**Amos Commentary**

**Amos Chapter 1**

Amo 1:1

**“Tekoa.”** Tekoa is a small town about 11 miles south and very slightly west of Jerusalem. It was on the western edge of the Judean Wilderness, in an arid and stony land. The soil was a kind of chalk marl, and any cultivation was scant in the valleys between the hillsides. Besides the grazing of sheep and goats, the land grew olives and “sycamore figs” (Amos 7:14). The land is dotted with caves that shepherds and flocks used for shelter.

**“that he saw concerning Israel.”** Amos lived in the Kingdom of Judah in the tribal area of the tribe of Judah, but God chose him to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (the ten tribes of Israel). Sometimes God wants us to serve where we live, sometimes He wants us to serve somewhere else. The reason God did not choose a prophet from Israel to deliver the message Amos delivered is not known.

**“Uzziah...Jeroboam.”** Uzziah was the king of Judah, and he reigned 52 years. Jeroboam II was the king of Israel and he reigned 41 years. The two kingdoms had peace between them, and enemies were not very active, so from the outside looking in this might be seen as a very good time for both kingdoms. But an inside view revealed that there was a lot of sin and disobedience, so trouble was ahead and coming.

**“two years before the earthquake.”** The earthquake was not foretold by Amos, but between the time Amos saw the vision and when he penned the book of Amos, there was a huge earthquake that was long remembered. It is likely the one mentioned in Zechariah 14:5. Large earthquakes produced tremendous damage to ancient cities. Mud-brick houses and temples collapsed, and often water sources were interrupted; often so badly that the town was abandoned.

Amo 1:2

**“Yahweh will roar from Zion and utter his voice from Jerusalem.”** This shows that God is still the God of both Israel and Judah, even though Israel had rejected him. After the death of Solomon, the ten northern tribes of Israel separated themselves from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin and set up the “kingdom of Israel.” They abandoned Yahweh and set up golden calf gods in Bethel and Dan, and made priests from people who were not Levites (1 Kings 12:28-33). But in spite of human efforts to control their own life and destiny, Yahweh is still God and His Word is everlasting, and He spoke to the people from the city where His Temple was—from Jerusalem.

Amo 1:3

**“For three transgressions...yes, for four.”** The poetic expression “three…four” is an idiom for “many.”

**“threshing instruments of iron.”** For more on threshing grain, see commentary on Ruth 2:17.

Amo 1:4

**“the palace-fortresses.”** The Hebrew word in Amos 1:4 translated palace-fortresses *armown* **(**#0759 אַרְמוֹן), and it can refer to a palace or a fortress. Although today people generally think of palaces and fortresses as being two different buildings, in the ancient world it was normal for a king to make the palace into a fortress that could withstand an attack from hostile forces. Herod the Great was known for building palace-fortresses and built them in Jerusalem, Jericho, Masada, Caesarea, and other places as well. Amos foretold that the palace-fortresses in Syria would be destroyed, and they were by the Assyrians.

Amo 1:8

**“Ashdod.”** A chief Philistine city. The Philistine city of Gath is not mentioned (see commentary on Zeph. 2:4).

Amo 1:13

**“For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yes, for four.”** The poetic expression “three…four” is an idiom for “many.” The Ammonites were a rather constant adversary to Israel, in spite of being descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot. Nahash the Ammonite tried to take territory from Israel and humiliate God’s people (1 Sam. 11:1-2). Hanun the Ammonite humiliated David’s ambassadors (2 Sam. 10:1-4). And the trouble continued after the time of Amos. For example, Tobiah the Ammonite was an adversary to Israel in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:3, 7; 6:12-14), and Baalis the king of Ammon hired a man to kill the Babylonian provisional governor of Judah after the Babylonian destruction of the country (Jer. 40:14).

**Amos Chapter 2**

Amo 2:1

**“he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime.”** This vicious and vengeful act was done not because Moab needed lime, but because it was believed by many in the ancient world that if a dead body was destroyed and did not get a proper burial, the spirit would wander without rest. The king of Moab wanted to deprive the king of Edom of resting in death.

Amo 2:2

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Amo 2:4

**“their lies.”** This refers to the idols that they follow, because they are the same things their “fathers” (ancestors) “walked after,” a term used of following idols or God, but it could then also refer to the words of the false prophets of those gods, e.g. the prophets of Baal, etc. The NIV has, “they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed,” and that gets the main sense of the text. God uses descriptors such as “Worthless,” and “Lies” to describe idols. Many people in Judah were following pagan gods, as we know from Kings and Chronicles and other prophets such as Jeremiah.

Amo 2:7

**“same girl.”** The Hebrew word translated “girl” here in Amos 2:7 is *na`arah* (#05291 נַעֲרָה), which usually refers to a girl who is young, not an older woman. The girl can be simply a young girl, a newly married girl, a female slave, or a prostitute. The context here is unspecific, and it is also possible that the girl, if a female slave, is being used without her consent. But it is clear that the text is not accusing the woman even if she is complicit; God holds each person responsible for maintaining their own holiness and avoiding sin. The Torah forbids a man from having his father’s wife (Lev. 18:8; 20:11; Deut. 22:30), and people who were closely related were not to have sex with the same person (Lev. 18:15; 20:12, 14, 20). Sexual holiness is very important to God and requires great restraint and diligence on the part of people because humans have such strong sexual urges. People who love God make the effort to obey Him and fulfill His requirements. Although it was permissible in the Old Testament for a man to have more than one wife, for Christians today God has brought sexual fulfillment back to His original design: inside a marriage between a man and a woman. Scripture says that each man is to have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1 Cor. 7:2).

Amo 2:8

**“on clothes taken in pledge.”** If a person gave his clothing as a pledge for a loan he was almost certainly poor, and those clothes were to be returned by nightfall so the person had something to sleep in (Deut. 24:12-13). These leaders were incredibly cold and hard-hearted, and sinned against the poor. No wonder God threatened judgment on the nation.

**“The house of their God.”** That is, the Temple. The Temple was to be a holy place for God, but these leaders use it as a place to celebrate their power over others.

**Amos Chapter 3**

Amo 3:6

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Amo 3:8

**“The lion has roared.”** In this context, the “lion” is God. God and people are sometimes referred to as lions by the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication, see commentary on Rev. 20:2).

Amo 3:12

**“two legs or a piece of an ear.”** A shepherd was charged with protecting the flock, but sometimes despite his best efforts a lion or other predator would kill a sheep. In that case, usually the shepherd would try to find a piece of the animal to take back to the owner to prove that he had not just eaten the sheep or sold it for money. Ordinarily, if a shepherd did that, the owner of the flock would bear the loss without taking wages from the shepherd. Jacob made the case before Laban that if an animal was snatched from the flock, he bore the cost himself (Gen. 31:39).

Amo 3:15

**“the winter house along with the summer house.”** Although a person could have a two-story house in which the winter house would be the lower level and the summer house would be the upper level and have many more windows to let any breeze blow through in the summer, in this case, the Hebrew text reads most naturally that the wealthy people owned two separate houses, one for the summer and one for the winter. Thus, Amos 3:15 reveals the extreme wealth of the wealthy, which makes their mistreatment of the poor and needy even more egregious.

**“the houses of ivory.”** The houses of the king and other wealthy people living in Samaria would not have been made of ivory but were decorated with ivory, an expensive and luxurious material that ostentatiously displayed their wealth. Many fragments of ivory have been found in the excavation of Samaria, revealing the truth of this prophecy.

**Amos Chapter 4**

Amo 4:1

**“cows of Bashan.”** Bashan was an area east and north of the Sea of Galilee that was known for its cattle. The cows of Bashan were the fattest and sassiest cows in all Israel, and so here the prophet Amos refers to the fat and sassy rich and powerful women of Israel, who live in the capital city of Samaria, as “you cows of Bashan.” Referring to a woman as a “cow” was not necessarily an insult in biblical times. Cows were expensive and well cared for. Samson referred to his young wife as a heifer (Judg. 14:18). Nevertheless, calling the ruling women of Samaria, “cows of Bashan” was an insult in this context.

**“Bring us drinks!”** These would normally be alcoholic drinks, and what was available at the time were wines and beers, and other fermented drinks. Distilled liquor like whisky could not be produced yet.

Amo 4:2

**“they will take you away with hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks.”** This sounds like a metaphor or hyperbole, but it is historically accurate. The Assyrians were very cruel people, and the Assyrian monuments show the Assyrians leading strings of captives from Israel. Each captive had a hook or fishhook through their lips or tongue, and the hook was attached to a cord which then went to the next captive and so on, such that there were lines of captives being led along on a line with hooks.

Amo 4:3

**“the breaks in the wall.”** The captives would not have the honor of leaving through the city gates which would either be destroyed and collapsed or controlled by the enemy army for their use. They would be taken captive through the breaches in the wall made by the attacking Assyrian army.

**“you will be thrown out toward Harmon.”** The women would be rounded up, put on ropes that had hooks that were put through the lips or tongues, and led away (there are Assyrian bas-reliefs that show this being done to women). Historically, the women were “led out” on the rope, but here in Amos 4:3, God says they are “thrown out,” that is thrown out of Jerusalem, thrown out like garbage. From God’s perspective, these women had participated in hurting His people and were no better than garbage, so they were “thrown out” of His city like garbage.

The location of “Harmon” is unknown, and even whether is it a real place is debated. The word seems to be related to “dung” or “dunghill,” and it may be that God considered being taken to Babylon to be taken to a dunghill. Translations include “thrown on a dunghill” (REB), “the dung heap” (NEB, cf. JPS), and “the garbage dump” (NCV). Other scholars, however, think the word is related to a fortress or fortified place, thus “thrown from your fortresses” (NLT).

Amo 4:4

**“Bethel…Gilgal.”** The towns of Bethel and Gilgal were two centers of pagan worship in Israel. Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel, set up a golden calf in Bethel soon after Solomon died (1 Kings 12:28-29).

**“and sin.”** This is irony. The prophet is magnifying the sin by making an ironic statement about it. He is certainly not encouraging the people to go sin by worshiping idols. The same kind of irony is used by Isaiah (Isa. 50:11).

Amo 4:5

**“for this is what you love to do.”** The people of Israel loved to make a show of their religious activities and were for the most part blissfully ignorant of the fact that they were living in disobedience to Yahweh and His laws and their rituals meant nothing to God; in fact, they offended Him. God does not value ritual for ritual’s sake. On the few points in which they knew they were not obeying the Law, they made excuses for it, thinking it did not matter much. That behavior still goes on. People who knowingly disobey God convince themselves that obeying God in everything is not really that important.

Amo 4:6

**“cleanness of teeth.”** An idiom for famine. The people had nothing to eat, so their teeth were clean. This is clear from the context (Amos 4:7-9).

**“and lack of food in every town.”** One of the great lessons of the Bible is that the behavior of people affects the land that they live on. This lesson is throughout the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 11:13-17; 28:1, 12, 15, 22-25, 38-40; Lev. 18:24-25; Ps. 107:33-34; Jer. 3:2-3; 12:4; 23:10; Amos 4:6-10). (See commentary on Lev. 18:25).

The Hebrew word translated “food” is literally “bread” in the Hebrew text, but here, as in many other places, “bread” is used for food in general.

**“but you have not returned to me.”** The Bible is very clear that if Israel was faithful to God, they, as well as their animals and land, would be blessed and there would be plenty of food. So, since there was famine, the people should have known what was happening, known that they had abandoned God, and repented and returned to Him. But they were so set on their ungodly ways that they ignored the disasters that were occurring in Israel.

Amo 4:7

**“withheld the rain from you.”** Rain in season and abundant harvests were promises of God’s blessing, and no rain was a sign Israel had not obeyed God (Deut. 28:12, 24), so what was happening with the rain should have been a sign to Israel they needed to repent and return to God.

Amo 4:13

**“and declares to humankind what are his thoughts.”** The meaning and translation of Amos 4:13 is debated by scholars, and this phrase is included in the debate. The primary debate about this phrase is whether it is speaking about human thoughts being revealed to other people by God, or God’s thoughts being revealed to humans. Making things difficult is that it is not clear in the verse who the “his” refers to in the phrase “his thought”— Is it referring to God or people? Also, the Hebrew word translated “thought” only occurs here in the entire Bible. A closely related word is used of human thoughts or counsel, or worry or lamenting, but is never used of God’s thoughts, and that has led some scholars to say that the verse is likely speaking of God revealing human thoughts to humans. However, arguing from what the Bible does not say is very weak, and it is especially weak when the argument is not even really based on the actual Hebrew word in the text. Furthermore, the scope of Scripture and the context of Amos favor the interpretation that this verse is about God revealing His thoughts to humans. Amos opens with Yahweh roaring from Mount Zion, giving His word and will to the people, and the phrase “this is what Yahweh says” is prominent in Amos. God is clearly revealing His thoughts and plans to people through the prophet Amos.

The Bible has many places that state that God declares His will to people so that they can obey it or be held accountable if they do not—in fact, one could make the case that a huge percentage of the Bible is God revealing His thoughts to humankind so they know how He is thinking and what they should do. One of the loving things that God does for humankind is to reveal His thoughts to them so they are guided in life. Versions of the Bible that clearly support that Amos 4:13 is referring to God revealing His thoughts to humankind are the BBE, CEB, CSB, GW, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, and TNK.

**Amos Chapter 5**

Amo 5:1

**“a lamentation.”** A lamentation is an expression of sorrow and mourning, usually for someone who has died, and it is often expressed in poetry, as we see here in the Hebrew text of Amos. God’s beloved children, the nation of Israel, have abandoned Him and will suffer destruction, and He is broken-hearted about it, but the people have chosen to reject Him and there are consequences for that.

Amo 5:2

**“The Virgin, Israel.”** The Hebrew can be read as a genitive, “The virgin of Israel,” but in this idiom the virgin is Israel. Amos is portraying Israel as a young woman who, because of her sins and disobedience, is cut off from life, no more to rise. This is such a sad situation but common: people abandon God and suffer in this life and the next, and God’s heart is broken about it, and expresses his heart through the prophet Amos, who no doubt felt the same way God did. Thus, the lamentation (cf. Amos 5:1). Although Amos speaks of Israel as already being cut off, it is a future event spoken of as if it were already accomplished.

Amo 5:5

**“Bethel…Gilgal…Beer-sheba.”** Three centers of pagan worship that had been established by Amos’ time. For Bethel and Gilgal, see commentary on Amos 4:4. Beer-sheba too had become a center of pagan worship (Amos 8:14). God is warning, as He does over and over, about the dangers of pagan worship. Yahweh alone is God and to worship anything but Him will only result in disaster, as is portrayed here: captivity and destruction. All of these cities were places where God had moved powerfully, and great men and women of God had been. The Devil loves to take such places and pervert the worship there so that it is directed to him instead of God, as if he could humiliate God. But also, it seems to be easier to get people to pervert godly worship and godly sites than to start over with brand new sites. Among all his other horrible attributes, the Devil is a parasite, building his perverted worship on the foundation God established for loving and godly worship.

Amo 5:6

**“no one to quench it in Bethel.”** When the real battle comes between good and evil, between God and idol gods (or the Devil), godless people will discover that the idols they trusted for support are no help at all.

Amo 5:7

**“You who turn justice into wormwood.”** “Wormwood” is the name of a perennial plant that bears yellow flowers and was used to flavor water even though it made the water bitter (Prov. 5:4; Lam. 3:15). Here in Amos 5:7, evil people turn good to evil. In this case, although they had the power to do good, evil people perverted justice and made people’s lives bitter. In contrast, God turns darkness to light (Amos 5:8). God’s people imitate God, and work to make people’s lives better.

Amo 5:10

**“him who reproves at the gate**.**”** The city elders sat at the gate of the city, and if one was honest and godly, he would try to stand for what was right and reprove the others, and was hated for it.

[For more on the elders at the gate, see commentary on Ruth 4:11.]

Amo 5:13

**“a prudent person keeps silent.”** There are times when the society around you is so evil that it is simply not wise to speak up against it. The wise and godly person prays for the right time and place to speak up to reprove and correct, or simply waits for God’s judgment. Other verses teach a similar lesson, cf. Proverbs 28:12, 28; Micah 7:5.

Amo 5:14

**“just as you have said *he is*.”** The Israelites said God was with them, but He was not: their sin had driven Him away, as we see in Amos. The situation is common when people disobey God: some of the leaders knew God was not with them (it was quite obvious to anyone who knew the Law) but said He was with them in order to “comfort” the people so they could be misled; some of the people were self-deceived and wanted to believe God was with them even though no signs of His presence were around them; some of the people were ignorant and were simply deceived and led astray by what the leaders and false prophets said. But whether a liar, self-deceived, or led astray, the facts were that Israel had abandoned God and would suffer for it.

Amo 5:15

**“hate.”** When God tells us to “hate” evil, that does not mean to have a “deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards” it.[[1]](#footnote-10447) He means we are to have nothing to do with evil, be disgusted and repulsed by it, and actively work to eradicate it.

[For more on the large semantic range of “hate” and its use in the Bible, see commentary on Prov. 1:22, “hate.”]

Amo 5:17

**“in all the vineyards.”** Vineyards were typically a place of rejoicing because wine and wine vinegar were such an important part of ancient life, but now there will be no harvest and so there will be wailing.

Amo 5:18

**“Woe to you who desire the Day of Yahweh.”** The Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”) is the period of great tribulation that will come on the earth as a consequence for all the sins that have been committed. It is a time of great tribulation. Here in Amos 5:18, Yahweh is speaking to the arrogant and ignorant Jews in Israel (Amos 5:1, 4), who wrongly thought that the Day of Yahweh was a time of the destruction of their enemies and a time of deliverance and vindication for them. But as Amos 5 shows, Israel was as big or bigger a sinner than even the pagans, after all, the pagan nations did not have any guidance from God as to how to live and how to act in a way that pleased God, but by the time Amos wrote, Israel had the Law of Moses and quite a few of the books of the Old Testament, so the Jews in Israel had the Law of God but refused to obey it. To whom much is given, much will be required, and the house of God will be judged along with everyone else (1 Pet. 4:17). Sadly, what happened in Israel over 2,700 years ago is happening today. The Bible is available to millions of people on earth who ignorantly and arrogantly ignore it, not realizing that their Judgment Day is coming.

[For more information on the Day of Yahweh, the Great Tribulation, see commentaries on Isa. 13:9 and Dan. 12:1. For more information on Jesus’ future kingdom that will be set up on earth after Armageddon, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For a basic timeline of End Times events, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Amo 5:19

**“and a bear met him.”** The prophecies of the Great Tribulation (the Day of the Lord) make it clear that life will be very dangerous and that most people on earth will die. This prophecy of fleeing one problem only to encounter another is similar to Isaiah 24:18. The disasters in the Day of the Lord are described in many of the Old Testament prophetic books (see commentary on Isa. 13:9).

Amo 5:22

**“I will not accept them.”** Many verses show that God does not accept the offerings of evil and unrepentant people and that God will not answer their prayers (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9; Isa. 1:11-15; 8:17; 58:1-8; Jer. 6:20; 14:10-12; Hos. 5:5-6; Amos 5:21-23; Mal. 1:10; 2:13-14; James 4:6. Verses that specifically mention prayer include: Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 59:1-2; Jer. 11:11; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; James 4:3).

Offerings and sacrifices were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God, as if God would overlook evil and sin if the person offered sacrifices. Nor did God want people to just “go through the motions” of praying, sacrificing, and giving offerings. No one can procure God’s favor just by doing a sacrifice if their heart is not in the right place. Sacrifices and offerings were designed to show, in a very visible manner, the obedient and humble heart of the person who brought the offering. Animal sacrifices were also designed to show how horrible sin was and the cost required to forgive it, and to show that God indeed forgives or favors people who had an acceptable sacrifice or offering.

The Bible says that when a person is evil and unrepentant, the sacrifices, offerings, and prayers that he or she makes are simply rejected by God: “A sacrifice *offered by* the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with deceitful intent.” (Prov. 21:27). God’s favor is not for sale, nor is He some kind of vending machine that if you put prayers or offerings in, then you get grace and mercy out. It is very worldly, and very tempting, to treat sacrifices and offerings as if they are gifts that buy God’s favor instead of being gifts that express love and thankfulness for God’s favor and forgiveness. The offerings were meant to be done “after the fact.” The sinner was to repent and genuinely seek God’s favor before he offered the sacrifice so that the sacrifice would be acceptable to God. If a person’s heart was evil and unrepentant, the sacrifice was not acceptable to God, and it did not procure any favor from God.

For much of the Old Testament, the system God lovingly put in place to support the priests was actually abused by many of them. The priests were allowed to eat part of many of the sacrifices offered by the people and thus could profit from the failure of the people. For example, the priests ate some of the grain offerings (Lev. 6:4-16, 18; 7:9-10), the sin offerings (Lev. 6:26, 29), the guilt offerings (Lev. 7:6), and the fellowship offerings (Lev. 7:28-34). Since they ate a portion of some of the sacrifices, unscrupulous priests had no incentive to work with the people to help them overcome their weakness and sin; instead, they wanted to see sin continue. That some of the priests did not do their best to stop the sin in Israel but enjoyed eating the sin offering is no doubt why God accused them, saying, “they feed on the sin offering of my people.” Amazingly, in spite of their elevated status and the level of luxury they enjoyed, because most people were not wealthy enough to eat meat regularly, many of the priests were still unthankful to God even though they were afforded this privilege (Mal. 1:7-14; see commentary on Mal. 1:7).

Although the drink offering accompanied many of the sacrifices, it was always to be poured out (Num. 28:7). One thing accomplished by that was the priests did not get drunk, in contrast to some Christian denominations that allow the priest to drink leftover wine from the Lord’s Supper and some of them do get drunk, which is a sin (cf. Eph. 5:18).

Also, although many kind and humble people follow their leaders into error, and most often God responds to the people’s heart and overlooks their error, that does not mean that God does not care about people’s error. God wants people to know the truth and obey it (1 Tim. 2:4). God expects people to get to know His will, which they will do if they read the Bible and make an effort to understand it. God says to the ignorant leaders and people, “For my people are fools, they do not know me. They are senseless children, and they have no understanding” (Jer. 4:22). In Jeremiah’s time the common people were following their leaders and worshiping idols, and although many of them did so out of ignorance, that did not mean God completely overlooked their sin. Today, many “common Christians” do much the same thing. They do not read their Bibles or seek to understand what is in it, and so they are led to do things that are contrary to the Bible, such as pray to dead saints.

In contrast to God not hearing the insincere prayers of sinful people, God hears the prayers of the godly and humble, even though they are sinners. Proverbs says, “the prayer of the upright *brings* his favor (Prov. 15:8).

[For more on God being more concerned with love and obedience than sacrifices, see commentary on Matt. 5:24. For more on God not speaking much about sacrifices when Israel came out of Egypt, see commentary on Jer. 7:22. For more on the lawsuit that God had with Israel because they broke the covenant they made with Him, see commentary on Hos. 4:1. For information on God being so upset with the people of Judah that he told Jeremiah not to pray for them, see commentary on Jer. 7:16.]

Amo 5:27

**“beyond Damascus.”** Although Damascus, the capital of Syria to the immediate north of Israel, seemed to be the logical threat to Israel, God foresaw that Israel would not be destroyed and carried captive by the Syrians, but by the Assyrians. The nation of Assyria was north of Syria and certainly “beyond Damascus.”

**Amos Chapter 6**

Amo 6:1

**“Woe.”** A word used to warn of, or lament over, future destruction. It was used at funerals. Some commentators think of it as “You are as good as dead.”

**“at ease in Zion…secure on the mountain of Samaria.”** The leaders of the country of Israel lived in the city of Samaria, and the leaders of Judah lived on (or near) Mount Zion, and it was to these leaders that God’s people, the “house of Israel” (“Israel” being used in the inclusive sense of all the people of Israel) looked for guidance. But the leaders were morally bankrupt and evil. Woe to them! Their end will be in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).

**“to whom the house of Israel come.”** The people of the house of Israel came to their king and to their rulers for guidance and justice and other things that leaders were supposed to provide.

Amo 6:13

**“Lo-debar...Karnaim.”** These were two towns under Syrian control that Israel captured from Syria and Israel was boasting about. A subtle irony that can be seen in the Hebrew text is that in this case, Lo-debar is spelled differently than it is in 2 Samuel 9:4 and 17:27 (although it refers to a different city there, but apparently with the same name). Here in Amos, it is spelled such that the meaning is “No thing,” that is, God’s opinion of what Israel accomplished was insignificant to Him because they were not living in holiness.

**Amos Chapter 7**

Amo 7:1

**“Lord Yahweh showed me: behold, he was forming locusts.”** In Amos 7:1-3, God showed Amos a disaster that was about to happen in the future. Amos prayed, and God moved in such a way that the plague did not happen.

Amo 7:3

**“Yahweh changed his mind concerning this.”** The Hebrew word translated “changed his mind” is *nacham* (#05162 נָחַם), and in this context, it means to change one’s mind and the subsequent course of action (cf. CJB, NASB; cf. BBE, NLT). God sometimes changes His mind in response to what people do, as we see here.

[For more information on God changing His mind, see commentary on Jer. 18:8.]

Amo 7:4

**“Lord Yahweh showed me: behold, the Lord Yahweh called for judgment by fire.”** In Amos 7:4-6, God showed Amos another disaster that was about to happen in the future. Amos prayed, and God moved in such a way that that disaster did not happen either.

**“and it devoured the great deep.”** This “fire,” whatever it literally was, was a more severe judgment and disaster than the locusts. The “deep” is a translation of *tehom* (#08415 תְּהוֹם ,תְּהֹם), which literally refers to the ocean with its great depths (e.g., Gen. 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; Isa. 51:10; Jon. 2:5). However, in this context the “great deep” refers to the Gentile nations. C. F. Keil writes that the “great deep” “is not the ocean, but the heathen world, the great sea of nations, in their rebellion against the kingdom of God. The world of nature in a state of agitation is a frequent symbol in the Scriptures for the agitated heathen world (e.g., Ps. 46:3; 93:3, 4).”[[2]](#footnote-23469)

There are other places in the Bible where the idea of the “sea” or “deep” refers to the Gentile nations (e.g., Ps. 93:3; 124:4; 144:7; Jer. 51:13; Dan. 7:2; Amos 7:4; Rev. 13:1; 17:1, 15).

[For more information on the “sea,” “water,” or “deep” being the Gentile nations or unsaved masses of people, see commentary on Revelation 17:15.]

Amo 7:6

**“changed his mind.”** See commentary on Amos 7:3.

Amo 7:9

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Amo 7:14

**“I was not a prophet.”** The meaning in this context is that Amos was not a professional prophet or a member of a prophetic guild. Many prophets were “professional prophets” and made their living that way or were supported by the king of wealthy people (cf. 1 Kings 18:19).

**“son.”** Here used in the cultural sense of “disciple.” Amos was not a prophet nor the disciple of a prophet.

[For more on “son” meaning “disciple,” see commentary on Matt. 12:27.]

**“a farmer of sycamore figs.”** It is noteworthy that Amos said he was a farmer of sycamore figs because the sycamore fig does not grow around Tekoa, but rather in the lowland, so it is possible that Amos agreed to take care of someone else’s trees in return for grazing rights, or it is also possible that Amos was wealthy enough to own land where he grew the sycamore figs. Since it would be impossible to both watch sheep around Tekoa and also take care of sycamore fig trees at the same time, Amos could well have been quite well off, which would also be why he could take time to go north into Israel and prophesy.

**Amos Chapter 8**

Amo 8:5

**“When will the new moon be gone.”** The Law of Moses specified that the new moon, the beginning of each month, would be dedicated to Yahweh with special sacrifices and blowing of trumpets (Num. 10:10; 28:11-15). In time it became a feast day in which no work was done, as we see here and 2 Kings 4:23.

**“false balances.”** Unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag or had measuring cups of slightly different sizes that only they could easily tell apart so that they bought a lot and sold a little. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16).

[For more on trading using honest balances, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

Amo 8:12

**“from sea to sea.”** This is likely from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 23:31).

Amo 8:14

**“the sin of Samaria.”** The “sin” of Samaria are the idols there that people worshiped. This is the figure of speech metonymy, where “sin” is put for things that cause people to sin, in this case, idols that people swear by. Samaria was the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and it had been a center of idolatry since it was established.

**“As your god lives, O Dan.”** Dan had been a center of idol worship since the time of Judges (Judg. 17-18; esp. Judg. 18:28-31). When Jeroboam I became the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, he set up a golden calf idol in Dan (1 Kings 12:28-30).

**“the Way of Beer-sheba.”** This is apparently the name of an idol god in Beer-sheba. The Septuagint translators understood it that way, and translated “Way” (“Road”) as “god.” Also, that fits well with the rest of the verse. It has been suggested that “way of Beer-sheba” refers to the pilgrimage route there to worship idols, but that is less likely given the immediate context and the difficulty in having a road “live.”

Sinners and idolaters can be very arrogant and self-assured about how their “way” is right, and it makes sense that they would call an idol god “the Way.” But there is a true and proper “way.” Jesus Christ said he was “the way” to God, and indeed he was correct (John 14:6).

**Amos Chapter 9**

Amo 9:4

**“evil.”** In this case, “evil” does not mean moral evil, but it refers to something bad happening to people as an “evil.” Thus, the essence of the statement is, “I will set my eyes on them for bad things to happen to them instead of good things.” The disobedient people had walked so far from God that He could not, as a righteous God, protect them from demonic attack and horrific consequences.

Amo 9:5

**“and all of it** *[the land]* **will rise up like the *Nile* River, and will sink again, like the River of Egypt.”** The Nile River was well-known for its annual floods. The Nile rose into a flood every year and then sank back down into its normal riverbed. In fact, it was the alluvial soil that was washed down the Nile and covered the land when the Nile flooded that made the land close to the Nile so fertile. Here God states that there will be a future judgment when the very land will rise and fall.

Amo 9:8

**“utterly destroy.**” The Hebrew is the figure polyptoton, where the Hebrew verb translated as “destroy” is repeated twice, first as an infinitive verb and second as an imperfect verb. Often in the REV, this figure would be translated as “destroy, yes, destroy.” The promise of God is that there will come a time when the Israelite sinners will be destroyed, but it will not be a total destruction of the people.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Amo 9:9

**“I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the least kernel will fall on the earth.”** To understand this verse it is necessary to understand the process of harvesting grain in the ancient biblical world.

In biblical times grain was harvested by hand. When the grain was ripe and ready to harvest, the stalk of wheat or other grain was cut off close to the ground with a sickle or knife of some kind. When the person harvesting the grain had cut too many stalks to easily hold, he or she wrapped them in a bundle (usually by wrapping some of the stalks around the bundle) and left them on the ground so they could be easily seen, gathered, and taken to a threshing floor. At that point, the grain was still on the stalk.

The threshing floor was a large flat area of rock or very hard ground. It was usually on top of a hill so the breeze would blow across it. “Threshing” was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the stalk, and various methods were used to do that. The most primitive method was simply to beat the wheat—or whatever grain was being harvested, such as barley or millet—with a stick over and over again to knock the grain off the stalk (e.g., Judg. 6:11). However, there were other more efficient methods of knocking the grain off the stalk, such as a “threshing sled” (cf. Isa. 41:15; Amos 1:3).

After the grain was threshed, there was a large pile of broken stalks, chaff, and grain all mixed together in a heap on the threshing floor. To separate the grain out from among the chaff and broken stalks, the farmer would wait for a breeze and then winnow the pile with a winnowing fork by throwing the stalks and grain into the air over and over again. The breeze would catch the stalks and the chaff, which were very light, and blow them to the side. The grains of wheat, which were heavier and oval-shaped, would fall almost straight back down to the threshing floor.

After the winnowing, the wheat would be left on the threshing floor, and it would be picked up to be eaten or ground into flour. But it usually happened that some pieces of stalk or little stones or pebbles would be picked up from the threshing floor with the grain, so the final thing before eating the grain or grinding it into flour was that it was shaken in a kind of sieve. The sieve was made in such a way that the grain did not fall through to the ground, but instead was separated from rocks when the sieve was shaken by an experienced woman (the women sifted the grain in the biblical world). Any stalks or rocks in the sieve would then be discarded and thrown on the ground.

Here in Amos 9:9, God is using the process of sifting grain to show that during His judgment, no “grain,” that is, no good or godly person, would be discarded, but He would keep them just as grain is kept, but in contrast, any “stones” would be thrown out.

[For more detail on harvesting grain in biblical times, see commentary on Ps. 1:4]

Amo 9:11

**“booth.”** People built temporary booths to watch their crops and keep them safe, especially as harvest approached, but those temporary shelters soon fell down and fell apart. Here, David’s kingdom is compared to a temporary booth that has fallen over. Judah was in ruins, but God foretells of a time when David’s kingdom will be restored, which will be when Christ rules the earth. Isaiah, who prophesied about the same time as Amos, also said Zion was in ruins like a booth in the field (see commentary on Isaiah 1:8).

Amo 9:14

**“I will bring my people Israel back from captivity.”** Many verses prophesy Israel’s return to the land of Israel, the Promised Land. Although Israel did return from Babylon, this prophecy will not be fully fulfilled until in the Millennial Kingdom, as is clear from the context.

[For more information on Israel’s return to the Promised Land, see commentary on Jer. 32:37.]

1. Arthur Reber, Rhianon Allen, Emily Reber, Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. “hatred,” 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-10447)
2. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Minor Prophets, 10:206. [↑](#footnote-ref-23469)