

“All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 1:3-2:3

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 February 11

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions?

Outline (the following is from *TLSB* p.1457; we will expand/collapse the major divisions as we proceed through them; note the logical reason for tonight’s grouping of “neighbors”; remember chapter and verse numbers were separate later additions to the text):

I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)

A. Syria (1:3-5)

B. Philistia (1:6-8)

C. Tyre (1:9-10)

D. Edom (1:11-12)

E. Ammon (1:13-15)

F. Moab (2:1-3)

G. Judah (2:4-5)

H. Israel (2:6-16)

II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)

III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Roehrs-Franzmann

characteristically writes:

“The shepherd-turned prophet

invites Israel to behold

the Judge of the nations at work.

In a sweeping panorama of

condemnation the Lord pronounces

doom on the surrounding nations”.

Syria (1:3-5):

1:3 *Thus says the LORD*: confer and compare 1:2, where Amos arguably is describing what he saw in a vision (confer 1:1), perhaps in contrast to his in 1:3 reporting the Lord’s words heard in the vision; confer also the beginning of each of the following seven statements and also the end of most of them. While we might distinguish, in a narrow sense, Amos’s words from the Lord’s words, in a broad sense, as inspired and therefore inerrant Holy Scripture, both kinds of words are the Word of the Lord and have the same attributes, including authority.

For three transgressions of ... and for four: the wording is repeated for all eight of the nations, the six neighbors and then also Judah and Israel. Keil-Delitzsch explains, “the numbers merely serve to denote the multiplicity of the sins, the exact number of which has no bearing upon the matter”, and quotes Hittig that the number is not three or four but much larger, and Keil-Delitzsch likewise quotes Luther that the number denotes “ungodliness in its worst form”. (Reference is also made to three as a perfect number and four as a way of gradation, though four can also be the number for the complete earth, as its compass directions.) Kretzmann comments, “the number being by no means restricted”. *CSSB* comments, “For their many sins, especially the one named” (where there seem to be more than one sin named, the subsequent ones named can be seen as expansions of the first one). Laetsch says “an additional transgression added to the former; the last sin, whereby the measure of sin, which before was full, overflows, and God’s wrath comes.” Laetsch also discusses “transgression” as revolt and rebellion against the Lord in the form of idolatry manifesting itself in sins against Israel. Roehrs-Franzmann says, “The nations have gone on and one to fill up the measure of their sins.” *TLSB* says that the wording “implies an ongoing escalation of wickedness during Amos’s day” and that the similar structure “not only builds dramatic tension but also emphasizes that God’s people are acting no better than their pagan neighbors.”

Damascus: we mentioned last time that Damascus was the leading city-state of the empire north of Israel also called Aram (confer the mention in 1:5). *TLSB* refers to modern-day Syria (confer the name used in 1:5), though the precise extent of the two nations would not necessarily be the same. *TLSB* also notes that though the nation was “Conquered by King David c 250 years earlier (2Sm 8:6), it soon recovered its strength and became a lasting nemesis of Israel (cf 1Ki 11:23-25; 2Ki 8:7-15).” Here is perhaps as good of a place as any to note that the sequence of nations is not circular but northeast, southwest, northwest, south, east, southeast (so Roehrs-Franzmann). Laetsch sees a progression from Syria, whose hate Israel had suffered the most, to Philistia, “another inveterate opponent of Israel, then Phoenicia, “with whom Israel had been more closely connected during the past centuries”, then three related nations, not to mention Judah, so that “The judgment comes ever closer to the northern tribes”.

I will not revoke the punishment: again the wording is repeated for all eight of the nations. *TLSB* comments, “This vow underlines that the Lord will not rescind the judgment being pronounced.” Laetsch remarks on the mysterious manner that the judgment is referred to by the pronoun “it” before it is given later. (The ESV adds the word “punishment”; which might make us think of Christ’s bearing our punishment on the cross and our being given His righteousness.)

because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron: *TLSB* notes that Gilead “sat in the territory separating Israel and Aram and so was among the first places attacked by Damascus.” (Confer the mention in 1:13.) In this case, *TLSB* explains that the “Attacks of Damascus on Israel are likened to metal-toothed devices used for ripping the wheat from the chaff on the threshing-room floor.” Roehrs-Franzmann explains, “refers to some act of inhuman cruelty inflicted on Gilead by the Syrians.” Keil-Delitzsch takes the reference literally and refers to the 2 Kings 10:32-33; 13:7, “when the conquerors acted so cruelly towards the Gileadites, that they even crushed the prisoners to pieces with iron threshing-machines, according to a barbarous war-custom that is met with elsewhere”, with reference to 2 Samuel 12:31 (to some extent confer Laetsch).

1:4 *So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad:* the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple “and”, but the ESV’s “So” captures the sense with the implication of 1:3’s “because”. *TLSB* explains, “Given that Hazael became king of Syria after murdering Ben-hadad and usurping his throne (2Ki 8:7-15), the penalty here pronounced seems fitting.” (*CSSB* seems to take the flow the other way, from Hazael to his son Ben-Hadad, the second king with that name; Roehrs-Franzmann notes that both names refer to kings and that there were several with the name Ben-Hadad [the ESV’s not capitalizing the second name seems odd].) *TLSB* notes that destruction by fire is a common element in these oracles of judgment, appearing in all but one, and in this case being strong enough to devour the Damascus fortresses even though they were made of stone (confer the altars of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:38). *CSSB* says divine judgment was “usually carried out by a devastating war that resulted in the burning of major cities and fortresses.”

1:5 *I will break the gate-bar of Damascus:* *TLSB* explains the gate-bar as that which “secured the fortress gates of a city (cf 1K 4:13)”, and *TLSB* comments, “Once a city’s gate-bar broke, its overthrow was all but guaranteed.” Confer the mention of Damascus in 1:3.

and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven: the Lord is still the subject. The verb “cut off” would appear to have two objects: first the people in this phrase and second their ruler in the next phrase. The inhabitants of the land are to be cut off from the Valley of Aven (the NIV and so *CSSB* refer to “the king” or the “one who sits enthroned” in the Valley), the location of which valley *TLSB* says is “uncertain, but most likely ‘Valley of Lebanon’ spoken of in Jsh 11:17”, which “extended along the northern border of Israel.” *CSSB* notes the name means “wickedness”. Confer and compare the essentially similar judgment in 1:8 (and 2:3, where *TLSB* refers to “a battle annihilation”, though compare 1:15).

and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden: with the scepter an emblem of rule, we understand that the Lord also cuts off the ruler of the land from Beth-eden, which *TLSB* says is an “Aramean city-state north of Damascus, on the banks of the Euphrates”. *CSSB* says the reference is probably to Damascus, “the garden spot of that region”. Presumably following Keil-Deltizsch, Kretzmann says the prophecy was fulfilled “when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser took the city of Damascus and dissolved the Syrian kingdom.”

and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir: the change in subject from God to the people of Syria (confer “Damascus” in 1:3 and earlier in 1:5) may be notable (the last thing “they” did was thresh Gilead in 1:3). On going into exile, *TLSB* comments, “To be forcibly removed from one’s land and taken captive by a conqueror. Such forced relocations were common in ancient conquests.” Of course, God is doing the action through the conqueror, thus even using pagan rulers and nations for His purposes (confer and compare 1:6). Regarding Kir, *TLSB* comments, “Location uncertain; the place where the Syrians originated. The Syrians would lose their kingdom and be reduced to their place of origin.” (However helpful that comment might be.) *CSSB* says Kir might possibly have been in the vicinity of Elam.

says the LORD: most of the oracles both begin with a verbal mark of quotation (confer 1:3) and end with a verbal mark of quotation, though not all ending marks are identical (confer and compare, for example, 1:8). Keil-Deltizsch comments that the closing words “serve to add strength to the threat”.

Philistia (1:6-8):

1:6 *Gaza*: *TLSB* explains, “Main city in Philistia, located southwest of Israel and Judah, along the coast of the Great Sea.” We should think of the same land of the ancient Philistines and the modern Palestinians, such as on the Gaza Strip, even if the people are not the same/ethnically-related.

because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom: yes, it seems the people of Gaza are being punished for doing something similar to what God Himself was just described as doing, though the purposes behind the actions obviously make the actions different in some sense (not in any way endorsing any sort of situational ethics or ends justifying means). As *TLSB* notes, Edom was a “Kingdom south of Judah. The Edomites descended from Esau and thus from Abraham, through Isaac (Gn 25:23-26; Dt 2:4). Unanswered by *TLSB* is both who the people delivered into exile are and why the people of Gaza would deliver them Edom (but see 1:9, where *TLSB* refers to slave trade). Edom gets its own oracle in 1:11-12. The NIV translates “whole communities”, and *CSSB* comments, “not just warriors captured in battle. The reference may be to villages in south Judah on the trade route from Edom to Gaza” and further refers to “trading the people like cattle to another country.” Roehrs-Franzmann refers to “the total population of a vanquished enemy”, but, since clearly not all of Judah/Israel was so carried into exile, we likely should think only of the cities or territory so vanquished (so Kretzmann, “all the prisoners taken in a certain campaign” and Laetsch, whole “cities and districts”; confer Keil-Delitzsch, who refers to 2 Chronicles 21:16).

1:7 *send fire upon the wall of Gaza*: confer 1:4 and God’s sending fire to devour Ben-hadad’s strongholds.

1:8 *Ashdod ... Ashkelon ... Ekron*: *TLSB* comments, “Along with Gaza (v 6), these are renowned strongholds of the Philistines. List conveys that all of Philistia will be punished.” Confer the essentially similar judgment in 1:5. *CSSB* refers to Gath as the fifth city of the Philistine group and suggests it “may already have been subdued by Uzziah”; Roehrs-Franzmann says Gath “would be included in the remnant of the Philistines”. Presumably following Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann says, “it was not essential to name them all”.

remnant ... shall perish: last time we discussed “remnant” as both a “law” theme that can show us our sin and a “Gospel” theme that can show us our Savior from sin and forgive our sin. In this verse, where even the “remnant” that remains will perish, law is arguably more the emphasis, though even the “law” destruction of an enemy is “Gospel” deliverance for God’s people. Confer and contrast the perishing here with the exile in 1:5. The NIV translates “till the last of the Philistines is dead”, and *CSSB* notes, “There would be no remnant. Philistia was finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.”

says the Lord God: where the name of the LORD is used by itself in 1:5, as indicated by the smaller capital letters in “LORD” (the Hebrew Tetragrammaton or Name of the Lord, יהוה, which we might read as “Jehovah” or “Yahweh”, and which the Jews would have not pronounced but read as Lord”), in this case the actual noun for Lord is used with the personal name., which combination the ESV has chosen to translate as “Lord God” (compare the NIV’s “Sovereign Lord”).

Tyre (1:9-10):

1:9 *Tyre*: as *TLSB* notes, Tyre was a “Port city northwest of Israel; important city-state in Phoenicia.” Confer also the mention in 1:10.

because they delivered up a whole people to Edom: in this case, *TLSB* explains, “Tyre was known for engaging in the slave trade. In particular, Amos is rebuking Tyre for the role it would play in selling Israelite slaves when the northern tribes fell to Assyria in 722 BC.” Kretzmann, on the other hand, refers to “captives obtained from the Philistines or the Syrians as the result of one of their campaigns”, and Keil-Delitzsch would seem to more clearly indicate that the captives were Israelites.

and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood: *TLSB* explains, “Israel and Tyre made a covenant during the days of King Solomon (1Ki 5:1-12; cf 2Sm 5:11). Motivated by greed, the people of Tyre would soon violate that agreement.” *CSSB* refers to an even earlier treaty in the days of David and later treaty in the days of Ahab. Roehrs-Franzmann seems to reject the “brotherhood” as a reference to the treaty between Solomon and King Hiram of Tyre.

1:10 *fire ... devour*: Kretzmann says the prophecy was fulfilled “during the Babylonian and Grecian conquests”.

Edom (1:11-12):

1:11 *Edom*: the preceding two oracles, those against Gaza and Tyre, both mentioned Edom, and now Edom gets its own oracle. At 1:6 above we noted that the Edomites were descendants of Abraham through Isaac’s son Esau, as the Israelites were descendants of Abraham through Isaac’s son Jacob, also called “Israel”. Obviously “brother” in the following phrase would be used in a looser sense of “relative” or “kinsman”.

Keil-Delitzsch notes that the two following nations, Ammon and Moab, were also related to Israel by lineal descent, though detail is not provided; Ben-Ammi and Moab were children of Lot, Abraham’s nephew (confer Laetsch), and would have been a second-cousin to Jacob/Israel.

because he pursued his brother with the sword: Despite an extended familial relationship, *CSSB* suggests Edom is a “treaty” brother of Israel/Judah. *TLSB* comments, “Sadly, biblical history is full of accounts about Edom making war against Israel (1Sm 14; 2Sm 8:12-14; 1Ki 11:14-22; 2Ki 8:20-22).” Keil-Delitzsch reads the text as not condemning “any particular sin”. Laetsch refers to “Family feuds” as “the most irremediable quarrels”, and we might think of Cain and Abel.

and cast off all pity: *TLSB* comments, “Wordplay. Lit., Edom ‘destroyed [Israel’s] wombs’ through brutal treatment and murder of Israelite women.” Confer 1:13.

and his anger tore perpetually: *TLSB* comments, “Presents an image of an animal tearing at its prey. The prophet thus characterizes Edom’s attacks on Israel as unrelentingly vicious.” Kretzmann comments, “Being bent upon murder”.

and he kept his wrath forever: *TLSB* comments, “Edom would never end its outpouring of rage against Israel.” Perhaps we can imagine even in the eternal torment of hell some descendants of Edom are still raging against some descendants Israel? Or, perhaps “forever” is hyperbole for a long time.

1:12 *Teman ... Bozrah*: Of Teman, *TLSB* notes, “Edomite territory, the home of Esau, south of the Salt Sea”; *CSSB* says it is thought to have been near Petra. Of Bozrah, *TLSB* notes, “Edom’s northernmost city”; *CSSB* says the city is now identified with Buseirah 37 miles further north; Kretzmann identifies it as the capital of the country. So, *TLSB* comments, “Amos hints that Edom will suffer widespread, or even complete destruction”, apparently due to the fire inflicted on a southern city’s spreading and devouring all the way to a northern city. *CSSB* comments, “With their [the cities’] destruction, Edom would lose its capacity for continual warfare.”

Ammon (1:13-15):

1:13 *Ammonites*: *TLSB* explains, “People east of the Jordan.”

because they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead: *TLSB* comments, “Ammon’s enmity against Israel will express itself in brutal attacks against women and children. Sadly, Israel suffered this fate more than once.” Confer 1:11. Keil-Delitzsch says, “The occasion on which the Ammonites were guilty of such cruelty towards the Israelites as is here condemned, is not recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament”. On Gilead, confer 1:3.

that they might enlarge their border: *TLSB* notes, “Ammon attempted to capture territory from the Israelites.” Kretzmann refers specifically to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh.

1:14 *Rabbah*: *TLSB* notes that the Hebrew word means “great” and that it was the name of Ammon’s capital city; *CSSB* refers to modern Amman.

with shouting on the day of battle: one might think of Israel’s defeat of Jericho under Joshua, in which, under the Lord’s command, there was apparently silent marching for six days and on the seventh day the people shouted a great shout (Joshua 6:1-21). Confer 2:2, where *TLSB* notes, “Violence and tumult of battle.” Kretzmann says, “as soon as the enemies would enter the city”.

with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind: *TLSB* comments, “Ammon’s judgment is coming in a terrible storm. Ammon will suffer a complete collapse in battle, and this defeat should be understood as divine punishment.” Compare Kretzmann, “the enemies would come in a tumultuous assault and carry all before them”. Keil-Delitzsch also refers to the enemy taking the city “by storm” and not a literal storm.

1:15 *and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together*: *TLSB* comments, “Defeat of the Ammonites will be such that even their royalty will be captured and carried away.” Could one not understand that the people would be left in place and only the royalty exiled? Were not defeated kings sometimes taken to live in the court of their conquerors as a sort of trophy? Compare 2:3 (and 1:5 *et cetera*), though *TLSB* seems to take them in a similar sense. Compare *CSSB*, which comments that the state would be left “without leaders to continue such practices.”

Moab (2:1-3):

2:1 *Moab*: *TLSB* explains, “Nation east of Israel, on the southern border of Ammon.”

because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom: *TLSB* explains, “Moabites stand accused of burning the bones of a fallen enemy to ash (or ‘lime’). Such desecration was obviously an atrocity.” Kretzmann says, “showing an almost unbelievable vindictiveness”. *CSSB* refers to the burning’s “depriving the king’s spirit of the rest that was widely believed to result from decent burial”; similarly, Roehrs-Franzmann comments of the burning, “intended to degrade the dead and to make him suffer even in death.” Though Luther takes the statement metaphorically, Keil-Delitzsch refers to 2 Kings 3 (confer Laetsch). Roehrs-Franzmann notes, “The remarkable thing about Moab’s offense is that it was committed, not against Israel but against Israel’s archenemy, Edom. The Lord, God of Israel, is no mere national deity but Lord of all, whose wrath strikes all ungodliness and wickedness everywhere.” Obviously, God has His own judgment on Edom in 1:11-12, and who is the means of executing that judgment is not indicated. We might think of both accidental burnings and the practice of intentional cremation in our time.

2:2 *Kerioth:* *TLSB* notes, “Main city of Moab, near Aroer, and site of principal shrine for pagan god Chemosh (cf Jer 48:13, 24).” Or, with a text note in the NIV, *CSSB* refers to the plural for “cities”.

2:3 *I will cut off the ruler from its midst, and will kill all its princes with him:* *TLSB* comments, “As in 1:15, this pictures a battle of annihilation. Even the king and princes will perish.” Other “cutting off” expressions are perhaps similarly “battle annihilation” (1:5, 8) but 1:15 specifically mentions “exile”, though perhaps that could be taken as an exile of death. Regardless of the meaning in 1:15, Kretzmann says of Moab that it “would cease to exist as a nation. This came to pass at the time of the Babylonian and Chaldean conquests.”

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

Atrocities continue to exist today, and leaders of countries and their people, including us, bear responsibilities in various ways. When we repent, then we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, receiving God’s forgiveness through His Means of Grace.

TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 1:1-2:3 says, “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 in Christ’s likeness.”

Next time, April 08 (Wednesday after Easter), Amos 2:4-16

Closing Prayer & Benediction

Color Map 2

