

VII. *The Roaring Lion*

16-Jan-05 Amos 3:1-15 Keddie Chapters 3-4

Theme: The Lion of Zion roars in judgment against Israel because they have failed to live up to their calling as the people of God.

Key Verses: Amos 3:1-2, 7-8 ¹Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: ²“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” ... ⁷Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. ⁸A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?

Review

Last week we looked at *the fourth transgression*. “For three transgressions of X, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment.” Amos follows this pattern to **proclaim the universality God’s judgment upon three pairs of pagan nations:** on Syria and Philistia for their cruelty to others; on Tyre and Edom for their cruelty to brothers; and on Ammon and Moab for their cruelty squared. **God held the pagan nations accountable for violations against the Second Great Commandment, to “love your neighbor as yourself.”** The seventh nation listed, as the supposed climax to this sermon, was **Judah, who was condemned for their covenant-breaking. God held his covenant people to a higher standard, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.”**

All would have been well for Amos’ Israelite hearers if he had stopped at the logical point in his sermon, after the seventh oracle of judgment. However, **Amos pulled a rhetorical surprise, using a seven plus one format. So Amos launches into the true heart of his sermon, against the “plus one” nation of Israel. Israel is guilty of living no different than the pagan nations around them, despite their uniqueness.** Although they have had the privilege of God’s revelation, God’s salvation, God’s covenant, God’s blessings, and God’s care of them, you could never tell by observing them. **Israel has broken both the First Great Commandment and the Second Great Commandment.**

So Amos comes to Israel and proclaims the words of the roaring Lion. **But Israel failed to hear the urgency of the message, and so within 50 years or so, the promised judgment fell on them.**

Introduction

Today, we will continue to look at the roaring Lion of Zion. This is the second section of our 7-part chiasm of the book of Amos. Having started with a “surprise” sermon that looked like it was against the nations but it was primarily against Israel, Amos continues to drill into that theme. Once again, **Amos emphasizes the uniqueness of Israel, their failure to heed the word of the Lord, their sinful behavior, and the consequences thereof.**

Once again, a look at **the structure of this passage can help us focus on the key points. The center of the chiasm is the indictment against Israel: they do not know how to do right.**

Minor Prophets: Joel & Amos

- A. Yahweh will punish Israel for its sins (3:1-2)
 - begins: hear
- B. coming disaster declared by the prophets (3:3-8)
 - theme: lion and its prey
- C. foreign fortresses called to assemble against the mountains of Samaria (3:9)
 - X. CENTER: Israel does not know how to do right (3:10)
 - C'. Israel's fortresses and strongholds will be destroyed (3:11)
- B'. coming of near-total disaster (3:12)
 - theme: lion and its prey
- A'. Yahweh will punish Israel for its sins (3:13-15)
 - begins: hear

Exposition

A. The Lion Roars (3:1-8)

1. A Chosen People (3:1-2)

Amos returns to the heart of his previous sermon to begin the latest indictment of Israel. He takes us once again back to the Exodus and the early days of the nation. Verses 1-2 contain a wealth of information, which we will try to understand.

First, this is a corporate message. Notice who this oracle is addressed to: “Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, *O children of Israel*, against *the whole family* which I brought up from the land of Egypt” (3:1). In the previous sermon, the nations of Judah (2:4-5) and Israel (2:6-16) had been addressed separately. However, in this section, **God is speaking to both nations, the corporate people of God.** No longer can Israel think that Amos is picking only on them. All the people of God are being addressed. Keddie puts it this way: “We might say that he speaks to the whole church, rather than one denomination.”

Next, notice the emphasis on the doctrine of election. “You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth” (3:2a). The word “known” in the NKJV can also be translated as “chosen” (NIV). Keddie comments: “**God’s choice, or election, of His people is certainly included in this verb, but the heart of its meaning is the particularity of God’s gracious knowledge of those whom He plans to save.** He knows them with that intimacy of involvement in which he surrounded them with His favor and led them in covenant faithfulness, generation after generation. **They were His people – loved, called and chosen — His church.**”

Third, notice there is also an emphasis on redemption. “... the whole family *which I brought up from the land of Egypt*” (3:1). Not only has God known and called His people, He has gone out and redeemed or saved His people. They were incapable of saving themselves; they needed a Redeemer. **The Exodus is the great Redemption in the Old Testament.** Time and again the people of God are reminded of their salvation. Likewise, we need to be constantly reminded that we are a redeemed people. **Our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, called us out of slavery to sin and death and has delivered us into the Kingdom of Heaven through his life, death, and resurrection.**

Fourth, notice again the emphasis on uniqueness. “You *only* have I known of all the families of the earth” (3:2a). God does not elect and redeem everyone. He elects and redeems some. **Israel had the amazing privilege of being unique in the sense that God chose to**

demonstrate His love towards them. He didn't choose them because of any quality inherent in them. They were a sinful nation, just like every other.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 ⁶For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Paul says the same thing of us in Romans 5:8:

Romans 5:8 ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Finally, notice the *love* of God towards His chosen, redeemed, unique people: “Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3:2b). Yes, I said *love*. If God loved His people enough to send His only son to die in their place, He also loves them enough to correct them when they err and stray. If you see someone else's child misbehaving in the grocery store, you might not intervene. But if your own child was throwing fruit down the aisles, I'm sure you would step in!

Verses 1-2 set the stage for the rest of the chapter. Israel (and Judah) are in a unique position as the chosen and redeemed people of God. They have been given much by the Lord, and they are being held accountable. Because of their wickedness, rebellion and sin, the Lord is roaring a word of judgment. As we will see, there is still time for them to respond, but time is running out.

2. Seven Questions (3:3-6)

Amos uses a series of seven rhetorical questions to drive home his message. Each question is phrased in such a way as to demand an obvious answer. The questions progress toward their inevitable conclusion. **Each of the questions deals with cause and effect in a logical progression.** Furthermore **apart from the first question, the next six questions are paired in a “before and after” arrangement,** intensifying their meaning.

Let's skip the first question for the moment. Look at the next two. “Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?” (3:4a). The answer is no, a lion only roars when the prey has no possibility of escape. “Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?” (3:4b). Again the answer is no. If the lion is growling in the den, then he has already caught his prey and is enjoying his dinner. **The first question is about the lion before the prey is captured; the second question is the situation after the prey is captured. These questions ought to get Israel's attention: the Lord is the lion and they are the prey.**

“Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?” (3:5a). Here the picture changes from a lion hunting prey to a person hunting birds through the use of ground snares. Obviously, the answer to the question is no, you can't catch a bird in a snare if you haven't set the trap first. “Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?” (3:5b). Again the answer is no, the trap is sprung only when the bird falls into it. **As with the lion questions, we have a before and after scenario: first you set the trap, then it is sprung. Once more Israel should get the obvious picture: God is the bird hunter setting the trap, and Israel is about to step into it.**

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Now we move from the country to the city for the last pair of questions. “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?” (3:6a). This is the same kind of trumpet call we saw in Joel 2:1 – a warning that war is coming and the city will soon be under siege. The obvious answer to this question is yes, if the city is about to be attacked, the inhabitants will be frightened. “If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (3:6b). Once again, Amos springs his “surprise” on his listeners. If they have followed the logic of the previous questions, there can be no other answer than yes, God is sovereign over calamitous events, even including warfare. **Once again, we see the before and after: the trumpet is blown before the invasion; the second question occurs after the calamity overtakes the city. It is clear that this is God’s intention for Samaria and for Israel.**

3. The Lion Roars (3:7-8)

Now we come to the explanation of the seven questions. “Surely the LORD God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (3:7). This verse is rich in teaching about prophecy. **The prophets are God’s spokesmen, informing His people of God’s impending actions.** The prophets are mediators between God and their fellow men. **They stand in fellowship with God, in His private council, and have access to God’s secret knowledge, which they are compelled to reveal to the intended audience.** Isn’t it amazing that God decided to communicate in this way? He didn’t have to. Once He told the Israelites what they were supposed to do and what they were not supposed to do, He could have clammed up. One misstep and ... bammo! No warning. But God didn’t do that. He sent the prophets, one after the other, in a long line, to warn the people and urge them to repent. God sent Amos to fulfill that function. That is what he is doing right here.

With the principle of God-inspired prophecy right in front of us, Amos nails his point home in verse 8: “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The LORD God has spoken? Who can but prophesy?” **God is the roaring lion. He is roaring in judgment.** Just like the prey in front of the real lion, just like the townsmen when the trumpet alarm sounds, the only natural reaction of the Israelites should be fear. **God has His prey in His sight, and He is about to pounce. There is not much time left.**

Even though this message is unpleasant, even though His listeners do not want to hear it, Amos has no choice but to bring it to the Israelites. **Just as the roaring lion provokes fear, the speaking Lord compels the prophet to prophesy. That is the role of the prophet.** He has been brought into the secret council of God, and he must proclaim the Lord’s message. The Lion roars, and the prophet speaks forth the Lord’s message. No wonder Amos wasn’t afraid of Amaziah the priest of Bethel (7:10-17). When the Lion of Zion roars, that takes precedence over a mere mortal!

Now **let’s return to that first question in verse 3** I skipped over. Motyer explains: “When we read forward from verse 3 something wonderfully unexpected happens. **We have already noticed the ‘before and after’ pattern of verses 4-6, but where is the ‘second half’ of verse 3 which would make it conform to this pattern?** It would not be difficult to propose a question which would fill the gap:

Do two walk together, unless they have come to an arrangement?

Can a marriage be restored if the certificate of divorce has been written?

“But there is no such second, final question asked. The first question stands awaiting an answer. While it waits, we are shown three times over that inevitably things pass through the interim period to a conclusion: the moment of hope does not tarry indefinitely. After the illustrations, verses 7-8 explain why verse 3 was left incomplete: again the roaring lion is heard (3:8a), but it is not followed by the lion growling over its prey. The roaring lion has provoked the voice of prophecy (3:8b). The completed message then is this: the ‘arrangement’ between the Lord and His people is threatened, it is deeply and seriously at risk. Unless action is taken the ‘punishment’ (3:2) cannot but come: the roar will be followed by the growl (3:4). But in the interim (that precious, crucial moment when, however belated, a decision may still be taken) the incompleteness of the structure of verse 3 leaves the future open, and the voice of the prophet (3:7, 8) calls the people to renew their ‘arrangement’ with the Lord and to act promptly, for even as he speaks to them the Lion is roaring.”

Do you see the picture here? **God has promised punishment for the iniquities of His people. He stands over them like a lion roaring before devouring His prey. But He has not yet devoured His prey. There is still time, albeit not much time, to change and repent before the Lion devours its prey.**

B. The Lion Devours (3:9-15)

And that brings us to the second half of the chapter, in which the Lion devours its prey.

1. The Watching World (3:9-10)

Amos does something unexpected in verse 9. **He calls on the Philistines and the Egyptians, two of the pagan nations that have persecuted and troubled God’s people in the past, to assemble in Samaria.** We know from our Biblical history that Egypt is the land of slavery and oppression, from the perspective of the Israelites. God’s great redeeming work of the Exodus saved the Hebrews from their Egyptian slave masters. As we have already seen in Amos 1:6-8, the fourth transgression of Philistia was also the slave trade.

Why are they summoned out of their palaces and strongholds by the heavenly heralds? To be witnesses at the trial and sentencing of Israel. They are called upon to witness the upheavals caused by sin and oppression within Samaria. Here is the great irony. These heathen nations, symbolic of inhumanity and suffering, are called upon to witness God’s judgment upon His own people. **The Israelites have become more wicked and more oppressive of their fellow man than the Egyptians or Philistines.** Israel was supposed to be a light unto the nations – a light of God’s word. And yet they are indistinguishable at best, and more guilty at worst, than the pagans around them. They have lost their witness in the world.

Keddie points out that the Church is called to be “the bearer of the light of the gospel of Christ in the world. She is to preach Christ as a Savior with every word and every action.” That is an awesome responsibility. We should never forget that **“the world is watching the church. The world expects Christians to practice what they preach — or what they ought to preach!** The world expects Christians to maintain a higher level of morality, humility and piety than it would ever dream of aspiring to itself. This is not hypocrisy; it is simply taking Christians at their word!”

Think about that for a moment. **Is there a Philistine or Egyptian in your life, watching you, watching your words and your conduct, judging them against your Christian profession of faith? What would they say?** Would they say, “Gee, they really do live and act like they say

they do”? Or would they say, “They’re no different than me”? In Israel’s case, it is clear that the second response is the one that applied to them: outwardly they claimed to be God’s people, but they lived wicked, immoral, and selfish lives.

Verse 10 is the indictment of Israel and is the central point in the chiasmic structure of this chapter. “For they do not know how to do right, says the Lord. Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.” **They do not know how to do right. That is the natural state of the unconverted man.** The unconverted man is a sinner and is incapable of doing right or pleasing God. What a sad condemnation of those who were supposedly God’s people! **They are no better than the heathen, because in fact they are heathen.**

This then is the state of the church in Amos day. Their sin is exposed to the watching world. They have lost their witness of God’s salvation work on their behalf. They have lost their uniqueness as God’s chosen people. Because they have forsaken God and His covenant, God is about to pronounce judgment on them.

2. The Lion Devours (3:11-12)

The watching world has heard the Lord read the charges against His people Israel. Now the judge turns to the defendant and begins sentencing. “Therefore thus says the LORD God: An adversary shall be all around the land; he shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered.” **Chiastically, verse 11 is paired with verse 9, especially with the emphasis on the word *palaces*.** Heralds have proclaimed the word of God to the *palaces of Ashdod* and to the *palaces in the land of Egypt*. Now **God proclaims His word among the *palaces* of Samaria. They are to be plundered by enemies. They contain the fruits of the Israelites’ violence and robbery against their own people.** Now in another example of the *lex talionis*, (an eye for an eye), these rich Israelite robber barons will themselves be the victims of theft, violence, and looting. **The roaring lion has now become a devouring lion.**

That imagery is clearly picked up in verse 12. “Thus says the LORD: As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out who dwell in Samaria—in the corner of a bed and on the edge of a couch!” **The background for the imagery in this verse is found in the book of Exodus:**

Exodus 22:10-13 ¹⁰If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, ¹¹then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. ¹²But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. ¹³*If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn.*

The Old Testament law makes provisions for the loss of one’s property under the care of another. Suppose that I am a tenant shepherd, and I am caring for my overlord’s sheep. I am responsible to take care of the sheep and protect them. If through no fault of mine, one of the animals becomes sick and dies, I am not to be held responsible for that loss. However, if the animal is stolen because I have not provided due diligence to protect the sheep or if I sell the sheep and pretend that it was lost, then I am held liable. Exodus 22:13 is the property rights law which pertains to our verse in Amos. **The law says that if the sheep is killed by a wild animal, then I must prove that loss by bringing the remains of the dead animal for inspection. By doing that, again I will not be held liable for the loss.**

Look how **Amos applies this law to Israel. Israel is the sheep. God is the Shepherd, but He is also the devouring lion. The remains of the carcass, a couple of legs or a torn piece of the ear, are offered as proof that the sheep has been devoured by a lion. Thus, the Good Shepherd is held guiltless for the demise of the sheep.**

Chiastically, verse 12 is associated with verses 3-8 regarding the lion and its prey. Remember how in verses 3-8 we talked about that moment between the lion roaring and the lion devouring his prey? **Israel had a short amount of time after hearing the Lord's roar before experiencing the promised destruction.** In the case of Amos' message, that time period was about 50 years. **In 50 years or so, Israel will be devoured by the invading nation of Assyria.** All that will be left of their pleasure palaces will be the odd corner of a bed, or the edge of a couch. These bits and pieces of furniture will be the mute witness to a life filled with luxury and idleness gained through deceit, robbery, and oppression of others.

3. Houses for Destruction (3:13-15)

Verses 13-15 are chiastically paired with verses 1-2 which started out this passage. Both sections begin with the command to *hear* the word of judgment to come. Both passages refer to the combined people of God. In verse 1, they are referred to as *Israel ... the whole family*; in verse 13 they are called the *house of Jacob*. Finally, verse 2 promises that God “will punish you for all your iniquities.” Compare that to verse 14: “that in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions.”

Who are commanded to *hear* and to *testify*? The verbs in Hebrew are plural, and so they may refer to the pagan nations of Philistia and Egypt who were earlier summoned into the courtroom of God for the trial of Israel. **The command to “testify against the house of Jacob” implies what I earlier stated: that these pagan nations were in fact present as witnesses against the nation of Israel.**

The sentencing of Israel continues in verse 14. So far, the emphasis in chapter 3 has been on societal sin. Israel has been guilty of oppression, violence, and robbery against the poorer members of their society. The sentence thus far has been to destroy the opulent palaces where this ill-gotten gain has been stored up. However, we know already from chapter 2 that there were widespread problems regarding the religion and worship of Israel. That issue is picked up here in verse 14. **God promises to also destroy the false altars of Bethel, the worship shrine of Israel.**

The horn is a symbol of strength in the Bible. In addition, the horns of the altar were intended to be a place of refuge and mercy. Remember the story of Adonijah who rebelled against Solomon only to have his coup fail?

1 Kings 1:50-51 ⁵⁰Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and *took hold of the horns of the altar.* ⁵¹And it was told Solomon, saying, “Indeed Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; for look, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’”

At this time, Adonijah was spared from death by the mercy of Solomon. However, only a few verses later, Adonijah oversteps the boundaries of Solomon's mercy by asking for David's concubine. That was a big mistake – it was tantamount to again contesting Solomon for the throne. Solomon had no choice but to execute Adonijah. Continuing on in the story of

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Solomon's ascension to the throne, we see that the horns of the altar which temporarily saved Adonijah were in fact no firm guarantee of mercy:

1 Kings 2:28-29 ²⁸Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the LORD, and *took hold of the horns of the altar*. ²⁹And King Solomon was told, "Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the LORD; there he is, by the altar." Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, strike him down."

So, **although the horns of the altar were a place to flee for mercy, there was still no guarantee that mercy would be found there.** Bethel has the added problem in that the altar there was a false altar – the true altar was in Jerusalem. Thus, **God proclaims that the horns of Bethel's altar will be cut off. Bethel's strength, Bethel's mercy, would be consumed by the roaring and devouring Lion of Zion.**

Finally, **in verse 15, God again reiterates His promise to destroy the palaces of Samaria.** Verse 11 talked about the palaces being plundered. Verse 12 showed us the remains – a corner of a bed and the edge of a couch. Now we learn a bit more about these houses meant for destruction. The rich Israelites had winter palaces and summer palaces, and pleasure palaces made out of exotic building materials such as ivory. Ivory much have cost a fortune, since it was a rare and imported item. "The great houses shall have an end, says the LORD."

Diane and I have visited some of the "great houses" of the United States. For example, The Breakers or the Granite House in Newport, RI, the Biltmore in Asheville, NC, the Hearst Castle in San Simeon, CA, and most recently Kykuit, the Rockefeller estate in Tarrytown, NY. These houses are amazing testaments to the wealth of the "great families" in the US: the Rockefellers, the Morgans, the Vanderbilts, the Hearsts, the Astors, etc. The houses in Newport, RI were summer homes for the wealthy of New York City to enjoy a few months a year. The wealth and opulence of these homes was amazing. When I read this description of the rich palaces of Samaria, I cannot help but think of these "great houses" in the US.

If we remember that *Bethel* means the "house of God", then we can notice an interesting progression in these last 3 verses: "the *house* of Jacob ... the *house* of God ... the *winter house* ... the *summer house* ... the *houses* of ivory ... the *great houses*." All of these houses shall have an end, says the Lord God, the God of Hosts. The false religion of Israel could no more save them than the false strength of Samaria's palaces. These are the houses for destruction.

Conclusion

The Lion roars from Zion. He roars in judgment against His chosen people, Israel, for their failure to live up to their calling. They are no different than the pagans around them. In fact they are worse, because they have had the unique privilege of receiving God's revelation and law, and yet they have disastrously chosen to abandon that blessing. **The Lion roars, but He pauses momentarily before devouring His prey. It is in that small space that the opportunity for repentance is given.** However, for Israel, no repentance would be forthcoming, and so Israel and Samaria were devoured by the relentless armies of Assyria.

What are we to do in the face of such a message? The Lord continues to roar His judgment upon nations, peoples, and individuals. Paul gives us good advice:

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Philippians 2:12-13 ¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

We are to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Don’t presume upon God’s grace. Don’t assume that because you once walked down an aisle, or were baptized, or said the sinner’s prayer, that you are converted. The truly converted bring forth fruits of righteousness in their lives. They don’t sit back and live heathen lives no different than their pagan neighbors. **Although our salvation is 100% from God, we are 100% responsible to live according to our calling. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. This was distinctly lacking in the church of Israel in Amos’ day. Don’t let it be lacking in this church, or in you.**

Next week: Lesson 8 – Prepare to Meet Your God! – Amos 4:1-13 – Keddie Chapters 5-6

Close in Prayer.