yehoveh was not a typical god as defined and imagined by virtually all known cultures, including Israel's, in the 8th century B.C., the era in which Amos lived and prophesied. As with all Torah Class lessons it is one of my goals to lift you out of our current era and cultural mindset, and to project us backwards in time to the various biblical eras and their evolving societies in order for us to gain a truer understanding of what these divinely inspired writers intended to impart to posterity. However, keep in mind that these Hebrew writers did not come from a universalist mindset. That is, they didn't think in terms of creating a document to be read outside their own peculiar Israelite culture, nor as something that ought to have much effect or even application to the world in general. Thus, what makes Amos significant among the prophets is that he actually opens a door, and clearly has an intent, to also address people and nations beyond Israel, and he is really the first prophet to do so. Therefore, what he has to say in that regard is innovative, even though the foundational theology he builds upon is anything but new or innovative. Amos bases his entire theological viewpoint on the Covenant of Moses...The Law...The Torah...that was given to Moses around 6 centuries before his day and so was something that had long been established. For Amos, the core issue was that not only Israel (both Ephraim/Israel and Judah), but also the nations, had strayed from this established Law, which I think we, today, are better to think of and characterize as God's unchanging and objective moral code intended for all humanity.

The opening words of chapter 1 depict Yehoveh as a lion that is about to tear into his prey. A sort of apex predator who is going to send terror and devastation upon 8 nations or kingdoms for their rebellion against Him. Of these targeted nations, 6 are pagan and 2 (Judah and Ephraim) represent all of Israel even though they are His own set apart and special people. Let's re-read the 1st chapter of Amos.

RE-READ AMOS CHAPTER 1 all

Oracles of destruction are outlined for 8 nations beginning with Damascus. At this time Damascus was a sort of extended city/state that essentially had become the capital of a region called Aram (today it is called Syria). Thus, much like in Hosea's and Amos's prophecies when they will call out Samaria for destruction, it is because Samaria was the capital city of the Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, but Samaria was meant to be all inclusive indicating all of Ephraim/Israel. As used here, then, Damascus and Aram are to be taken as parallel terms; it wasn't only the *city* of Damascus but also the entire nation of Aram that is being put under judgment in verse 3.

A strange formulaic statement is now made: "For Damascus's 3 crimes...no 4...". This opening formula of "3 crimes...no 4" will be used for the remaining 7 judgment oracles as well. What is the intent and meaning of this strange phrase? In order to understand it, we need to first notice another numbering scheme and pattern that it occurs within. It is the recognized numbering pattern of 7-8. The number 8 is paired with the number 7 in what scholars of ancient Middle Eastern literature call ascending staircase parallelism. Don't worry about what it is called; the point is that you will notice that there are 8 oracles of judgment against 8 nations. Yet, 7 of these nations come outside the focus and main subject of Amos, which is the nation of Ephraim/Israel (with Ephraim/Israel being the 8th nation that is to expect divine judgment). The thing to grasp is that this is a rather common literary feature of that biblical era, employed throughout the Middle Eastern nations and not just Israel. So, while the point of it might be obscure to us in modern times, it was obvious to the people of Amos's era.

We see this 7-8 pattern in a number of places in the Old Testament. When Aaron was going to be ordained as High Priest, we read the following that begins in Leviticus chapter 8:

CJB Leviticus 8:33-9:2 ***³³ You are not to go out from the entrance to the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are over; since ADONAI will be consecrating you for seven days. ³⁴ He ordered done what has been done today, in order to make atonement for you. ³⁵ You are to remain at the entrance to the tent of meeting day and night for seven days, thereby obeying what ADONAI ordered done, so that you may not die. For this is what I was***

ordered." ³⁶ Aharon and his sons did all the things which ADONAI ordered through Moshe.

CJB Leviticus 9:1-2 *On the eighth day, Moshe called Aharon, his sons and the leaders of Isra'el, ² and said to Aharon, 'Take a male calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without defect, and offer them before ADONAI.)*

We also find this 7-8 pattern used in the formula for the Spring biblical feasts of Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits and in the Fall biblical feast of Sukkot. That is, there is an element of these feasts that is for 7 days, but then there is an 8th day as well.

CJB Leviticus 23:34-36 *³⁴ 'Tell the people of Isra'el, 'On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of Sukkot for seven days to ADONAI. ³⁵ On the first day there is to be a holy convocation; do not do any kind of ordinary work. ³⁶ For seven days you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; on the eighth day you are to have a holy convocation and bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI; it is a day of public assembly; do not do any kind of ordinary work.*

So, whereas the number 7 is symbolic of ideal completeness, the number 8 is symbolic of the climax of something. When used together, 7-8 represent the fullest possible totality of something. We find this 7-8 pattern expressed in other places in the **Tanakh** (the Hebrew Bible) as well.

CJB Micah 5:1-4 *But you, Beit-Lechem near Efrat, so small among the clans of Y'hudah, out of you will come forth to me the future ruler of Isra'el, whose origins are far in the past, back in ancient times. ² Therefore he will give up [Isra'el] only until she who is in labor gives birth. Then the rest of his kinsmen will return to the people of Isra'el. ³ He will stand and feed his flock in the strength of ADONAI, in the majesty of the name of ADONAI his God; and they will stay put, as he grows great to the very ends of the earth; ⁴ and this will be peace. If Ashur invades our land, if he overruns our fortresses, we will raise seven shepherds against him, eight leaders of men.*

CJB Ecclesiastes 11:1-2 *Send your resources out over the seas; eventually you will reap a return. ² Divide your merchandise into seven or eight shares, since you don't know what disasters may come on the earth.*

Further, we see that this 7-8 pattern can be expanded into larger numbers.

CJB Psalm 90:10 *¹⁰ The span of our life is seventy years, or if we are strong, eighty; yet at best it is toil and sorrow, over in a moment, and then we are gone*

And even larger....

CJB 1 Kings 5:29-30 *²⁹ Shlomo had 70,000 men to carry loads and another 80,000 stonecutters in the hills, ³⁰ besides Shlomo's 3,300 supervisors who were in charge of the people doing the work*

So, too, we need to understand the 3-4 pattern. First: the number 3 is, in Hebrew, **Shelosh. Shelosh**, in addition to indicating the number 3 also means harmony, new life, and completeness. The number 4 means all the compass directions, which symbolically means the entire earth. So, when we understand that, then it becomes clearer that saying "For Damascus's 3 crimes...no 4", it is an understood expression of that era meaning "for all the wrong things against God they have done". It is not intended to literally mean 3 specific crimes, but on second thought there were 4 specific crimes, and then we're to start looking for exactly what those 4 crimes were. And because this 3-4 pattern of meaning of the crimes these 8 nations committed falls within the 7-8 pattern of meaning by listing those 8 nations that includes both gentile and Hebrew nations (that is, nations that together represent both the people groups that God divided the world into upon His covenant with Abraham...gentiles and Hebrews), then the concept is that not ONLY those 8 nations listed will be under God's judgment, but rather this applies to **all** the nations on earth because they are all guilty before God. We also need to notice that while in the near term for Amos it might only be those named 8 nations affected, from a prophetic viewpoint it will eventually be all the nations on earth put under God's judgment for their crimes against Him.

CJB Joel 4:1-2 *"For then, at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Y'hudah and Yerushalayim, ² I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of*

Y'hoshafat [ADONAI judges]. I will enter into judgment there for my people, my heritage Isra'el, whom they scattered among the nations; then they divided my land.

CJB Matthew 25:31-33 ³¹ ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. ³³ The 'sheep' he will place at his right hand and the 'goats' at his left.***

Before we get into the specifics of some of what Damascus is being judged for doing, we need to back away and understand the far-reaching theological principle being developed here that has been shelved within Christianity for going on 18 centuries. It is that God's Laws... His defined and objective moral code... applies to everyone and every place on earth. It's not just for Israel.

Prior to the Covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai, there was something that existed that Paul says is natural and intrinsic to all humans. It has gained the name Natural Law.

CJB Romans 2:9-16 ⁹ ***Yes, he will pay back misery and anguish to every human being who does evil, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory and honor and shalom to everyone who keeps doing what is good, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism. ¹² All who have sinned outside the framework of Torah will die outside the framework of Torah; and all who have sinned within the framework of Torah will be judged by Torah. ¹³ For it is not merely the hearers of Torah whom God considers righteous; rather, it is the doers of what Torah says who will be made righteous in God's sight. ¹⁴ For whenever Gentiles, who have no Torah, do naturally what the Torah requires, then these, even though they don't have Torah, for themselves are Torah! ¹⁵ For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts. Their consciences also bear witness to this, for their conflicting thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them ¹⁶ on a day when God passes judgment on people's inmost secrets. (According to the Good News as I proclaim it, he does this through the Messiah Yeshua.)***

For a more in-depth study of this passage, you can go to the Torah Class website or app and look up the study of the Book of Romans. But, to focus on the issue at hand of whether there exists a single, common divine law for all humans, even those who have no knowledge of the existence of the Torah (gentiles, mainly), Paul says there is a law intrinsic to our human nature that was placed there by God and therefore no human has an excuse for breaking this law.

This “law written on their hearts” (biblically, heart means “mind”) is what theologians mean by Natural Law. St. Thomas Aquinas talks about it as man’s rational participation in the eternal law. What he means is that God’s universe is an orderly, rational one, and we are rational beings. Thus, there’s a lot we’re able to rationally discern and simply by instinct know about what we should and shouldn’t do. Those who have never heard of the Ten Commandments already know that it’s wrong to murder—even if they do it anyway, or even if they rationalize a certain type of murder as not really murder.

At its most basic level, Natural Law says to “do good and avoid evil.” We start moral discussions from an advantage: we don’t have to show that we should do good and not do evil; we can merely show what *is* good versus what *is* evil, and let our consciences do the rest.

I think this is a little easier to comprehend if we think of this Natural Law in terms of the very earliest divine moral code, which must begin with the premise that there is such a thing as morality. There is such a thing as right and wrong. However, when we agree that there exists such a thing within mankind as morality, the next issue is who defines it? Who determines what is right and what is wrong... for all humanity? We only have a couple of paths to go, here. Either someone outside the human sphere defines it and bestows it universally over all humanity, or humans define it and so it will by nature vary nation by nation if not nearly individual by individual. On its face the notion that a moral code could be different for different people is absurd because then there would be no solid basis for deciding what morality is. It would mean that there is no objective standard for nations or individuals to follow or to be judged by. Morality becomes a subjective free for all and self-determined. Or, put another way, God metes out various moralities for various people. I can lie, but you can’t. You can murder,

but I can't. Therefore, in the judgment that we'll all eventually face, we wouldn't even know in advance by what standard we'll be judged.

Amos opens up this can of worms perhaps not even knowing he did. After all, when we read the list of crimes (the sin, the rebellion) of these 6 pagan nations, they are all taken from the Torah, which itself is but a nuanced expansion of the Natural Law. The Torah is not different than the Natural Law; it is simply written down in more specifics and offers case examples as compared to the Natural Law that God made part of our human DNA. Amos doesn't even bother to address why these 6 pagan nations that weren't given the Torah are to be judged by it. For him, it's a given. The Natural Law and the Torah Law are one in the same. They present the same objective standard of morality. What is it that Paul said?

CJB Romans 2:14-15 ***¹⁴ For whenever Gentiles, who have no Torah, do naturally what the Torah requires, then these, even though they don't have Torah, for themselves are Torah! ¹⁵ For their lives show that the conduct the Torah dictates is written in their hearts. Their consciences also bear witness to this, for their conflicting thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them***

So, what does that mean for Believers... Christian, Messianic, however one wishes to identify themselves? Christianity says that the moral code God gave to Moses is dead and gone; and that this happened on the Cross. Amos says, as does Yeshua, as Paul also says that there is but one universal standard of morality and it applies to all nations and all people at all times and eras. That standard is the Natural Law that expanded into the Law of Moses and ignorance of it is no excuse to disobey it because the foundational principles on which it was given are the same as what has always been written on human hearts. That principle, as does the Law of Moses, continue to exist not just for Jews, nor even only for Christians, but for all of mankind. As the End Times comes to its climax, it will be on that basis of a universal, divinely given right and wrong that each human who has ever lived will be judged. Forgiveness for disobedience to that divine moral code will be given based on sincere trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who have not trusted have already been condemned.

Back to verse 3 and the fate of Damascus. Aram was a constant foe of Israel; there was open warfare between Aram and Israel all during the 9th and 8th

centuries B.C. What we find Yehoveh accuse Aram (Damascus) of is a pattern of cruelty. As Douglas Stuart puts it: "The crimes (the *peshot*, better meaning rebellions) are violations of the implicit world-wide covenant; that is, rebelliousness against Yahweh's sovereign law." The most infamous crime they committed (according to God's way of judging it) was their attack on Gilead. The wording uses the agricultural metaphor of Gilead being threshed with a threshing slide that had iron spikes in it. Gilead was a name given to the entire region where the 2 ½ tribes of Israel that had determined to settle on the east side of the Jordan River resided. The particular atrocity that Amos seems to be referring to can be reasonably identified because of the inclusion of the names Ben-Had and Hazael in a passage in 2Kings.

CJB 2 Kings 8:7-13 ⁷ *Elisha went to Dammeseq. Ben-Hadad the king of Aram was ill; and he was told, "The man of God has come here."* ⁸ *The king said to Haza'el, "Take with you a gift, go meet the man of God and consult ADONAI through him; ask if I will recover from this illness."* ⁹ *Haza'el went to meet him, taking with him a gift that included everything good Dammeseq had, forty camel-loads. He came, stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram has sent me to you; he asks, 'Will I recover from this illness?'"* ¹⁰ *Elisha answered, "Go and say to him, 'You will surely recover'- even though ADONAI has shown me that he will surely die."* ¹¹ *Then the man of God fixed his gaze on him for so long that Haza'el became embarrassed; finally, Elisha began to cry.* ¹² *Haza'el asked, "Why is my lord crying?" He answered, "Because I know the disasters you will bring on the people of Isra'el- you will set their fortresses on fire, you will kill their young men with the sword, you will dash their little ones to pieces and rip their pregnant women apart."* ¹³ *Haza'el said, "But what is your servant? Nothing but a dog! How could he do anything of such magnitude?" Elisha answered, "ADONAI has shown me that you will be king over Aram."*

A couple of chapters later in 2Kings we read this:

CJB 2 Kings 10:32-33 ³² *It was during that period that ADONAI began to dismember Isra'el. Haza'el attacked them throughout the territory of Isra'el* ³³ *east of the Yarden- all the land of Gil'ad: the Gadi, Re'uveni and M'nashi, from 'Aro'er by the Arnon River, including Gil'ad and Bashan.*

In Amos 1:4 Yehoveh announces the punishment He will inflict on Aram and it is given in terms of warfare of that era, which always involved fire. Setting captured cities on fire was standard operating procedure. In verse 5 we are told that the gate-bar will be broken. This is referring to the large piece of timber used to lock the city gate and keep intruders out. So, to break the bar is to forcefully enter into the city for the purpose of ransacking it. Next God says he will keep the residents of Damascus from fleeing to ***Bi'kat Aven***; or in English, the Valley of Iniquity. Since no one would name a place in their own nation something like this, then this is a nasty epithet that Amos assigned to this place. Very likely it was a place where the religious cult of Aram was practiced, and so an idol of their god was located there. No one is certain of where this place was located, but clearly it was important to the people of Aram. The mention of Kir is interesting. Kir was where the people of Aram originally immigrated from, located in eastern Mesopotamia. So just as God threatened to send Israel back to Egypt (back to oppression) for their rebellion against Him, God says He is going to reverse Aram's history and send them back to where they came from: Kir. There's a reason ancient people moved from one place to another, a long way away: they were having serious problems where they were and their survival was in question. So, whatever life was like in Kir before their migration to Aram, that is what the Arameans were going to experience again in consequence of violating God's moral code.

Verse 6 begins God's judgment oracle against Philistia and it begins as all 8 do, incorporating that 3-4 number formula. So, for all of Philistia's many crimes against God's moral code, including the one that is listed, they are going to be severely punished. Notice that like in the previous oracle of doom that it is not Philistia that is cited but rather it is Gaza. Gaza was the southernmost city/state of the Philistine nation that extended as far north as Ashdod and included Ashkelon and Ekron. Gaza was merely representative of the entire Philistine domain that is going to be dealt with catastrophically. It was probably the most important place in Philistia because it was where the roads of 2 important trade routes intersected. What is important to understand is that one of the main purposes of these 2 trade routes was the slave trade. This repugnant business in human trafficking, perhaps as much or more so than the actual stated indictment against Gaza, is indicative of the character of Philistia as Yehoveh views it.

One of the most heinous crimes they committed is said to be when they exiled and sold an entire population of people to Edom. Probably this means that Philistia conquered some people group, captured them, and then sold them as but commodities to wealthy people in Edom. Selling slaves was a most profitable venture. One of Edom's primary sources of wealth at this time was copper mining. Copper mining chewed up and spit out people as the conditions for mining were horrific. The mines looked nothing like what we see today. In Timna, a place in the southernmost region of Israel, we can find the remnants of copper mines that go back to the time of Amos and earlier. The mine shafts were barely 2 feet in diameter and so the miners had to slither down into these dark holes like a snake returning to its underground home. Only by the light of a torch could they operate and there was no ventilation provided; miners died by the truckload and so a constant stream of replacements was needed. Naturally the Edomites wanted foreigners as slaves to be used as miners (and not their own people) because their lives would be short and miserable. Some slaves were likely used in Edom's shipping business and in agriculture. Interestingly, this kidnapping of people and selling them into slavery was forbidden by the Torah and the penalty for doing it was death.

CJB Exodus 21:16 ¹⁶ "Whoever kidnaps someone must be put to death, regardless of whether he has already sold him or the person is found still in his possession."

Typically, it was thought by Israelites that God's ordinance against kidnapping and making slaves of people applied primarily to their own Hebrew people and not to foreigners. But, clearly here in Amos this prohibition applies universally to everyone. The emphasis then is on the act of enslavement itself and it is considered by Yehoveh to be immoral and inhuman. The ethnicity and nationality of the victims matters not at all. And, by the way: one of the rationalizations for slavery in Europe and later in America was that the biblical law against it applied only to the Israelites. Therefore, gentile Christians were perfectly free to capture or buy slaves and it was not wrong and so of no offense to God.

Verse 9 moves us to the next nation to be judged: Tzor. Tzor and Tyre were the same place. Tzor was a very powerful city/state operating on the shores of the Mediterranean in the region of Phoenicia. Located Northwest of Israel, their

economy was based on shipping, trading, and fishing. Tyre, too, was a slave trafficking nation and it became notorious for it. For some reason the other primary city/state of the Phoenicia region, Sidon, is left out of the conversation. Slave trading is at the heart of the judgment against Tzor; not because they captured and sold slaves but rather they provided the transportation system to move these slaves to far-flung places. Think of the modern drug trafficking cartels where a major part of the organization is called mules. Mules don't acquire the drugs, package the drugs, or even sell the drugs; they simply transport them from place to place for those who do. Think of the old-fashioned crime of bank robbing whereby one person might be the driver of the get-away car who doesn't plan the operation or even do the robbing, but rather only drives the participants to and from the crime scene. Our criminal laws often seem to go easier on the mules and get-away drivers than on the others. Interestingly whereas the Philistines were sentenced to death for acquiring and selling slaves, Tzor was sentenced only to the destruction of their city for transporting them. The Law of Moses provides various sentences proportional to the seriousness of a person's participation in a criminal activity, and that seems to be what we're seeing carried out here.

The other issue brought up as cause for Tzor's judgment is that they broke covenant with kinsmen. Actually, what it most literally says is a covenant of brotherhood; a term used here and nowhere else in the Bible. So, there is disagreement on exactly what this means. A covenant with whom? Was it with a brother, in the literal sense, or was it with a treaty partner with whom they had a brother-like closeness of relationship? Clearly the act of breaking that treaty was seen by God as an act of treachery and basic dishonesty that was most serious in His eyes. There is a sense in the tone of this oracle that perhaps the treaty was between Tyre and Israel. If so, then Yehoveh would have been named as the guarantor of the covenant of peace and so it was His place to punish a covenant violator. Further, the mention of Edom and the term brotherhood might indicate that this is speaking of a treaty with Edom's brother. Since it was Esau that founded Edom and Jacob that founded Israel, then perhaps this is the obscure connection.

We do know of a peace treaty between Phoenicia and Israel that first occurred during the time of King David, when Hiram was the king of the Phoenicia region

(this is alluded to in 2Samuel 5 and 1Kings 5). It is outright stated as a fact when Solomon took over the throne from his father (2Chronicles 2 and in later verses of 1Kings 5). So perhaps this is the covenant of brotherhood being referenced. Part of the reason for the belief that such a covenant existed has to do with the way that 1Kings 5:15 is constructed.

CJB 1 Kings 5:15 ***15 Hiram king of Tzor sent his servants to Shlomo, because he had heard that they had anointed him king in his father's place, and Hiram had always loved David***

The key is the word love or loved (***ahav*** or ***ahab*** in Hebrew). Let's focus a few minutes on this common and much used word in the Bible and what it actually meant to the people of the Bible era.

While it might seem a bit difficult to wrap your brain around at first, it is necessary to grasp the unassailable fact that the inherent nature of languages is that they are not created in a vacuum. That is, a language doesn't spring up from nowhere; rather a language is always an offshoot from an older and already existing language (clearly it is not impossible that an exception or two might exist). For instance, several European languages stem from Latin. The Hebrew language is no different as it sprang from a set of earlier languages called Semitic languages as spoken and written in what we today loosely call the Middle East. So, Hebrew words will usually have what is called cognates in another closely related language (and often in more than one language) that existed well before the Hebrew language became a separately identifiable language all its own. A cognate is a word present in two or more different languages that share meaning, spelling, or pronunciation, which although not necessarily perfectly identical in every detail, the words are intimately related. It is the ongoing academic study and search for cognates for the ancient Hebrew language (what is usually called biblical Hebrew) that gives us more depth in understanding the intent of the words of the original biblical authors and therefore, assuming the author was inspired in his writings, the intent of God. I mention the term **ancient Hebrew** because the biblical Hebrew language has definite differences between it and the modern conversational Hebrew as it is spoken and written today, and in many cases even with the Masoretic Hebrew of the 10th century that many Old Testaments draw from. More often than not, Bible translators approach Hebrew

to English translating by filtering the Hebrew through the meanings of words in the Masoretic or even the more modern Hebrew language dialects that simply didn't exist in that form when the Bible was written. So, how can we know what certain words meant in the **ancient Hebrew** form that hasn't existed for centuries? The best way is to search for language cognates in other and older Semitic languages, the meanings of which are often better defined and understood, and then applying that meaning to the Hebrew. That is what we're about to do as concerns the Hebrew word **ahav**... or in English, love. In 1Kings 5:15 we read:

CJB 1 Kings 5:15 ***⁵ Hiram king of Tzor sent his servants to Shlomo, because he had heard that they had anointed him king in his father's place, and Hiram had always loved David.***

The KJV of this passage says that Hiram was "ever a lover of David". In modern times, as read through the eyes of Westerners, the tone of these English words has been taken by some to mean that Hiram had a homosexual love affair with David (which is at best merely incorrect, but far more likely it is outright intellectual dishonesty). The issue lies in the misunderstanding of the word **ahav**, love. A cognate word in Akkadian (a much earlier Semitic language) is **ra'amu**, which means "to love". This word is used in the sphere of politics and treaties, and it has to do with loyalty and faithfulness. In the now famous archeological find called the Armana Letter, we read "Should my brother increase tenfold the friendship (**ra'amuta**) and brotherliness (**ahhuta**) between us over that maintained by his father, then we will love (**ra'amu**) each other very much". This is directly speaking about a treaty of peace and not about human affections. In another ancient letter concerning the terms of a treaty between Esarhaddon and a vassal king, we read: "You will love (**ra'amu**) Ashurbanipal as yourselves". Perhaps that last phrase has a familiar ring to it, which we'll get to in a moment.

Here's the point: while no doubt there are instances in the Bible where the word **ahav**, love, indicates a warm affection or a romantic intimacy, there are at least as many instances whereby it simply means faithfulness and loyalty, and very often in the context of loyalty and faithfulness to a superior or to the terms of a treaty. As concerns the issue of Tzor breaking a covenant, and of the book of 1Kings mentioning a "love" between David and King Hiram, in the case of this "love" it is political/treaty language and has nothing to do with romance or

affection. Thus, it is fairly certain that the covenant that Amos was speaking about was between Phoenicia (Tyre) and Israel. But now let's examine for a moment what the impact of this new understanding of the biblical word for "love" ought to have upon Believers and Bible students.

Yeshua says that the 2 fundamental principles or commandments upon which all other principles and commandments are built are, as taken from Matthew 22:

NIV Matthew 22:37-40 ***³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'** ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

We can know with certainty that the term "love" as used in these two commands is the ancient Hebrew **ahav**, because Christ was quoting from Deuteronomy 6 (about loving God), and from Leviticus 19:18 (about loving your neighbor), both of which were written in Hebrew. The entire passage revolving around loving God in Deuteronomy 6 is all about obedience to God's commands. Without doubt, then, the term love as used here has nothing to do with affection or warm feelings; emotions. Rather, it is meant in the political sense of having loyalty and showing faithfulness to God. To love God means (biblically) to demonstrate your loyalty to God by obeying Him. Unfortunately, Christianity long ago adopted the Greek sense of love in which it nearly always points to romance, affection, and even erotic pleasures. Fellow Believers, this might bother some of you to hear that God was not seeking your emotional affections towards Him, but rather it was a pragmatic demand for your determined obedience and loyalty to Him, in the form of obeying the Torah.

As for the sense of love (**ahav**) in loving one's neighbor as we love ourselves let's begin by noticing a key phrase in what Yeshua said: He said that the call to love your neighbor is LIKE the call to love God. Alike in what way? Recall how in the treaty terms between Esarhaddon and an unnamed vassal king we read: "you will love Ashurbanipal as (you love) yourselves". This meant to show as much loyalty and fidelity to Ashurbanipal as you showed to yourselves, and I have no doubt that this is the substantive meaning of the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Once again, this command is not about our conjuring up warm

feelings or sentiments (emotion) for our neighbor; rather it is about having as much practical concern (loyalty) for our neighbor's needs and well-being from the standpoint of it being a God-given command that we do so. Could it incorporate some level of affection for your neighbor (more meaning people you come into contact with)? Most certainly. But that was not, and never was, the core issue or sense of the command, and Jesus certainly did not change its meaning from the original.

Christianity long ago replaced the sense and purpose of God's 2 fundamental commandments that put an obligation and duty upon us as His worshippers to be selfless and loyal when it comes to obeying Him and also to looking after the needs of other human beings we come into contact with in practical, tangible ways. Instead, this newer and misguided sense of the command says that we are only to hold some kind of deep or strongly felt **emotional** attachment to both God and neighbor. This newer sense of those biblical commands has led us astray and into sin after sin without our ever realizing it.

We'll continue with Amos chapter 1 next time.