

## VI. *The Fourth Transgression*

09-Jan-05            Amos 1:3-2:16    Keddie Chapters 1-2

*Theme:*            God universally judges the nations, but He holds the Church to a higher standard because of their unique position as the people of God.

*Key Verses:*    Amos 2:6-8 <sup>6</sup>Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals. <sup>7</sup>They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, And pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, To defile My holy name. <sup>8</sup>They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, And drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.”

### Review

Last week, we began our study of the book of Amos and the prophet from Tekoa. **Amos lived in the days of Jeroboam II of Israel – around 785-750 BC. It was a time of peace and prosperity. However, the society was corrupt religiously and morally.** Their external religion bore little reality to the revealed will of God. Wealth and leisure led to social injustice and exploitation of the poor. **The “golden age” had a gilded exterior and a rotten core.**

Amos was an Aggie – a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore-figs, not a professional prophet. However, when the Lord came along and *took* him, he had no choice but to obey. **God called him to be a prophet of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel, even though he was from the southern kingdom of Judah.** That obviously did not make his calling easier, as we saw in the confrontation with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel.

**Amaziah tried to silence Amos by misrepresentation, by temptation and by confrontation by authority. But Amos was not fazed by Amaziah’s attacks.** Amos held his ground and dealt with all of Amaziah’s false words before dealing a word of judgment against Amaziah and the nation of Israel. **The LORD God again roared as a lion about to consume its prey. This is the theme of Amos – judgment against the corrupt religion and social injustice of Amos’ day.** Like all the other prophets, Amos’ message is a timeless one that is pertinent in every age, especially our own. Let us have ears to hear the roar of the Lion from Zion and repent of our sin.

### Introduction

James Boice tells a pertinent story that helps us get into our text this morning: “A woman attended an evangelistic meeting and was delighted when she learned that the preacher would talk about sin. When he preached against strong drink she cried, ‘Preach it, brother!’ When he declaimed against tobacco she shouted, ‘Amen!’ The minister’s third point was a condemnation of gossip, and she leaned over to her neighbor and said, ‘Now he’s not preachin’; he’s meddlin’.’ This is the way those who first listened to Amos must have reacted as they heard the sermon recorded in the first two chapters of his prophecy.”

**The passage before us today is a series of oracles against the nations surrounding Israel.** Each oracle is announced with the same opening formula: “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of X, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment.’” **There are a total of eight oracles, arranged in a 7+1 pattern. The first six oracles are against pagan nations. They are further arranged in thematic pairs:** Syria and Philistia go together, followed by Tyre

## Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

and Edom then Ammon and Moab. The seventh nation is the southern kingdom of Judah – Amos’ own country. **This gives a structure of a-a’-b-b’-c-c’-d, where the final emphasis is upon Judah.** If this was Amos’ first message in the northern kingdom, he probably had quite a receptive audience: “Preach it brother!” “Let ‘em have it!” “Now you’re talking!” “Atta boy!”

However, Amos wasn’t finished yet. He didn’t have a seven-part sermon; his sermon had a 7+1 structure. **It’s the “+1” that’s the rhetorical surprise.** Just when you think he’s come to a good ending, he springs the real ending on you. **An eighth oracle, introduced by the same formula, but much longer and much more detailed, is now levied against Israel. The entire structure of the message is designed to focus on this last oracle: the indictment of Israel.** And like the woman at the evangelistic meeting, Israel’s enthusiasm for God’s judgment on others’ sins is now swallowed up in denial when their own sins are highlighted. Amos is no longer just preachin’; he’s meddlin’. Remember Amaziah and his reaction to Amos. Let’s hear what this meddler has to say.

### Exposition

#### A. Seven Nations (1:3-2:5)

Because this series of oracles against the seven nations is so highly structured, let us first notice **the similarities between them** before we highlight the differences.

**“Thus says the LORD.” Each oracle is the word of the Covenant God, the God who roars from Zion.** These are not Amos’ words of judgment. They come from the roaring lion of Zion.

**“For three transgressions of X, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment.” This is the introductory formula for each oracle.** It should be read figuratively, rather than literally. **The idea is one of piling up of sin.** In Abraham’s day “the iniquity of the Amorite” may not have yet been complete. But it was growing, until the time in which Joshua led the Israelites in a holy war against them, because the time of their wickedness became complete. In the same way, the sins of these nations are filling up the cup of wrath, until it is time for God’s wrath to descend upon them. The numerical formula may suggest that there were three other items in the list of transgressions which Amos omits, instead focusing on the decisive *fourth transgression*. **The “fourth transgression” is the straw the breaks the camel’s back; it is the one that triggers judgment.**

This already says something about the Lord – the lion of Zion. It demonstrates His patience with sinful people. He is fully within His rights to destroy the sinner after the very first sin. But He is patient. God’s mercy waits and His patience watches, for He does save sinners out of their sins. That is the grace of God. But there does come a time when the grace period is over, and then judgment falls. The lion is roaring judgment against the nations.

**Third,** notice the form of punishment listed in each of the first seven oracles: “I will send a fire ...” **God will send the fire of judgment upon the strongholds of each offending nation.** They will not be safe behind their walls and in their palaces or strongholds. In their strength they could commit the fourth transgression with seeming impunity; but **God will destroy them in the midst of their so-called “strength.”**

**Next, notice the location of these nations and their proximity to Israel.** First we have Syria, represented by its capital city of Damascus, to the north. Then we go to Philistia, represented by Gaza (and Ashdod, Askalon, and Ekron) to the southwest. We then travel northwest to Tyre, then southeast to Edom, northeast to Ammon, east to Moab, and eventually end up south in

Judah. **If we draw a continuous line, we're like a spider that has caught the fly of Israel in its web.**

As Amos goes through his list of nations, he works to draw that web tighter and tighter around Israel. **The first three nations, Syria, Philistia, and Tyre, are pagan nations that interact with Israel politically, nothing more. The next three nations, however, have a kinship with Israel.** Edom is a brother-nation, descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob (*cf.* Gen. 25:29ff.). Meanwhile, Ammon and Moab are incestuous cousins, descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham (*cf.* Gen. 19:36-38). **Finally, the seventh nation, Judah, was really the same country as Israel and a joint-heir of the covenant promises of God. If the pagan nations, and the cousin-nations, and even the joint-heir nation are not exempt from God's wrath, what chance does Israel think she has to escape judgment?**

Finally, notice that each pair of countries is linked by similar fourth transgressions. **The theme of the first two, Syria and Philistia, could be summed up as "cruelty to others." The fourth transgression of Tyre and Edom is "cruelty to brothers." Ammon and Moab are guilty of practicing cruelty on the helpless, which I've designated as "cruelty squared." All of these non-covenant nations are guilty of transgressions against their fellow man.** Even though they do not have the revelation of God's word and the fellowship of God's covenant, they are held accountable for their conduct towards their neighbor. Obviously they are guilty of the first great commandment, "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength," but **they are held guilty here of failing to adhere to the second great commandment: "love your neighbor as yourself."**

Meanwhile, what is Judah's fourth transgression? **It is covenant-breaking. They are held to a higher standard, because they have received God's revelation and God's covenant.** Their guilt is of a more damning character. "To whom much is given, much is required." Judah was given special privileges by God and is guilty of abusing them, sinning against God. In a sense, **Israel, the "+1" nation in this list of seven, is paired with Judah. They are also guilty of covenant-breaking. But God shows them how their covenant breaking goes even further. Because they are breaking the covenant and sinning against God, it expresses itself in social injustice and crimes against their fellow man. The first and second commandments are linked – Amos holds Israel in the spotlight and shines the truth of their guilt upon them.**

With that lengthy introduction, let's finally examine the text in detail.

*1. Syria and Philistia: Cruelty to Others (1:3-8)*

The first nation up on our list is Syria, represented by its capital of Damascus. **Their fourth transgression is cruelty in war against the inhabitants of Gilead, a part of Israel.** Amos is most likely referring to the military campaigns of Hazael (841-806 BC) about a half-century earlier. Elisha had told Hazael that the current king of Syria, was about to die (at Hazael's hands, as it turned out). Listen to what Elisha tells Hazael:

**2 Kings 8:12-13** <sup>12</sup>And Hazael said, "Why is my lord weeping?" He [Elisha] answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child." <sup>13</sup>So Hazael said, "But what is your

## Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

servant—a dog, that he should do this gross thing?” And Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you will become king over Syria."

Later on, we read of Hazael's military campaigns against Israel:

**2 Kings 10:32-33** <sup>32</sup>In those days the LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel <sup>33</sup>from the Jordan eastward: *all the land of Gilead*—Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh—from Aroer, which is by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan.

**2 Kings 13:7** <sup>7</sup>For he left of the army of Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers; for the king of Syria had destroyed them and *made them like the dust at threshing*.

After Hazael's death, king Jehoash of Israel (the father of Jeroboam II) was able to regain much of the lost territory from Hazael's son, Ben-Hadad (2 Kings 13:22-25). This led into the peace and prosperity of Jeroboam's reign during the time of Amos.

Amos says that Hazael and Syria “threshed Gilead with implements of iron.” **They treated the inhabitants of that part of Israel like wheat.** You thresh wheat to remove the chaff and extract extra value out of the crop. **Hazael treated people like a crop – something to extract profit from.** For this cruelty to others, Syria is condemned.

Moving on, what is the fourth transgression of Philistia, represented by the city of Gaza? **They profited in slave-trading, selling captives to Edom. Again notice the cruelty to others, treating them like commodities to be bought and sold.**

**Syria and Philistia are paired in their cruelty to others.** They are also paired in judgment. God says He will “cut off the inhabitant” and “the one who holds the scepter.”

### 2. Tyre and Edom: Cruelty to Brothers (1:9-12)

The next oracle is against Tyre, that great seaport and trading city of the Phoenicians, located in modern-day Lebanon. **At first glance, the fourth transgression of Tyre is the same as that of Philistia** – “because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom.” **However, this sin is intensified by the second phrase, “and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.”**

Both Tyre and Philistia were engaged in the slave trade; both were engaged in slave-trading with Edom. However, **the fourth transgression of Tyre goes beyond treating others as objects; it is in treating “brothers” as objects.** Apparently Tyre had broken a treaty or covenant with another people and violated that agreement by selling that people into slavery. The slave trade is bad enough; but the deceit and treachery against one in covenantal relationship was unforgivable. **Tyre's fourth transgression is cruelty to brothers.**

When we turn to Edom, we almost expect to hear more about slave trading. After all, both Philistia and Tyre have been implicated in the slave trade with Edom. But as we turn from the rocky seacoast of Tyre to the rocky desert strongholds of Edom, we are in for a surprise. **The fourth transgression of Edom involves warfare and cruelty against “his brother.”** So we can see that the linkage between Tyre and Edom lies in their cruelty to brothers. But what is this brother of Edom?

While it is possible that the text is referring to a brotherhood created by covenant, as in the case of Tyre, it is more likely that **Amos is referring to their brother-nation: Israel.** The

## Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

descendants of Esau had long been antagonistic toward the descendants of Jacob. Edom refused to permit the Israelites to pass through their land in the days of Moses (Num. 20:18-21). David conquered Edom and incorporated their territory into his kingdom (2 Sam. 8:13-14). Later on, Edom revolved against king Jehoram of Judah and regained their independence about 850 BC (2 Kgs. 8:20-22; 2 Chr. 21:8-10). Wars continued on and off between Edom and God's people (2 Chr. 25:5-16; 28:16-18) until they were again subdued in the days of the Maccabees (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC) and incorporated into the Jewish nation. Herod the Great of Idumea was an Edomite, and continued the war by trying to destroy the Christ-child.

**When Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, the Edomites were part of the Babylonian coalition and rejoiced at the downfall of their ancient enemy:**

**Psalm 137:7** <sup>7</sup>Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!"

For this reason, the entire prophecy of the little book of Obadiah is against the nation of Edom:

**Obadiah 1:10-12** <sup>10</sup>For violence against your brother Jacob, Shame shall cover you, And you shall be cut off forever. <sup>11</sup>In the day that you stood on the other side—In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, When foreigners entered his gates And cast lots for Jerusalem—Even you were as one of them. <sup>12</sup>But *you should not have gazed on the day of your brother In the day of his captivity*; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly In the day of distress.

**Cruelty to brothers – this is the fourth transgression of Tyre and Edom.**

### *3. Ammon and Moab: Cruelty Squared (1:13-2:3)*

Next we have the cousins: **Ammon and Moab**. These two countries take cruelty against their neighbor to the next level. **Their crimes are against the helpless**. Ammon is judged "because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead." Moab is judged "because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime." Instead of respecting the dead, Moab desecrated human remains. Boice puts it this way: "The first offense is against the future. The second offense is against the past. We are to honor the past. We are to protect the future." **In both cases, personhood is degraded. Unborn children are slaughtered by the Ammonites. The bones of the dead are desecrated by the Moabites. Neither is able to mount their own defense – they are helpless in the face of this cruelty taken to the next level – cruelty squared.**

This wraps up our review of the oracles against the first six nations. Cruelty to others, cruelty to brothers, and cruelty squared. All six of these nations were guilty of violating the second great commandment: "love your neighbor as yourself." As we turn to the (supposed) climax of Amos' opening sermon, we see him shift gears yet again. Judah is a covenant nation. And their guilt is greater, because their revelation is greater.

### *4. Judah: Covenant Breaking (2:4-5)*

What is the fourth transgression of Judah? "They have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed." **Judah's crime is not a sin against their neighbor; it is a sin against God Himself. They have strayed from their covenant responsibilities. They have failed to love the LORD their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.** They have sinned against knowledge –

## Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

disobeying the commandments of God given to them in the law at Sinai. Theirs is the greater guilt – “to whom much is given, much is required.”

The word “lies” in the NKJV is translated as “false gods” in the NIV. The lies that Judah followed were the pagan gods of the nations around them. We can see in this short oracle the process of moral and spiritual decline. First you turn away from God and His word, and then you turn toward the lie of another god. As Keddie puts it: “Yesterday’s heresy is tomorrow’s orthodoxy. Tradition, in the bad sense, prevailed over revealed truth.”

### **B. One Nation: Israel (2:6-16)**

If that had been the end of the sermon, Amos’ Israelite listeners no doubt would have been satisfied. They would have gone home never recognizing that they were just as guilty as any of the previous seven nations. They could see the speck in their neighbors’ eyes, but the log in their own eye was blinding them to the truth. Thus, Amos continues on preaching. While it must have pained Amos to speak such words against his homeland of Judah, there was stronger condemnation to come. In a sense, **everything that he has said to this point is just the introductory remarks. The meat of the message is in the oracle against the seventh (plus one) nation: Israel.**

As we consider **the oracle against Israel**, we should realize that it **forms the natural fourth pair of nations with Judah**. Israel and Judah together comprise the people of God. The sin of Judah already given, covenant-breaking, is equally true of Israel. It appears as if Amos simply assumes that that is known, because he proceeds to go beyond that in detailing the crimes of Israel.

#### *1. The Indictment (2:6-8)*

**The indictment against Israel is much lengthier than against the other nations. Amos gives us four poetic couplets, describing four sins.** Hubbard suggests that Amos may have “deliberately filled out the three-four pattern by listing a quartet of wrongs rather than skipping down to the last items as he did in all the other indictments of the nations.” **Essentially, there are two categories of sin that Amos describes here. The first category is sins against neighbors – the wealthy oppressing the poor; the second category is sins against God.** All of these acts are sins against the revealed word of God; Israel should have known better.

**The first sin shows how the wealthy in Israel treated their less fortunate neighbors:** “they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals” (2:6b). Once again we see the treatment of people like objects for personal and material gain; **the oppression of others.** Is Israel any better than Syria or Philistia? No!

**The second sin continues this theme of oppression of the less fortunate:** “They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble” (2:7a). Keddie comments: “A modern paraphrase of this verse might be ‘They wanted to rub the faces of the poor in the dirt.’ The poor were to be kept in their place. It was class prejudice of the most exploitative kind.” When we consider that the wealthy Israelites were doing this to their fellow countrymen, we realize that **they were oppressing their brothers.** Is Israel any better than Tyre or Edom? No!

**The third sin refers to ritual prostitution:** “A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name” (2:7b). The girl in question would have been a “holy” woman dedicated to the service of Baal. All the men of the land, signified by “a man and his father” go to these

Baal shrines “to worship” with the cultic prostitutes. That is why **this is a sin against God – a sin of defiling God’s holy name. They were engaging in this activity in the name of God, but they were breaking the First, Second, and Seventh Commandments.** They knew better, because they had the law, but they turned away from God and turned toward idolatrous worship. **They were covenant breakers.** Is Israel any better than Judah? No!

Finally, **the fourth sin, the fourth transgression, is a compound offense against both God and man:** “They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god” (2:8). **They are so comfortable in the house of their false god that they settle down and sleep there.** In addition, it may be a reference to the previous verse regarding the ritual prostitutes. The presence of an altar just confirms the perversion of their religion, because the altar is to be the place of reconciliation between God and man; but no reconciliation ever took place at a false altar. Furthermore, **they are sinning against their fellow man, by sleeping in cloaks taken in pledge against a loan.** The law makes it clear that such collateral must be returned at night:

*Exodus 22:26-27* <sup>26</sup>*If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.* <sup>27</sup>*For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious.*

**So, Israel oppresses their neighbor and breaks the covenant by worshiping other gods.** Is Israel any better than Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, *or* Judah? NO!

## 2. The Evidence (2:9-12)

I’ve asked if Israel’s conduct was any better than the other nations around them. The way Amos has framed his “surprise” sermon has clearly demonstrated that it is not. **They are guilty of the same kind of crimes. However, their guilt is heightened by their history.** The pagan nations around Israel (and Judah) did not have the revelation of God’s word. Neither did they have the intervention of God’s salvation power in their history. Israel did. **Israel should have known better.**

That’s the point of this next section. **Amos points out to Israel the grace of God on their behalf.** In fact, God Himself speaks to make this point even clearer. Notice all of the “I” statements. “I destroyed the Amorite.” “I brought you up from the land of Egypt.” “I raised up some of your sons as prophets.”

**In contrast to the sin of Israel, the grace of God is highlighted. In just a few short verses, we are reminded of the history of God’s people from Exodus through the books of Samuel,** and how God delivered His people from slavery, protected them in the wilderness despite their grumbling, gave them a land that was not their own, and continued to grace them with holy men such as the prophets and Nazirites (e.g., Samson, Samuel) to lead them in truth. God even challenges the people to deny the truth of this history. “Is it not so, O you children of Israel?”

How does Israel respond to the grace of God? Keddie comments: “The holiness of the Nazirites embarrassed them and the message of the prophets offended them! They were a living reproach to the unclean lives of Israel’s people! The lamentable reality is that the most virulent opposition to enthusiastic expressions of Christian commitment come from supposedly Christian people. Who wants today’s prophets to tone down the message? Who would rather have ‘gospel rock’ than authoritative preaching of the Word? Surely the church, more than the world!”

Motyer sums it up well: “Israel wanted neither the example of holy living nor the declaration of divine truth. The deepest sin of the people of God, the sin from which all sin springs, the sin which, through His prophet, the Lord singles out for final reaffirmation, is the sin of possessing revelation from God and ignoring it. This is the ‘fourth transgression’ of the people of God.”

3. *The Verdict (2:13-16)*

**What is left for God to do but to pronounce judgment?** Israel is guilty, and must be punished. Verse 13 is difficult to translate in the Hebrew and its meaning is uncertain. One possible interpretation is that **even as a fully-loaded cart presses down on what lies under it, a pressing and inescapable judgment will crush down upon Israel.** In the book (and musical) *Les Miserables*, the escaped convict Jean Valjean risks recapture when a runaway cart crashes and pins a helpless man under it. No one is able to move the heavy cart to save the man, who is slowly being crushed to death. But Valjean is an exceptionally strong man, and he is able to lift the crushing load of the cart to save the man. Police Inspect Javert sees this act of superhuman strength and realizes that this man is the convict he is searching for. Unfortunately for Israel, there is no Jean Valjean to lift up the crushing load that God has placed upon them.

As I look at verses 14-16, I am reminded of the Olympic motto – *citius, altius, fortius* – faster, higher, stronger. However, not even an Olympic champion will be able to escape God’s wrath. **Neither their swiftness, nor their strength, nor their skill, nor their courage will be able to save them in that day of the Lord’s judgment.**

Conclusion

Thus Amos concludes his opening sermon. The Lord has roared from Zion. What lessons can we learn? I’ve come up with three, and in a feeble attempt to be clever, they all start with the letter “U.”

**First, notice the universality of God’s judgment. God holds all nations and all individuals accountable for their sins, whether or not they are aware of their lawlessness.** The six pagan nations were judged by what they knew, on how they treated their neighbor. The two covenant nations were held to a higher standard, being judged according to how they broke God’s law. But all were judged by the roaring Lion. In the New Testament Paul explains this principle:

**Romans 1:18-25** <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, <sup>21</sup>because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. <sup>24</sup>Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

All will be judged. Ignorance is no excuse.

**Second, understand the *uniqueness of God's people*. God's church is called out from the nations. They are to be different, unique.** They have the word, the law, the covenants, the blessings, and the gifts of God. But the people of Israel in Amos' day were not living like that. Their lives were indistinguishable from the pagans around them. The word of God, the covenant of God had no impact in their daily lives. They were too busy pursuing their selfish gains and satisfying their selfish desires to live the unique calling of God's people. And so the Lord roared from Zion. **If God's people will not live unique lives, then they lose their unique privileges.** God treated Israel no differently than He would a pagan nation, because that is what Israel had become.

What about today? There are many churches that profess the name of Jesus Christ, but do they live lives in accordance with the Word of God? I fear that there are many shallow, empty, Godless churches today in Christendom. On the exterior, they look whole, but beyond the gilded surface, they are hollow and corrupt. Are they any different than Israel? Will God treat them any differently than Israel? This is a warning for us. **Let us guard the uniqueness of God's people in our own church, in our own lives, and live according to the revealed word of God.**

**Third, listen to the *urgency of God's word*.** The Lord roared from Zion in judgment. I didn't spend any time reviewing the fates of all of the nations listed in Amos 1-2. In some case, I don't know what happened to them in history. But let me ask you this: Where are the Philistines? Where are the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites? Where are the Phoenicians? The city of Tyre was completely destroyed by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. What about Damascus? While it is true Damascus remains one of the oldest continually occupied cities in the world, they have had their share of woe. They were captured first by Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 BC. Later on they would be controlled by the Babylonians, the Persians, Alexander the Great, and from 63 BC onward into the New Testament era, the Romans.

But the focus of Amos' first sermon was not on these nations, but on the people of God. What about them? **The nation of Israel was among the first to feel the blow of judgment. In 722 BC, only 50-60 years after Amos first gave this prophecy, the city of Samaria was destroyed by the Assyrians** and the people of Israel were carted off and dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire. The promised judgment came within the lifetime of some of Amos' listeners. **There is an urgency about the word of God, especially when it comes in judgment. Today is the day to hear God's word and repent. Tomorrow might be too late.** As the Scripture says:

**Hebrews 3:7-13** <sup>7</sup>Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, <sup>8</sup>Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup>Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years." <sup>10</sup>Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, "They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways." <sup>11</sup>So I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." <sup>12</sup>Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; <sup>13</sup>but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Let us hear the urgency of God's word, repent of our sins, and live lives worthy of our calling as the unique people of God.

Next week: Lesson 7 – The Roaring Lion – Amos 3:1-15 – Keddie Chapters 3-4

Close in Prayer.