

AMOS—WEEK 3

DISCIPLINE



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.

Israel's rejection of the covenant, and of God's law, is so complete that it weighs Him down.

Thus, great calamity is coming, and they should know it is of the LORD.

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Amos, Week 3 — Discipline
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1 Amos 2:9–12

*“Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them,
Whose height was like the height of the cedars,
And he was as strong as the oaks;
Yet I destroyed his fruit above
And his roots beneath.
Also it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt,
And led you forty years through the wilderness,
To possess the land of the Amorite.
I raised up some of your sons as prophets,
And some of your young men as Nazirites.
Is it not so, O you children of Israel?”
Says the LORD.
“But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink,
And commanded the prophets saying,
‘Do not prophesy!’ ”*

The LORD is saying that He kept his side of the covenant.

He brought [them] up from the land of Egypt. He led [them] forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite. He destroyed the Amorite before them. He raised up some of [their] sons as prophets. And some of [their] young men as Nazirites.

And what did Israel do in response? They broke their covenant with the LORD, even making a point of erasing some of His blessings.

[They] gave the Nazirites wine to drink (which violates their vows, ending their status as Nazirites). And commanded the prophets saying, “Do not prophesy!”

That’s just plain “in your face” rejection.

Any time we see something unbelievably sinful/stupid in the Bible, we should ask ourselves if we do the same thing. If the standard is exactly the same thing, then, no, we don’t. I don’t know anyone who has given wine to a Nazirite, nor anyone who has told a prophet to shut up.

But that’s a dodge. As Rafiki said to Simba in *The Lion King*, “Look haaarder.” What about the things that are modern equivalents? Have you despised (wasted) a blessing from God? I sure have.

Consider all the blessings God has given you. Be honest about the ones you wasted and the ones you didn’t. What blessings are opportunities now?

Every mistake is an opportunity to grow. God cares more about the growth than the mistakes.

2 Amos 2:13–16

*“Behold, I am weighed down by you,
As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.
Therefore flight shall perish from the swift,
The strong shall not strengthen his power,
Nor shall the mighty deliver himself;
He shall not stand who handles the bow,
The swift of foot shall not escape,
Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself.
The most courageous men of might
Shall flee naked in that day,”
Says the LORD.*

This reminds me of the classic line parents use when spanking their children, “This will hurt me more than it hurts you.”

While this passage prophesies some tough punishments, notice the love. Israel’s intransigence is a burden for the LORD. *“I am weighed down by you.”*

God now has the unenviable task of correcting His children. *Therefore*, a bunch of horrible things will happen.

And notice the pattern. Everything seems optimized to embarrass and shame. God describes many “powers” and knocks them down, one-by-one.

The *swift* can’t flee. The *strong* can’t help. The *mighty* can’t save himself. The archer can’t stand (can’t hold their position). The *swift of foot* can’t escape. *He who rides a horse* can’t deliver himself.

But most shameful of all, *the most courageous men of might shall flee naked*,

God’s punishments have a curious way of fitting the crime. Today’s passage begins with, *“I am weighed down by you as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.”* The analogy is of a cart that has reached its weight limit. God’s point is that the weight of Israel’s incessant sin has hit a limit.

This is born of overconfidence and cockiness. They count on God’s blessings but don’t appreciate them.

So, God’s punishment is to smash their pride.

That’s why what’s coming is so finely tuned to embarrass them.

3 Amos 3:1–2

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, saying:

*“You only have I known of all the families of the earth;
Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”*

Remember how yesterday’s lesson noted that the punishment fits the crime. Israel was getting overconfident and cocky, so God is going to take them down a peg.

Here we see the point of the punishment fitting the crime.

The main purpose of the punishment isn’t justice; it’s teaching. The LORD is treating His chosen people like sons. A father will punish his own children for doing something at the same time that he ignores the neighborhood kids who are doing the same thing.

God’s punishment of Israel is tough love.

But tough love isn’t just for Israel. It’s for us, too.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.” — Hebrews 12:5–6*

But there’s a subtle and important twist to this. Saying, “The punishment fits the crime,” doesn’t tell the whole story. It’s more like, “The discipline fits the lesson.”

When I was a teenager, my father made me work as a caddie at various golf courses in the Bethesda, Maryland area. Large golf bags weigh about 30 pounds each and I often carried two of them over a miles long golf course. I only weighed about 130 pounds at the time, and it was tough.

But my father didn’t do this to me as punishment. As I would later figure out, he did it because of a family history of scoliosis (curvature of the spine). His scoliosis was so bad, he lost some of the feeling in his left hand. My daughter’s case is severe enough that she has special exercises she does to prevent serious problems.

But my back is as strong as an ox’s. I’m now blessed by the rough treatment I received at the hands of my father. So it is with God and His sons.

He knows what He’s doing, and we don’t.

4 Amos 3:3–8

*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?
Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?
Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?
Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?
Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?
If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?
If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?"*

*Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,
Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
A lion has roared!
Who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken!
Who can but prophesy?*

The Hebrew idiom used here works the same in English. Questions posed in the negative imply that the answer is obvious. Two walking together must have agreed. A lion roaring *in the forest* must have its prey. The Hebrew word translated as *forest* here is more like a thicket. It has the sense of a hiding place. Thus, a roar would be a giveaway. That's absurd unless the hunt is over.

And notice the foreboding sense of Amos coming back to the lion imagery in verse 8. In Hebrew poetry, that means they're connected. The LORD is the lion and Israel is in its clutches.

Similarly, a bird falling in a snare must be caught in something. A snare springing up must, likewise, have caught something. The bird is Israel and they're already caught.

A trumpet blast in a city must inspire fear. The Hebrew is literally, "Does a shofar blown in the city not inspire fear?" The sound of the shofar is their version of an air-raid siren.

And the next line is the conclusion. Disaster coming to a city must be of the LORD.

Amos's point here is clarified and strengthened by two things.

First, the poetic structure gives emphasis to the conclusion. The pairings of the lion with the young lion, and the bird in the snare with the snare, set up the final pair. The fear inspired by the shofar blown *in a city* is paired with the coming calamity *in a city*. The calamity won't be something like a drought; it will come with terror, preceded by blasts of the shofar.

Second, Amos's prophecy and his repeated use of the phrase, "*Says the LORD*," solidify the connection. Any event can look random out of context, but prophesized in advance, it takes on additional meaning.

What's coming is anything but random.

5 Amos 3:9–11 (ESV)

*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.”*
“They do not know how to do right,” declares the LORD,
“those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”

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.”*

The LORD is making a point here about strongholds. These are often the highest elevation places, as they are easiest to defend and hardest to attack. They’re supposed to be almost invincible. Samaria (the capital of the northern kingdom) is one such stronghold.

But the people are putting their trust in strongholds. So, they feel free to do anything they want, including *store up violence and robbery in their strongholds*, knowing that no one can touch them.

But strongholds mean nothing to God. What matters to Him is that *those who store up violence and robbery* are so steeped in evil that they don’t even *know how to do right*. They’ve forgotten the covenant and they’ve forgotten His law.

So, God is going to hit them where it hurts. Strongholds have a weakness; they’re easily surrounded. Whether a walled city or a mountain, or even a walled city on a mountain, a siege can cut it off from the outside world. Eventually, the stronghold runs out of food and water and is forced to surrender.

Then comes the plunder.

The key to this passage isn’t the horrible end; it’s the beginning. The point of all this isn’t the punishment; it’s the lesson. The LORD wants the people in the strongholds of *Ashdod and Egypt* to gather at Israel’s stronghold (*Samaria*) and open their eyes.

“Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst.”

But notice that the LORD wants Ashdod (a Philistine city) and Egypt to see the lesson. You might think that God would want to avoid the embarrassment of everyone seeing His chosen people be evil.

But that’s not how He works.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What current blessings are opportunities for growth?
2. When have you seen a punishment fit perfectly?
3. We're you ever disciplined just to teach a lesson?
4. Have you ever felt God's wrath?
5. Have you ever wanted something embarrassing to be kept secret?

Items for prayer: