

Amos

Chapter 2

Thus says the LORD:

“For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. 2 So I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth, and Moab shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet; 3 I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its princes with him,” says the LORD.

2:1 *Moab.* Nation east of Israel, on the southern border of Ammon. (TLSB)

burned ... the bones of Edom’s king. Thus depriving the king’s spirit of the rest that was widely believed to result from decent burial. (CSB)

Moabites stand accused of burning the bones of a fallen enemy to ash (or, “lime”). Such desecration was obviously an atrocity. (TLSB)

Taking vengeance upon the dead by burning his body to powder, a crime showing an almost unbelievable vindictiveness. (Kretzmann)

2:2 *Kerioth.* Perhaps a plural noun meaning “cities” (see NIV text note) or the name of a major town (see Jer 48:24) and shrine of Chemosh, the national god of Moab (see 1Ki 11:7, 33). (CSB)

Main city of Moab, near Aroer, and site of principal shrine for pagan god Chemosh (cf Jer 48:13, 24). (TLSB)

uproar. Violence and tumult of battle. (TLSB)

2:3 *I will cut off the ruler ... princes.* As in 1:15, this pictures a battle of annihilation. Even the king and princes will perish. (TLSB)

1:1–2:3 Amos denounces the nations surrounding Judah and Israel and threatens them with fiery judgment and political defeat. Seeing those around us similarly judged might tempt us to be smug, though it ought to show us that unless we repent and do what is right, the same fate can befall us. In order to learn to abhor all forms of sin and be empowered to walk in the Lord’s ways, God has promised us His Spirit. As we hear God’s Word and receive His Sacraments, His Spirit transforms us by helping us to grow into Christ’s likeness. • “O Holy Spirit, enter in, And in our hearts Your work begin ... That we may be Truly living, To You giving Prayer unceasing And in love be still increasing.” Amen. (LSB 913:1) (TLSB)

Judgment on Judah

4 Thus says the LORD:

“For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. 5 So I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.”

2:4 *Judah*. Southern tribes of the divided kingdom. (TLSB)

rejected the law of the LORD. Judah's sins differed in kind from those of the other nations. Those nations violated the generally recognized laws of humanity, but Judah disobeyed the revealed law of God. These sins may be included in the indictment against Israel that follows. (CSB)

Judah is accused of breaking the Sinai covenant. (TLSB)

Idolatry had been practiced in the country almost continually, secretly, if not openly. (Kretzmann)

lies have led them astray. Falsehood led to idolatry, improper worship, and ethical failures. (TLSB)

their fathers walked. Covenant unfaithfulness had persisted for generations. Even from the time of the deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites had continually been tempted to follow other gods (cf Dt 4:3; 1Ki 18:18). (TLSB)

2:5 *fire ... devour the strongholds*. Judah's punishment is the same as Aram's (1:4), Gaza's (1:7), Tyre's (1:10), Edom's (1:12), Ammon's (1:14) and Moab's (2:2)—loss of the defenses and wealth in which they trusted. (CSB)

Here it was true, as the maxim has it, that a person is rightly judged by the company he keeps and may be obliged to share the lot of his friends. (Kretzmann)

2:4–5 Like its unbelieving neighbors, Judah is guilty of listening to false prophets and worshiping in ways unbecoming the one true God. Sadly, we, too, are tempted and led astray by false theologies. However, it is the Lord's Word of Gospel alone that washes away our sin and bestows life for the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ. • "Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done." Amen. (LSB 655:1) (TLSB)

Judgment on Israel

6 Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; 8 they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. 9 "Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. 10 Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. 11 And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?" declares the LORD. 12 "But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.' 13 "Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down. 14 Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life; 15 he who handles the bow shall not stand, and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself, nor shall he who rides the horse save his life; 16 and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day," declares the LORD.

2:6 Israel's sins revealed the general moral deterioration of the nation. (CSB)

the righteous. Probably those who were not in debt and whom there was no lawful reason to sell (cf. Lev 25:39–43). (CSB)

The Sinai covenant had in place many laws designed to protect the innocent (Ex 23:6–8; Dt 16:18–20). However, justice was being perverted in Amos’s day. Judges were regularly taking bribes and depriving the innocent of their rights. See note, 1Sm 2:15–16. In rabbinic tradition, the “righteous one” was Joseph, sold by his brothers to buy sandals. (TLSB)

the needy. God had commanded that they be helped (Dt 15:7–11), but they were instead sold for failure to repay a (perhaps paltry) debt, for which a pair of sandals had been given in pledge (see 8:6). (CSB)

Namely, by the unjust condemnation of innocent people when they were brought into court, the judges being guilty of shameless bribery to the detriment of justice. (Kretzmann)

a pair of sandals. Bogus judgments against the needy could be bought for a paltry price. (TLSB)

2:7 *trample.* By oppressing the poor so severely that the latter, in their misery, show their grief by placing dust on their heads. (Kretzmann)

poor ... afflicted. To care for them and to protect them from injustice were clearly commanded by Israel’s law (Ex 23:6–8); also, throughout the ancient Near East, kings were supposed to defend such people. (CSB)

Despite the covenant’s mandates that the vulnerable of Israel be protected (Ex 22:21–27; Dt 24:12–17), the poor were being mistreated. (TLSB)

a man and his father go to the same girl. Whether the girl in question was a household servant (in which case father and son used her as a family prostitute) is not clear. In any case, the law required that if there were sexual relations with a girl, marriage was obligatory (Ex 22:16; Dt 22:28–29). For a father and son to have sexual relations with the same girl or woman was strictly forbidden (Lev 18:7–8, 15; 20:11–12). (CSB)

Incestuous behavior was forbidden explicitly (Lv 18:8; 20:11; Dt 22:30); it is an offense against nature. (TLSB)

my holy name is profaned. Cf. Lev 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32; Jer 34:16; Eze 20:9, 14, 22, 39; 36:20–23; 39:7. (CSB)

The Lord’s name is repeatedly associated with grace, mercy, and holiness (Ex 20:7; 34:6–7). The rampant corruption of Amos’s day – Israel’s perversion of justice, dishonoring women, and idol worship – constituted an especially grievous affront to God’s holiness. (TLSB)

2:8 *beside every altar ... In the house of their god.* Israelites who broke the laws protecting the powerless brazenly used their wrongly gotten gains even in places supposed to be holy. (CSB)

Many pagan altars in Israel competed with the Lord’s altar in the Jerusalem temple. Because of the popularity of these unauthorized shrines, Amos repeatedly accuses the people of syncretism and idolatry (3:14; 4:4; 7:9–10; 9:1). (TLSB)

garments taken in pledge. The law prohibited keeping a man's cloak overnight as a pledge (Ex 22:26–27; Dt 24:12–13), or taking a widow's cloak at all (Dt 24:17). (CSB)

Garments were often given as collateral in ancient Israel in order to secure a loan or guarantee an unpaid debt. However, out of care and regard for the poor, garments given in pledge were not to be kept overnight (Dt 24:10–13). Amos's rebuke reveals that this command was being ignored. A seventh-century Hbr letter found at a military outpost along the Mediterranean held the complaint of a laborer that his garment was taken away unjustly. He was requesting its return. (TLSB)

The upper garment of the poor, laid to pledge by every altar, although the Law required that such pledges be returned in the evening, because the garments also served as covers by night, cp. Ex. 22, 25; Deut. 24, 12. 13. (Kretzmann)

house of their God – Being brazen enough to do this in the very Sanctuary, in places which, after all, were originally intended as altars consecrated to Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

Not the Jerusalem temple, but the pagan and syncretistic shrines erected in the northern territories by the kings of Israel in order to keep their citizens from traveling to the Lord's temple in Judah, at Jerusalem. Cf 1Ki 12:25–29. Though the priests officiating at such unauthorized altars did indeed invoke the Lord's name, they often did so while also praying to pagan gods. (TLSB)

fined. Claimed as restitution for damages suffered. Exorbitant claims or even false charges of damage seem to be suggested. (CSB)

Not the wine offered in the Jerusalem temple (Ex 29:40–41), but wine taken as payment for fines by the priests of unauthorized sanctuaries. Such libations were in turn consumed within the precincts of these illicit sanctuaries. Significantly, drunkenness and debauchery is associated with the worship of false gods elsewhere in the Bible (cf Jgs 9:27). (TLSB)

2:9 *I who destroyed.* Israel not only had known God's law but had been specially favored by his powerful help. (CSB)

Amos here calls to mind the mighty acts God worked on Israel's behalf while bringing them into the Promised Land. By helping them defeat this powerful and important Canaanite tribe, the Lord not only protected Israel from danger but, more important, allowed them to take possession of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:12-16). (TLSB)

height of the cedars. Symbolic phrase reminding the Israelites of the dread they once felt before the Amorites. In anticipation of the conquest, Moses sent spies into Amorite territories. They came back reporting that this was a giant people (Nu 13:25–33; Dt 1:27–28). (TLSB)

Amorite. Here used for all the inhabitants of Canaan. (CSB)

his fruit above and his roots below. That is, totally. (CSB)

Couplet denoting total destruction (2Ki 19:30; Ezk 17:9; Hos 9:16). Today we say “from top to bottom.” (TLSB)

2:10 *I brought you up.* God's great blessings to Israel in the past added to her guilt, and now they are recalled as a part of the Lord's indictment against his people. (CSB)

Continues reminding Israel of God's faithfulness in bringing His people out of Egyptian bondage and into the Promised Land. The Lord's purpose in the exodus and in leading Israel "forty years in the wilderness" was that they would take possession of "the land of the Amorite" and then live under a covenant of grace. Israel's experience of the exodus and conquest defined its identity as God's chosen people. As such, the story of the exodus and conquest was to be recited faithfully among the Israelites throughout all generations (Lv 11:45; Dt 20:1; Jsh 24:16-18; Mi 6:4-5). (TLSB)

2:11 *I also raised up...for ...Nazirites.* Prophets, as God's faithful spokesmen (Dt 18:15-19), and Nazirites, as those uniquely dedicated to him (Nu 6:1-21; Jdg 13:5), are singled out as special gifts to his people. These persons who were outside the priesthood were used by God through word and example to call his people to faithfulness. (CSB)

Nazirites took a vow not to drink wine or eat grapes, not to cut their hair and not to go near a dead body (Numbers 6:1-21). Their unusual diet and appearance during the term of their vow marked them as God-fearing Israelites who had especially consecrated themselves to the Lord. (PBC)

2:12 *But you.* They showed utter disdain for God's faithful servants and thus betrayed their callous insensitivity to God's working among them (cf. 7:16). (CSB)

Israelites had become so impious that even Nazirites were breaking their vows to God by taking alcohol. (TLSB)

commanded the prophets. Things had been turned upside down in Amos's day. Instead of listening to the prophetic Word and repenting, people tried to command the prophets, demanding changes in their behavior. On the priest Amaziah's attempt to silence Amos, cf 7:12. (TLSB)

2:13 A loaded cart crushes anything that falls beneath its wheels. (CSB)

Sheaves seem light, like a prophet's words. But the bottom sheaves are crushed and smothered by the total weight. (TLSB)

2:14-16 No one who might be expected to stand his ground or escape would be able to save himself. (CSB)

Climatic verses containing seven illustrations of what will befall Israel when the judgment comes. These metaphors vividly depict just how completely Israel will be crushed. The concluding image is telling indeed: even Israel's mightiest will flee naked from that terrible defeat. (TLSB)

2:16 *that day.* The day God comes in judgment—as he did through the Assyrian invasion that swept the northern kingdom away. (CSB)

2:6-16 Amos accuses Israel of breaking virtually every part of the covenant. The people worship other gods, withhold justice from the innocent, and shamefully exploit the poor and vulnerable. Such vices destroy our communities today, despite the great blessings we have enjoyed from God's hand. God calls His Church today to repentance precisely because He wishes to avert the shame and sorrow that will inevitably result when we take the way of selfishness and greed. He daily calls us to receive anew the forgiveness Christ won for us. • Gracious Lord, have mercy on Your people. Make our hearts swift to believe Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)