

# AMOS—WEEK 2

## ABANDONMENT



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is by James Tissot (1836–1902)*

*Amos was the owner of a flock of sheep. Tissot shows him with a stick and a dog.*

The sins listed here aren't just nasty; they represent the abandonment of principles, agreements, and covenants. Forgiveness is abandoned. Respect for the unborn and the dead is abandoned. God's covenant with His people is abandoned.

Israel's abandonment of the covenant is total.

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Amos, Week 2 — Abandonment  
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1 Amos 1:11–12

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“For three transgressions of Edom, and for four,  
I will not turn away its punishment,  
Because he pursued his brother with the sword,  
And cast off all pity;  
His anger tore perpetually,  
And he kept his wrath forever.  
But I will send a fire upon Teman,  
Which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.”*

Jacob’s (Israel’s) brother, Esau, was called Edom (which means red) because of his red hair. The land where his descendants settled is called Edom. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, but Jacob stole Isaac’s “oldest son” blessing outright from Esau. When Esau showed up to get his blessing, he was shaken.

*And Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!”  
And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.*

*Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:*

*“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth,  
And of the dew of heaven from above.*

*By your sword you shall live,  
And you shall serve your brother;  
And it shall come to pass, when you become restless,  
That you shall break his yoke from your neck.” — Genesis 28:38–40*

But Esau forgave Jacob—completely. Years later, when Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him, he was so scared he that he divided his family so that some might survive if Esau’s wrath.

*Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.*

*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. —  
Genesis 33:1–4*

But Esau’s descendants unforgave Jacob. As we saw in verses 6–10, they enslaved many Israelis.

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“Forgive and forget.” The challenge with forgiveness is making it permanent. Only then is it genuine.

2 Amos 1:13–15

Thus says the LORD:

*“For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four,  
I will not turn away its punishment,  
Because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead,  
That they might enlarge their territory.  
But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah,  
And it shall devour its palaces,  
Amid shouting in the day of battle,  
And a tempest in the day of the whirlwind.  
Their king shall go into captivity,  
He and his princes together,”  
Says the LORD.*

The Hebrew verb translated as “ripped” here also means split. Since, soldiers likely did this with swords, “split” may be the better translation. This is particularly evil. God has made it clear that pregnant women get special honor and treatment.

*“If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” — Exodus 21:22–25*

This punishment for an unintended consequence—the men were fighting with each other, not the woman—is particularly severe. They are subject to punishment even if *no harm follows*. Conversely, even killing another man has an escape clause.

*“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.” — Exodus 21:12–13*

*“Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites you shall appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee.” — Numbers 35:6a*

So, the Ammonites are in big trouble. But notice that it’s the leadership who gets enslaved. This connects to the reason for the transgressions. They committed these horrors to *enlarge their territory*.

That’s on orders from the top.

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There is much unjustified confusion about Exodus 21:22. The Hebrew translated as, “*she gives birth prematurely*” is only two words: “child” (יָלֵד “yel-id”) and “goes out” (יָצָא “yah-tsa”).

3 Amos 2:1–3

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“For three transgressions of Moab, and for four,  
I will not turn away its punishment,  
Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.  
But I will send a fire upon Moab,  
And it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth;  
Moab shall die with tumult,  
With shouting and trumpet sound.  
And I will cut off the judge from its midst,  
And slay all its princes with him,”  
Says the LORD.*

This English translation here doesn't do justice to how nasty Moab's crime is. Aramaic translations of the Old Testament (called Targums) suggest that the lime from burning the king of Edom's bones was used in construction.

Bone ash is primarily calcium oxide (CaO), also known as quicklime. Regular limestone is calcium carbonate (CaCO<sub>3</sub>). Cement is made by heating limestone to drive out the carbon, yielding quicklime. Quicklime (cement) is the binding agent in concrete and mortar.

However, back then, they would have just used quicklime to make plaster. Some Targums indicate that's what they did with the bones of the king of Edom.

That's about as far from a dignified burial as you can get.

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Notice that Moab's crime wasn't against the people of Israel; they did this to the Edomites (at least to the king of Edom). This shows that God is concerned with justice, not just justice for the people of Israel.

The punishments in Amos 1:3–2:3, which depict God's judgement against five neighbors of Israel, reveal a pattern. A great wave of terror is coming, in the form of the Assyrian army.

But Amos's prophesy takes this out of the hands of Assyria. They are not really the ones punishing these five nations; God is. The Assyrians are merely the agents of God's wrath.

Of course, the Assyrians will deserve God's wrath for doing this. Thus, we get an exceedingly complex lesson in God's sovereignty. As chapter three of the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "*God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.*" He ordains everything. Just as God punished Pharaoh for his hard heart—though God had hardened it—He will punish the Assyrians for the actions that fulfill these prophesies.

If this troubles you, good. It's complex but righteous. Seek to understand it.

4 Amos 2:4–5

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“For three transgressions of Judah, and for four,  
I will not turn away its punishment,  
Because they have despised the law of the LORD,  
And have not kept His commandments.  
Their lies lead them astray,  
Lies which their fathers followed.  
But I will send a fire upon Judah,  
And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”*

Notice how Judah is kept to a higher standard than the first five nations. This gets back to covenants. By not keeping *His commandments* Judah is breaking their covenant with God. That is, as we’ve explained, a great offense, even if the specifics are not horrifying.

God’s people are held to a high standard because they signed up for a high standard.

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This applies to us—even more so because we signed up for the covenant individually.

“Okay, fine. But what’s my end of the bargain?”

It’s a lot and this is where much of modern American Christianity often drops the ball. Confessing Christ means confessing Him as Lord. That means seeking His will as well as obeying it.

If you’re reading this, you already take that seriously. Good. Having a daily devotional is a big step toward discipleship. Unfortunately, many Americans confess Christ, assume they’ve bought a ticket to heaven, and go back to doing what they were doing before.

Even worse, many Americans never confessed Jesus as Lord in the first place; they confessed Him as “my personal savior.” That’s not even a covenantal commitment. They just lay claim to the benefits of the covenant without committing to anything.

Curiously, many committed Christians started out this way—with a floppy confession of faith. They know Jesus as the Lord, and endeavor to serve Him every day, yet their confession was all about trusting Him, and Him alone, for their salvation. They never confessed Him as my Lord.

If this is you, it’s time to plug that hole. You don’t have to stand up in front of a congregation to do this; you just have to reorient your understanding of your relationship with Jesus. For many committed Christians this isn’t a big shift. You might even think of it as one of labeling.

But when sharing the gospel, it is a big shift. When Christianity is sold as the ultimate lagniappe, you get believers who believe, not because they think Christianity is true, but because they hope it’s true.

5 Amos 2:6–8 (ESV)

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—  
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;  
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.*

At this point, the Israelis might be thinking, “We’re the good guys and have escaped God wrath.” Not so. God has saved the best for last. He’s going to light into Israel for pretty much the rest of the book.

Amos lives in Israel and their transgressions are the main focus of his prophecy. Their violations of the covenant with the LORD are so numerous that they will take many chapters to list. This adds to our earlier explanation of the meaning of, “*For three transgressions ... and for four*”.

In addition to meaning “many and more” there is a sense of completeness in the total being seven. This sense applies best to Israel. The other nations did terrible things, but there were plenty of things they didn’t do.

But the range of Israel’s violations is so vast that they give the impression that their covenant with God isn’t violated; it’s abandoned and forgotten.

They’re on a completely different path.

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The individual sins listed here aren’t as horrifying as some of the ones we saw previously. Then again, this is just the beginning of a long list.

But there’s one offense mentioned here that’s especially troubling in Hebrew. Notice that this translation says, “*a man and his father go in to the same girl*,” not, “woman,” while saying “*man*,” (אִישׁ “eesh”) not “boy” (נֶעַר “nar”), The Hebrew translated as “girl” (נַעֲרָה “nar-ah”), literally means, “adolescent girl.”

There isn’t any specific prohibition in the law of the father-son combination, but this age gap is troubling. Even the son is older than the girl. This may be a reference to prostitution, even temple prostitution.

The *father* is easily old enough to be a grandfather.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you ever unforgiven anyone who you thought you had forgiven?
2. How did we lose our heart for the unborn?
3. What are your thoughts on cremation vs. burial?
4. How can you tell who just hopes it's true?
5. When/how does sin become a total abandonment of the covenant?

*Items for prayer:*