

Amos

Chapter 3

Israel's Guilt and Punishment

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: 2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. 3 “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? 4 Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing? 5 Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? 6 Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? 7 “For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. 8 The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?” 9 Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, “Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst.” 10 “They do not know how to do right,” declares the LORD, “those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.” 11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered.” 12 Thus says the LORD: “As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. 13 “Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, 14 “that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. 15 I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end,” declares the LORD.

3:1–5:17 Oracles that underscore the certainty of God’s judgment on Israel. (CSB)

3:1 *Hear this word.* See 4:1; 5:1. The Lord calls his people to account because of their sins. (CSB)

I. He now speaks more directly than in 1:2–2:16. (CSB)

whole family – Though Amos has thus far drawn a distinction between the southern and northern tribes, addressing himself to Judah in 2:4-5 and then to Israel in 2:6-16, he here treats all of God’s chosen people as one. He does so in order to remind the separated people of God about the intent of the covenant that they are supposed to follow in a right relationship with the Lord and in harmony with one another. (TLSB)

3:2 *You only.* Israel’s present strength and prosperity gave rise to complacency about her privileged status as the Lord’s chosen people. She is shockingly reminded of the long-forgotten responsibilities her privileges entailed. (CSB)

God’s choice of Israel is a unique privilege. As such, breaking the covenant is a terrible offense, deserving the full penalty of God’s judgment. (TLSB)

known. Often connotes marital intimacy and unity. Cf Gn 4:1, 17. (TLSB)

3:3–6 With these rhetorical questions (involving comparisons) Amos builds up to the statements of vv. 7–8, to explain why he is speaking such terrifying words. Each picture is of cause and effect, using figures drawn from daily life—and culminating in divine action (v. 6). (CSB)

Six rhetorical questions, each expecting a negative response, lead to a climactic seventh one (v 6b). This rhetorical device emphasizes that the disaster soon to come upon Israel is from the Lord’s hand. The people should understand that they are receiving the just penalty for their sin. (TLSB)

3:3 *two walk together* – This and the following propositions, bringing out illustrations from daily life, are intended to substantiate the prophet's right to speak to the people in this manner, even if they were inclined to resent his sharp words. Jehovah and His prophet are in perfect agreement, as the sequel was bound to show. (Kretzmann)

3:4 *lion roar* – Jehovah is the lion, and His roaring is that of satisfaction over the certainty that His prey cannot escape, that is, that Israel, in its present state of mind, will surely be punished. (Kretzmann)

has taken nothing – In the same way Jehovah already has the guilty people in His power and is ready to carry out His judgment upon them. (Kretzmann)

3:5 *there is no trap for it* – That is: Could destruction come upon Israel if his own sin-fullness did not draw him into it? (Kretzmann)

trap spring up from ground – Literally, "Does the trap rise from the ground if a snared bird does not cause it to do so?" that is. Did Israel, knowing his own corruptness, hope to escape destruction, which was bound to take hold of him? (Kretzmann)

3:6 *trumpet blown* – As the signal of the trumpet was intended to arouse the people out of their security, so the message of the prophet was intended to awaken the people of Israel to the peril of their position. (Kretzmann)

Lord has done it – Sin does not originate with the Holy One, who made all things good. Yet the prophet plainly speaks of a disaster (literally, “evil”) coming from the Lord. The Almighty does indeed permit disasters as a natural consequence of sin. Jeremiah later characterized disaster coming upon the people as “the fruit” of their wicked devices and godless plans (Jer 6:19) John of Damascus says, “Sometimes [evil] means what is evil by nature, and this is the opposite of virtue and the will of God: and sometimes it means...afflictions and calamities. Now these are seemingly evil because they are painful, but in reality are good. For to those who understand they become ambassadors of conversion and salvation. The Scripture says that of these God is the Author.” (TLSB)

3:7 *without revealing His secret*. In His mercy, the Lord regularly reveals His judgments and intentions by the mouth of His prophets. This is why Amos was called to ministry: his job was to relay to the people what he received while seeing the Word of the Lord (1:1). (TLSB)

3:8 *who can but prophesy?* Amos speaks because God has spoken. (CSB)

Hypothetical question used as a rhetorical device to state that this prophetic message to Israel is by the Lord’s authority. As surely as a lion’s roar (cf 1:2) will bring fear, so the Lord’s speaking will bring the voice of the prophet. (TLSB)

3:9 The rich and powerful of Philistia and Egypt are summoned to witness the Lord’s indictment against those who store up ill-gotten riches in the fortresses of Samaria (see v. 15). (CSB)

Perennially powerful nation from which the Lord delivered Israel during the exodus. (TLSB)

strongholds. From these mountains, one can see the entire city. A measure of God's disgust with Samaria is that He threatened to assemble Ashdod and Egypt on the surrounding peaks to act as witnesses of the rampant injustice and oppression being perpetuated therein. (TLSB)

great tumults. The result of a violent, selfish power structure that was heedless of the justice called for in God's law. (CSB)

Innocent and the poor were regularly denied justice, as Amos emphasizes (2:6–7; 5:11–12; 8:4–6). (TLSB)

3:10 *who store up violence.* Cf. 2:6–8. The prosperity of Israel's wealthy depended on oppression and robbery. The following verses announce God's judgment on such greed (cf. Hab 2:6–11). (CSB)

3:11 *adversary.* Assyria. (CSB)

surround the land. Enemies lay siege. Israel's impending punishment is thus revealed as coming in the form of a military campaign. There will be a prolonged assault, followed by looting and plundering. (TLSB)

Literally, "and that, too, from every side of the land," attacking Israel, and particularly Samaria, from all sides. (Kretzmann)

strongholds shall be plundered. Those that Samaria's wealthy had greedily filled with plunder. (CSB)

3:12 *As a shepherd rescues ... only two leg bones.* To prove to the owner that the sheep had been eaten by a wild animal, not stolen by the shepherd. (CSB)

In reporting a sheep killed by wild beasts, a shepherd would often produce the victim's remains as proof of what happened (cf. Gn 31:39). So also the remnant of Israel will similarly be a small and mangled portion of the whole after its enemies lay waste and carry away the people in exile. (TLSB))

be rescued. Only a mutilated remnant would survive. The nation as such would be more than wounded—it would be destroyed. (CSB)

those who sit. In idle luxury (cf. 6:4). (CSB)

The once mighty house of Israel is being reduced to a few scraps of furniture. (TLSB)

Samaria...corner of a couch. Since at this time Israel had extended its influence over Damascus, the rich merchants of Samaria may have maintained luxurious houses also in Damascus along with market privileges in that city (cf. 1Ki 20:34). (CSB)

3:13 *Hear ... testify.* Addressed to those summoned in v. 9. The rich and powerful of Philistia and Egypt are called upon to hear the Lord's indictment of the rich and powerful in Samaria and to testify that his indictment is true and that his judgment is warranted. Even these pagans will agree with God's judgment. (CSB)

hosts. Describes not only the angelic armies but also the heavenly council. Just as the heavenly hosts hear the Lord's words being pronounced in heaven above, so also these same utterances are delivered on earth by God's servants, the prophets (cf Is 6:1–8; 1Ki 22:19–23). (TLSB)

3:14 *altars of Bethel*. Israel's sins were rooted in the false shrine built by Jeroboam I at Bethel (1Ki 12:26–33). (CSB)

Syncretistic shrines of Israel would be destroyed.

Bethel. C 10 mi N of Jerusalem. One of the main sites of unauthorized worship in Israel. Such shrines were built and supported by the king of the breakaway northern tribes and, as such, were illegitimate. Abraham and Jacob had built altars and worshiped at Bethel much earlier (Gn 12:8; 28:18–22; 35:9–15). But by the time of Amos, the Jerusalem temple was the place that faithful Israelites were expected to worship. (TLSB)

horns of the altar. Even the last refuge for a condemned man (cf. 1Ki 1:50–53) will afford Israel no protection. (CSB)

Altars at Bethel resembled those of the tabernacle. Cutting off the horns would render it useless for sacrifice and for protection (cf 1Ki 1:50; 2:28). (TLSB)

3:15 *winter house ... summer house*. Cf. 6:11; further signs of opulence that would not benefit their owners on the day of God's judgment—nor would expensive imported decorations, carvings and inlays of ivory (cf. 6:4; 1Ki 22:39). Many examples of such carvings have been found in ruined palaces in Samaria and other cities. (CSB)

This list of houses—one for every season, each in its own opulent style—emphasizes Israel's indulgent prosperity. However, many of these mansions were built upon the oppression of the innocent and the poor. Destruction of the altar at Bethel (v 14) would then engulf the homes of the wealthy. In that fashion, judgment would come upon temple as well as home, against Israel's religious and economic life. (TLSB)

houses of ivory. Phoenician low-relief carved plaques were used to decorate furnishings and other features of a home. The Phoenician artistic style had great influence on Israelite architecture and design, as archaeology and Scripture testify. (TLSB)