

**THE BOOK OF AMOS**  
**Lesson 6, Chapters 2 and 3**

After spending the last 2 lessons in Amos addressing the mysterious and fascinating matter of the *Nephilim*, giants, fallen angels, demons and the like, and that apparently the Amorites that Amos spoke of in chapter 2 verse 9 were led by, or perhaps even consisted largely composed of these hybrid divine/human creatures that Yehoveh wanted destroyed, we'll move on to complete chapter 2 and then begin chapter 3.

Let's begin by re-reading part of Amos chapter 2.

**RE-READ AMOS CHAPTER 2:10 – end**

Throughout the many hundreds of Torah Class lessons, we've often discussed the all-important matter of our identity. That is, who do we say we are...with whom or what do we identify... as that essentially defines us as an individual or as a corporate body. In verse 10, God says that Israel is who they are...they are a separately identified people group... based on 2 main factors: His deliverance of Israel from their helpless oppression and captivity in Egypt, and also according to the homeland He had given to them; a homeland that was being taken away from the Canaanites due to their wickedness and given instead to Israel.

Within the context of what we've learned over the past 2 lessons, and within the context of the previous verse that spoke of the destruction of the Amorites, then we see that in God's economy the Amorites and the Israelites represent the two extremes of a spectrum of mankind. At one end are the people who never should have been in existence in the first place (the Amorites who are identified with the wicked *Nephilim*), versus the people that God separated out from all other humans on the planet to be a nation of priests meant to identify with Him. Further, in one way of looking at it, a goal of the exodus from Egypt was that God's people should repossess a land on His behalf; a land that had become overrun and occupied partly by illicit and wicked half-human creatures (represented by the Amorites), with the remainder of the Canaanites being heavily influenced by their presence. This probably truly bothers the minds of most modern Christians as talk of quasi-human creatures smacks of fairytales

and legends; but this issue between the Amorites and the Israelites brings us to an unavoidable conclusion if we take the Bible for what it says and not attempt to spin it and allegorize it into something more palatable for the Western mind.

This act of God to destroy the Amorites and then to give their land to the Israelites was one of great mercy and blessing towards the Hebrews. Yet another act of Yehoveh's mercy and blessings is mentioned in verse 11. It is that God didn't just deliver and deposit Israel into their Promised Land and then leave them to their own fate and destiny. Rather, God set up a continuous chain of care for them, and communication with them, by means of His appointed Prophets and Nazarites. Moses was Israel's first Prophet (since becoming an identifiable nation of people), and Amos was only its latest. There were many prophets (such as Samuel, Elijah, and Jonah) in between. We should take note that what is only lightly implied elsewhere in the Holy Scriptures (that God gave the Nazarites to Israel out of His favor and mercy) is here made concrete. By means of their strict dedication to God, and to the rituals and lifestyles He ordained for them, the Nazarites were meant to exemplify those who do God's will on earth, despite their imperfections. Although the many Nazarites over the centuries each seemed to abide largely within the boundaries set down by a short slate of rules, they didn't all behave the same. Samson for instance focused on the instruction for Nazarites not to have his hair cut. Samuel focused on not drinking wine. One has to wonder why in this chapter of Amos Prophets and Nazarites are highlighted as opposed to Prophets and Priests as a connected pair, since Nazarites seem to be but small role players that emerge from time to time in Israel's history (and little else), while Priests have been central to Israel's faith practices since Mt. Sinai. I can only speculate that perhaps the current state of the Priesthood (in both Jerusalem and in Samaria) was so diminished by Amos's time, and that Prophets and Priests were at that time regularly opposed to one another, that the mention of a now-corrupted priesthood was avoided.

There is something else about verses 10 and 11 to be considered, and spiced with a bit of introspection. Essentially what we are reading about is Israel's redemption (their salvation) history. And yet, because Israel strayed so far away from that redemption history that revolved around God's grace, it has now devolved into their judgment history revolving around God's wrath. This is a caution for all who claim to worship Messiah Yeshua and Yehoveh God of Israel.

There is a more-than-implied Church doctrine in several large Christian denominations of once-saved-always-saved. That is, because of our redemption history based on God's grace, regardless of our bad behavior or how seriously we may abandon our faith, trust in, and obedience to God, that history is safely tucked away like an insurance policy, and we don't ever have to be concerned with an adverse judgment against us on the Day of Judgment. To that, my response is this: no, Jesus did not change the pattern we're reading about in Amos. No, Yeshua didn't abolish His Father's criteria for blessing and for curse. Just as Israel and Judah were on the cusp of having their salvation history reversed and turned into a punitive judgment against them for blatant rebellion and disobedience, so are all Believers in all eras subject to the same. That includes you, I and everyone else who has, or ever will, be born on this planet.

Verse 12 condemns the people of Israel for intentionally corrupting the Nazarites. Whether or not some Israelites virtually forced the Nazarites to break their Nazarite vows by making them drink wine is unknown. At the least those Nazarites who stuck to their vows were marginalized and shunned by the community, putting them into untenable situations. No one wants to be ignored by our own community, and (humans being what we are) sometimes we react or behave in ways that we otherwise would not in order to not be ostracized or even harmed. As for Prophets being prohibited from prophesying (from delivering God's message), we do find such occasions in the Bible. In 1Kings13 we read of Jeroboam arresting a Prophet for prophesying. In 1Kings18, during the time of Queen Jezebel we read of a couple hundred of God's prophets having to go into hiding to keep from being arrested or killed. In Isaiah 30 we read:

**CJB Isaiah 30:9-11** ***<sup>9</sup> For this is a rebellious people; they are lying children, children who refuse to hear the Torah of ADONAI. <sup>10</sup> They say to the seers, "Do not see!" to those who have visions, "Do not tell us the visions you have as they really are; but flatter us, fabricate illusions! <sup>11</sup> Get out of the way! Leave the path! Rid us of the Holy One of Isra'el!"***

Today, even in supposed "enlightened and free" Western nations such as Canada, Pastors are restricted by government law what they can preach from the pulpit, especially as concerns God's biblical morality code on sexuality. Those who defy those laws can, and do, get arrested and jailed. Sometimes their Churches are

literally confiscated and shut down. The biblical pattern of God's prophets being shut-down and silenced continues and only gets more restrictive year after year. So, in verse 13 God announces that He's through with waiting patiently for Israel to reform their rebellious behavior, and now will exact a severe punishment upon them for all the transgressions (and more) that He has listed.

The agricultural metaphor of this happening is of an overloaded cart getting bogged down, unable to move. The overloaded cart is meant to represent the incredible abundance that Ephraim/Israel has been enjoying for some time as a result of God's blessing. Ironically, it is as a result of this amazing abundance that Israel has become arrogant and thus ripe for judgment. This translates to the idea that Israel will have no ability to run away to safety once the military invasion against them begins. Instead, they will be frozen in fear at the moment of attack.

The final 3 verses of chapter 2 offer various examples of the helplessness of the entire Israelite population, even including their army, before the overwhelming forces of their invader. So, these verses deal with what Israel has designed to protect them against such an event...their army...but God says it will quickly wither under the coming assault. Recall that the invasion being envisioned is future to when Amos is prophesying. Now, if years in advance you heard that your city would be invaded by an enemy and that police protection could not stop it...that the loss and occupation of your city was inevitable no matter what...what would you do? Common sense says that you would prepare by leaving well in advance of this uncertain... but entirely unstoppable...event. But you'd only do it if you actually believed it. If you weren't sure, or were skeptical, you likely would stay and wait to see what happens...assuming you could escape at some point closer to when the prophesied event actually occurs...thereby maintaining the comforts and familiarity of your life as it is. Thus, the notion is (as with the Prophet Hosea), that God is issuing a warning through His Prophets to prepare, thus giving you sufficient time to prepare. The preparation clearly (in this case) amounts to leaving the land at a time which can be done in an orderly and planned way. Because once the first signs of the invading army appear, it will be too late.

Once again I'm asking you to pay attention to the signs of the times. God, through His Prophets, has warned us that as the End gets very close, scarcities and depravities and dangers of every kind will emerge. In our current situation in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when these exact things are happening worldwide, preparing by running away probably isn't the best course of action because there likely is no place to run to. Rather, preparing our pantries and our lives for a more self-sustaining lifestyle that takes into account the suddenness of emergencies makes more sense. For the moment, there is still time for us to go about it in an orderly fashion; but the overnight onslaught of the Covid pandemic, and our government and societal reaction to it, showed us how once a crisis emerges, it is too late to prepare. My advice is to act now, **but** don't overreact. Prepare practically and not hysterically; this is what God did for Israel and is doing for us who trust in Him. Practical preparation is sensible and sustainable and godly; hysterical preparation...or no preparation at all...is not.

Verses 14 – 16 say that the fastest runners in Israel's army won't be able to outrun the enemy's onslaught. The strongest among their many warriors will be outmatched. Their archers will not be able to stand and shoot their arrows because the enemy is advancing so rapidly, and even those soldiers on war chariots won't be able to flee ahead of the invaders. The bravest few among Israel's large army will simply throw down their weapons, and run and hide in order to try to save themselves. Bottom line: Israel has no hope of surviving what it about to happen to them in the near term. God has ordained their destruction and deportation so no army can prevent what is soon to come, because it is His will that it happens. Let's move on to Amos chapter 3.

### **READ AMOS CHAPTER 3 all**

Although the opening word of verse 1 is translated in the CJB as "listen", it is not a strong enough English term for what is meant. The better word is "hear". In Hebrew the word is **shema**. Hearing without necessarily doing describes the modern sense of the word "listen", but it is far from the meaning of **shema** that always includes an action: doing in response to what you have heard. This frequent word formula to open a thought in the Bible expressed, then, the idea to pay careful attention because something of utmost importance is about to be said and it needs to be heeded. Continuing with the understanding that God has

already made it clear that He will not be recanting or postponing these judgments, what is it that Israel is to “do” after they’ve “heard”? They must do the only things that *can* be done at this point: first, repent and change one’s worship and lifestyle practices even though this will not avert the judgmental punishment. Second, prepare for the inevitable consequences now that you know they are coming. So, the unspoken thought is: **prepare** (there is simply no getting away from this strong underlying theme in Amos). We also find that even though most Bibles say it was the “Lord” that Israel is to heed, the Hebrew actually uses God’s formal name, Yehoveh. In Amos’s era (and most eras right through the New Testament) “lord” is but the English translation for the rather generic Canaanite term **ba’al**. So, just as for pagans if told the lord commands something of them the question would be “which **ba’al**” (which lord), then for multiple-god-worshipping Israel the question would naturally have been “which lord” (if the generic Hebrew word for lord had been used...but it wasn’t). Thus, in this verse we find the Hebrew word Yehoveh...not lord...that makes it clear which “lord” is commanding them.

Once again the matter of Israel’s historical identity is front and center. Israel is the people who God brought up from Egypt. What follows, however, is not just meant for Ephraim/Israel (the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom) but also for **all** Israel (Judah and Ephraim/Israel combined) because the words are directed to “the entire family” (meaning Jacob’s family...all the tribes) which God brought up out of Egypt. This leads us to verse 2, which affirms Israel’s unique position before Yehoveh. He makes it clear that He had a choice of families on earth, but chose Jacob’s family to bless as His elect. They are the **ONLY** nation so chosen, and it is because of this privilege that they must bear this severe judgment. The clear pattern of reasoning goes something like this: 1) Israel, through an actual covenant with God, is uniquely bound to God and to all the terms of that covenant. 2) Because every legitimate covenant consists of terms of the agreement, then since God inherently will never go back on His word, it is up to Israel to bear the responsibility to do their part and obey the terms of the agreement. 3) Since the covenant was between Israel and Yehoveh, then it will be Yehoveh...and no other party or no other god...that will punish Israel the covenant breaker for all their sins (sin is defined throughout the Bible...Old and New Testaments...as breaking a law contained in the Covenant of Moses).

What follows is a series of 7 rhetorical questions put before Israel. That is, as rhetorical it means that the answer to each question is, in this case, a presumed "no". The idea is to get across a most basic message of fact to God's people: nothing is an accident. There is a cause behind everything that happens, even if we cannot quite discern what the effect of it might be. The first rhetorical question is: do two people traveling together share food if they had never met before? The presumed answer is "no". Second, does a lion roar when he's not hunting, but rather is asleep or at his leisure? Again, "no". The third asks if a young lion growls in his lair if he has caught nothing to eat? "No". The lion and next the "young" lion is a common literary pairing in the Hebrew language, and so other than for a difference in the stage of development of the two lions, the difference between them doesn't matter. It just makes the metaphor more impactful and complete.

The 4<sup>th</sup> rhetorical question asks if a bird would become caught in a snare if there was no bait in the trap to draw-in the unsuspecting creature. The answer continues to be "no". The 5<sup>th</sup> question asks if a typical trap used to catch a wild animal has been sprung, does it mean that NOTHING is caught in it? Once again, "no". The sixth question is if a ram's horn is heard in the town will not the townspeople be startled? The ram's horn was used like an alarm. So, if one hears a ram's horn in a town, then it means a battle with an enemy is underway...something that is sure to cause a chill to run down one's spine. The seventh question is where the real point of impact of the previous 6 happens; it asks if a town suffers disaster, isn't it obvious that God has caused it? While many in Israel might have answered "yes" to this question if it was a question about pagan towns in general, since the context is about what is going to happen to an Israelite town, then such a premise that God would be behind the destruction was not something they could easily accept. After all, it's one thing for God to cause disaster on a gentile town; but it's quite another for Him to cause disaster to befall a town of His own people. The Israelites' knee-jerk response to such a question would normally have been "no", because their God was supposed to protect their towns, not to call an enemy to attack them and then stand aside so that the town can be obliterated. The point being made here (that was designed to send an unwelcome chill down every Israelite's spine) was that what they assumed had always been so, wasn't. Yehoveh WILL bring disaster upon His own people as a punishment.

There is an underlying and often implied understanding within much of the Christian world that God would never punish those who trust in His Son, no matter how much they deserved it. Here, it is made clear through Amos that under the right circumstances...extreme circumstances...and with sufficient rebellion and disobedience, Yehoveh most certainly reserves the right to severely punish His own, and the proof of it is that He has done it before in the past. Therefore, one ought not to be smug or complacent about our redemption, nor should one take his or her salvation as an automatic, guaranteed right of protection against God's destructive discipline for or faithlessness.

A summation of what verses 3 – 6 explain to the people of Israel is made in verse 7 and it goes like this: "Do you really think that just because you are My people that you are immune from My punishment for wrongdoing against Me?" And, further: "since God always warns His people in advance through His Prophets, should you not listen when I (Amos) speak to you God's oracle of judgment and the cause for it?". Amos is essentially validating his own credentials as God's selected harbinger of the catastrophe that is guaranteed to befall Israel...soon.

So, verse 8 emphasizes that the warning Amos is giving is a done deal; it is fact written in stone and not merely a possibility. The fear of lions was enormous (as it ought to have been). No explanation to anyone alive in that era was necessary. A few verses earlier two "lion" questions were asked based on well-known standard lion behavior: a lion does not roar when he has yet to acquire his prey. But he does growl in his lair once he has captured that prey and is in process of devouring it. Thus says Amos, God (as the metaphorical lion) **has** growled! From the standpoint of Heaven, the prey has already been captured and is about to be devoured. That prey is Israel. Yikes. And further, any true Prophet of God cannot possibly ignore the voice of God anymore than he can ignore the roar of a lion...and Amos was not about to suffer in order to learn this lesson as his predecessor Jonah had to!

Here's the thing (and I especially would like for all who identify themselves as a modern prophet for God to consider): a true prophet acts under divine compulsion and not self-will. A true Prophet doesn't seek to be a Prophet, but rather is often called by God to be a Prophet against his/her will. A Prophet of



Yehoveh is never wrong if they are actually prophesying what God told them to prophesy. If they are ever wrong they are false prophets worthy only of death for their wickedness in deceitfully purporting to others that they speak for God when in fact they are but speaking their own uninspired thoughts. Amos's prophecies...and all the biblical prophets' prophecies...have come true and some are in process of coming true and in many cases are but a repeat of what already happened in the past.

Verse 9 begins a new oracle from God. In a nutshell, this begins a section that extends well into the first several verses of chapter 4. It is a diatribe against the wealthy and elite of the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, and it begins with God scoffing at the futility of the fortifications that Israel has built.

It is for a reason that Ashdod and the fortified cities of Egypt were chosen to be witnesses to the destruction of the capital city of Ephraim/Israel, which is Samaria. These represent nations who, although they don't know Yehoveh as their god, are not aware (but should be) that His laws and commands apply to them just as they do to all the tribes of Israel (this is what was plainly revealed in the verses prior to where we are now when the judgment of 6 pagan nations is announced). Do not let it go unnoticed that in God's laws 2 witnesses are to be brought forth to give eyewitness accounts concerning a criminal allegation. Thus, Ashdod and Egypt are those 2 witnesses to bear testimony against the crimes of the accused northern kingdom of Israel. The tone, and context, is (ironically enough) that Ashdod and Egypt are "expert" witnesses. Why are they expert? Because for centuries they have been doing what Israel is now accused of doing.

These nations produced terror to their own citizens and ruled much territory outside their own nation in brutality. Although it would be Assyria that God uses to invade Israel, they are of the same ilk as Ashdod and Egypt. For those of you who are among the more nuanced Bible students, I'll mention that only in the oldest Hebrew texts do we find the word "Ashdod". The Greek instead says Egypt and Assyria, as does the Masoretic Hebrew text from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Without doubt this is because it turned out to be Assyria (not Ashdod) that attacked Israel. But on the other hand, neither did Egypt get involved in the assault. So, whoever the Bible editor was in the distant past who made these assumptions should not

have. Ashdod and Egypt are representative of Israel's ancient and nearly continual foes, and this applied to Amos's day as well.

These 2 witnesses are summoned to the hills surrounding Samaria in order to get a panoramic view of what is going to happen to that fortress city (to be clear, they are not invited to come as invaders). Naturally this invitation is not meant for the common citizens of each place, but rather to the government leaders, the wealthy and the elite, because they are just like the leaders and wealthy elite of Israel. The tumult spoken of within the city of Samaria is connected to the oppression of the people by the leaders and the aristocrats. That is, the poor (that made up the bulk of ancient societies) were being used as cheap labor so that the elite could increase their fortunes.

Verse 10 says something that is another common theme in Amos as it is found in Hosea. It is that Israel is no longer capable of doing what is right. So, instead, they sow violence and robbery in their palaces. Why can they no longer do right? Because they have no longer have a moral compass. They abandoned their divine moral compass...the Law of Moses...in favor of the doctrines of their leaders who, like false prophets, proclaim to speak for God but don't. Hosea addressed this head-on:

**CJB Hosea 4:6 *6 My people are destroyed for want of knowledge. Because you rejected knowledge, I will also reject you as cohen for me. Because you forgot the Torah of your God, I will also forget your children.***

"Because you forgot the Torah of your God...." There it is. When a worshipper of God abandons His moral code (the Law of Moses), he abandons knowledge. And when we abandon Heavenly knowledge, we of course substitute it with manmade "knowledge". Therefore, when we don't know God's Torah we have lost the capability to do what is right, even though we think otherwise. Neither Ashdod nor Egypt knew God's Torah so the result was violence, robbery, social injustice, and moral degradation. Israel had become no different than Ashdod and Egypt. The leaders of these two nations had become so accustomed to oppressing the poor in order to line their pockets that it seemed "right" to them. They believed they were entitled to take advantage of the helpless. Amos, God's appointed enforcer of His Torah, was calling the leaders of Ephraim/Israel on the carpet for

daring to adopt pagan standards of leadership and calling it godly. It bears repeating that the Canaanite (and virtually all other) pagan religions of the era placed no demands on the worshippers to be ethical or moral. The gods of these religions allowed all indulgences into personal pleasure and gain; all they cared about was for themselves to be cared for. Therefore, the incredible if not obscene wealth of the elite and powerful of Ashdod, Egypt and now Israel are, of themselves, proof of their godlessness and depravity. And, by the way, biblically speaking while wealth is of itself not proof of godlessness, such wealth when hoarded and not used for the good of others (good as defined by Yehoveh) is. So, we are not to take this as a diatribe against all wealth or all wealthy in all cases, but rather as a Proverb that operates as a general rule of thumb.

The consequences of Israel's rebuff of their moral compass...disobedience to God's laws...is stated in verse 11. An enemy is soon going to invade Ephraim/Israel, and strip it of all the accumulated wealth that is stored up in the palaces of the rich. In other words, all the work and oppression of the people to enrich the elites will soon be for naught; it will be confiscated by an enemy nation. It is important to regularly remind us all that what God is inflicting as a curse is precisely what the Covenant of Moses says will happen to Israel for the type of wrongdoing that is happening. Most of Deuteronomy 28 deals with this but I'll draw out just a few verses to highlight it:

**CJB Deuteronomy 28:49-53** ***<sup>49</sup> Yes, ADONAI will bring against you a nation from far away that will swoop down on you from the end of the earth like a vulture, a nation whose language you don't understand, <sup>50</sup> a nation grim in appearance, whose people neither respect the old nor pity the young. <sup>51</sup> They will devour the offspring of your livestock and the produce of your soil, until you have been destroyed. They will leave you without grain, wine, olive oil, or your young cattle and sheep- until they have caused you to perish. <sup>52</sup> They will besiege all your towns until your high, fortified walls, in which you trusted, collapse everywhere in your land, which ADONAI your God gave you. <sup>53</sup> Then, because of the severity of the siege and distress that your enemies are inflicting on you, you will eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your own sons and daughters, whom ADONAI your God has given you.***

Is this not precisely what we reading about here in Amos? It is; and it is precisely what did happen to Ephraim/Israel and a little more than a century later to Judah. And Believers... especially Believers in America and in other Western oriented nations...this will happen to us as well. When, exactly, I cannot know so I cannot tell you. But my instinct is that it is near, and for the same reasons. I'll pontificate for just a moment so please indulge me. It has always fallen to God's people...including those gentiles who have accepted Christ...to be the advocates of God's morality and ethics. And this especially applies to our leadership who speak in bema and pulpit. Sadly, ever since the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when the Roman Church that is the forefather of modern Christianity systematically replaced God's Torah with Church doctrines formulated by church councils, we have (like Israel) moved farther and farther away from divine truth and now operate so much on human rules and traditions. Even so, the core of God's moral code was sufficiently ingrained in our faith such that good men of God would preach the truth to their congregations so as to greatly affect the moral condition of our societies (generally for the good). But, like the infamous fable of the frog in the kettle, a point of inflection has been reached in the last half-century or so, the results of which can only be one thing: a nearly complete abandonment of God's morality code in favor of a fluid and ever-changing morality (or I prefer to think of it as new amorality) that reflects the condition and desires of our societies. Thus, morality and its absolute nature, sin and its absolute nature, are less spoken of in our Churches and Synagogues, and rather are left up to the whims of individuals who follow and prefer the trends of our modern world. We are the new Ephraim/Israel. And just like with Ephraim/Israel it is not that every last individual or every corporate group of the faithful are the same. However, it has become (in my observation) that the preponderance has abandoned God's moral code, and so that is how God sees us as an overall body. It is how God judged Israel as a corporate body and we need to pay attention, repent, and resume our purpose as God's elect to proclaim to one and all, and to live-out in sight of all, the moral code He has given to us as embodied by the Torah.

The God-as-a-lion metaphor continues in verses 12 and 13. It also continues with the subject of an enemy plundering the riches of the wealthy of Ephraim/Israel. Remembering that Amos was a sheep breeder, he had no doubt lost a few sheep to lions and viewed the remains. The idea is that only the scantest remnant of the dead animal remains when a lion is through with it (as

represented by the leg bones and a piece of an ear). God says so it shall be for the people (especially the wealthy) of Israel. Only a remnant shall remain, and even then probably not fully intact.

It speaks of the people of Israel huddled under their beds. That is, these are those who did NOT prepare, because they did NOT believe the words of God's Prophets that were sent with the divine warning. Or perhaps they thought themselves above it and immune. Understand that while in modern times beds are located in bedrooms and used for nighttime when sleeping, that was not the case in ancient times. Beds referred to the soft cushions where the more well-to-do could assume a reclining position as they ate meals around a table and as they socialized and partied. This would not have been the experience of the common people who mostly slept on mats laid on the dirt floors of their meager homes.

We'll pause here for today, and conclude chapter 3 and get well into chapter 4 next time.