

# “All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 2:4-16

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 April 08

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

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class (February 11!): 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)

Judah (2:4-5):

2:4 *Thus says the LORD*: as noted at 1:3, Amos may be reporting the Lord’s words heard in the vision of 1:1; confer also 2:6 and 2:11 and 2:16.

*For three transgressions ... and for four*: as noted at 1:3, the numbers denote the multiplicity of the sins, not the exact number that would be much higher, increasing ungodliness, the last transgression perhaps bringing on the wrath for all of them.

*Judah*: the southern kingdom of the divided Israel, called by the largest tribe that settled in the territory, with the capital city of Jerusalem. After six oracles against their “Gentile” neighbors, in 2:4, God’s prophecy through Amos turns to His own people of Judah before speaking directly to His people in the northern kingdom of Israel.

*I will not revoke the punishment*: as noted at 1:3, the Lord vows not to rescind His judgment.

*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:* unlike the neighbors condemned for mistreating God's people, the people of Judah are condemned for disobeying God's law/statutes and instead following their own lies, like their ancestors (already in the desert). *CSSB* comments, "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" (to be sure the other nations had natural knowledge of God and His law). We should not miss the contrast between true and false teaching and the true and false practice that respectively result. *TLSB* comments, "Falsehood led to idolatry, improper worship, and ethical failures" and "Covenant unfaithfulness had persisted for generations". Roehrs-Franzmann takes the "lies" as a designation for idols. Keil-Delitzsch reminds us that the *torah* (translated "law", used only here in Amos) can be the sum and substance of all God gives to His people (so "law" in the wide sense as including Gospel, not to mention that the word could refer to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses), but if the phrases are parallel/synonymous, then Gospel would not seem to be in view, though Laetsch refers to it. Lessing seems to suggest that rejecting the *torah* was equivalent to rejecting the Word that would become flesh. The false gods are not capable of leading anyone astray, of course, though the prophets of the false gods could, not to mention that the people willingly followed the idols.

2:5 *So I will send a fire upon Judah and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem:* as noted at 1:4, the Hebrew conjunction could be a simple "and", but the ESV's "So" captures the sense with the implication of 2:4's "because". As also noted at 1:4, destruction by fire is common to all but one of these oracles (that is, the last one, against Israel), and the fire may have come as a result of a war in which the enemies burned major cities and fortresses. *CSSB* refers to the "loss of the defense and wealth in which they trusted". Lessing notes that not even Judah gets any hope at this point but only at the end of Amos through the line of David (9:11-15).

Israel (2:6-16):

2:6 *Israel:* God's prophecy through Amos finally reaches its primary target, with a rhetorical climax that shows that the northern kingdom of Israel is no better than its neighbors. Roehrs-Franzmann notes the indictment of Israel is "fuller and more detailed than all the rest." Lessing discusses the unexpectedness of an eighth oracle and how the oracle against Israel is different from those that precede it. As with Judah, Israel is accused of not keeping God's Commandments as is evident in the implicit contrasts that follow between what the Israelites should be doing and, in fact, are doing. *CSSB* notes that the sins of Judah "may be included in the indictment against Israel". (Arguably the same could be said of Judah's to some extent also being indictment by the sins of Israel.)

*Because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals:* presumably the righteous and needy are poetically parallel, as then would be the silver and the pair of sandals, with the common element's being the selling. *CSSB* suggests that the righteous are "Probably those who were not in debt and whom there was no lawful reason to sell" and that the needy "God had commanded be helped ... but they were instead sold to repay a (perhaps paltry) debt." Roehrs-Franzmann notes that the indictment is not mere social injustice but religious in its targeting, those under the benefit of the covenant; Keil-Delitzsch rejects the idea of moral righteousness. However, Laetsch refers to the righteous still living in the country as a "constant thorn in the flesh of the wicked", and Lessing seems to take the adjective in a religious sense through faith in the Messiah. *TLSB* contrasts the Sinai covenant's laws to protect the innocent with the perversion of justice in Amos's day by judges taking bribes even for paltry prices. *TLSB* also notes "In rabbinic tradition, the 'righteous one' was Joseph, sold by his brothers to buy sandals". (The account is in Genesis 37:25-28; the Ishmaelite caravan is said to have gum, balm, and myrrh; Judah proposes the sale; and the price was twenty shekels of silver by weight, the typical price for a male slave at the time; we are not told what the brothers did with the money.) Keil-Delitzsch takes the pair of sandals as describing not the bribe but the state of the poor, though the parallelism seems to go against that (confer Lessing). Lessing notes that the Church Father Tertullian interpreted the righteous one sold for silver of Christ, though by then the price had increased to thirty silver pieces.

*2:7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted:* again, presumably the poor and afflicted are poetically parallel, suggesting some parallelism between trampling the poor's heads and turning aside the afflicted's way. Perhaps following Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann refers to the poor's being oppressed "so severely" that "in their misery" they "show their grief by placing dust on their heads". *GWJF* quotes NIV84 "trample on the heads of the poor as upon dust of the ground". Lessing understands "the poorest of the poor" and mentions their awareness of their need for an Intercessor and Savior. Roehrs-Franzmann explains that the afflicted "never reach their goal or obtain their rights." Laetsch seems to see the way as the Lord's way. *TLSB* comments simply, "Despite the covenant's mandates that the vulnerable of Israel be protected ... the poor were being mistreated." *CSSB* notes that "throughout the ancient Near East, kings were supposed to defend such people."

*a man and his father go in to the same girl:* *TLSB* comments simply, “Incestuous behavior was forbidden explicitly ... it is an offense against nature.” The sin of prostitution itself oddly seems to go without mention. The *ESV* adds “same” where the Hebrew lacks it, and Keil-Delitzsch suggest “same” was omitted to avoid suggesting their going to different prostitutes was okay. Roehrs-Franzmann thinks a cult prostitute is in view (which would accent the religious/idolatrous aspect of the sin), but Keil-Delitzsch disagrees, and Laetsch likewise does not think even a public prostitute need be in view. More thorough, *CSSB* comments, “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 ... For a father and son to have sexual relations with the same girl or woman was strictly forbidden” (the New Testament builds on this Old Testament background, for example, in 1 Corinthians 6:16 about he who is joined to a prostitute’s becoming one body with her). Lessing thinks no marriage relationship exists between either the father or the son and the young woman, making both father and son commit adultery, though their being married is not expressed, and Lessing notes that, even if the father or the son were married to the young woman, the other is committing adultery and incest. Lessing observes the cultic context in 2:8 and a frequent connection between sexual adultery and idolatry, and Lessing refers to 1 Corinthians 5:1-5’s excommunication of a man with his father’s wife. However, Lessing seems to conclude that she is a sympathetic victim exploited by Israel, and he discusses the ideal marital situation as able to embody and proclaim the love between Christ and His Bride, the Church.

*so that my holy name is profaned:* *TLSB* comments, “The Lord’s name is repeatedly associated with grace, mercy, and holiness ... The rampant corruption of Amos’s day—Israel’s perversion of justice [2:6b-7a], dishonoring of women [2:7b], and idol worship [2:8]—constituted an esp[ecially] grievous affront to God’s holiness.” Keil-Delitzsch discusses the daring character of the sin arising not from weakness or ignorance but from “studious contempt of the holy God”. Luther observes that the Name of God put upon us in baptism and says that the Name “is blasphemed and corrupted because of us and through us when we walk unworthily, when we live and behave otherwise than befits Christians, when we are given over to wickedness and uncleanness” (confer Lessing, who also quotes this passage from Luther).

2:8 *they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge:* at first the “they” may read as a continuation of “a man and his father” but probably should not necessarily be taken that way. The laying down could be in actual sleep overnight, related to garments taken in pledge that were to be returned to the poor overnight, and, the *CSSB* notes, a widow’s not taken at all. Keil-Delitzsch refers to their reclining at sacrificial meals instead of standing in awe of God, and Lessing mentions people’s stretching themselves out for sexual immorality. The existence of many pagan altars reflects the people’s idolatry. *CSSB* comments, “Israelites who broke the laws protecting the powerless brazenly used their wrongly gotten gains even in places supposed to be holy.”

*and in the house of their God:* the ESV's capitalization of "God" seems striking in this context (confer ASV, NASB; compare KJV, NIV). The Hebrew word is plural ("gods"), though it is also plural in references to the true God. God certainly creates all people, but not all people have a faith relationship with Him. Lessing notes this is the only place in Amos where the divine title is used with a third-person plural "of them" or "their". The "house" or "temple" is not the one in Jerusalem but one, perhaps of several, wrongly set up to keep the people of the northern kingdom from traveling to the southern kingdom to worship at the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. The separatist priests at the separatist altars may have invoked the Lord's name but often did so syncretistically, while also praying to pagan gods. Laetsch is one who sees idols as in view. Luther is one who thinks the house was not that of the true God even though they thought they were serving the true God. Each of the varying ways of translating has varying ways of interpreting; for example, whether or not the Israelites recognized or worshiped the one true God, God through Amos could still be referring to Himself as their one true God. (There are major implications for our contemporary situation of not just Jews and Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, but also other so-called Christian religious traditions and whether they think they are worshipping the true God but in fact are not worshipping the true God.)

*they drink the wine of those who have been fined:* Luther says, "Priests who intended to enter the tabernacles had been absolutely forbidden to drink wine", and Leviticus 10:9 says that. *TLSB* refers to wine taken as payment by the priests of the unauthorized sanctuaries and then consumed within the sanctuaries' precincts, commenting, "Significantly, drunkenness and debauchery is associated with the worship of false gods elsewhere in the Bible". *CSSB* comments that "Exorbitant claims or even false charges of damage seem to be suggested." Roehrs-Franzmann sees the poor as the victims of the unjustly-exacted fines. Keil-Delitzsch suggests the fines were exacted in money that was used to purchase the wine (confer Laetsch).

2:9 *Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them:* the Hebrew conjunction can be a simple "and" but the ESV's "yet" captures the sense. Keil-Delitzsch says the repeated Hebrew for "and I" (variously translated or omitted by the ESV) is "used with peculiar emphasis, and serves to bring out the contrast between the conduct of the Israelites towards the Lord, and the fidelity of the Lord towards Israel." Lessing contrasts Israel's sin against God with God's gracious actions towards Israel. (We might think of the reproaches on Good Friday.) *CSSB* notes, "Israel had not only known God's law but had been specifically favored by his powerful help." The people of Amos's day are not worshiping God as they should, despite His having done mighty acts on their ancestors', and so implicitly also their, behalf in bringing them into the Promised Land (confer/compare "you" in 2:10). *TLSB* notes God's protecting Israel from danger and allowing them to take possession of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. The Amorites were one of the peoples of East Canaan and beyond the Jordan (to the east, trans-Jordan, across the Jordan, from the Jerusalem perspective), who were dispossessed by the Israelites coming out of Egypt (the Amorites are not to be confused with the Ammonites of 1:13-15). Presumably at least some of the land occupied by the people of the northern kingdom at the time of Amos was the land of the Amorites (see 2:10). *CSSB* says the Amorites are being used for all the inhabitants of Canaan.

*whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks:* *TLSB* comments, “Symbolic phrase reminding the Israelites of the dread they once felt before the Amorites. In anticipation of the conquest, Moses sent spies into the Amorite territories. They came back reporting that this was a giant people”. (We might usually think of the cedars of Lebanon.) Lessing says the reference to the trees could also be a subtle reference to the false worship of Asherah.

*I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath:* *TLSB* refers to “total destruction” (as if there is any other kind) and suggests that we might say “from top to bottom”.

2:10 *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:* God through Amos continues to remind the people of Israel of what He had done for them (compare the “you” in this verse and through 2:13 with the “them” in 2:9), backing up in time, as it were to the Exodus itself. (We might think of the “Prologue” to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6, that God brought the people up out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, so they “will” do the things He describes.) *TLSB* comments, “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 covenant 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” (confer our Church Year and Lectionary Series’ recounting God’s delivering us from sin).

2:11 *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?:* Further evidence of God’s continued love and faithfulness is His present-day providing spiritual leadership in the form of prophets, those who not only “saw” into or fore-told the future but also forth-told God’s Word of law and Gospel. As described in Numbers 6:1-21, Nazirites were set apart as holy by voluntarily taking oaths not to, for example, cut their hair or drink wine for a limited period of time, which *TLSB* says gave them special holy status of a priest or Levite. *CSSB* says the Nazirites “were used by God through word and example to call his people to faithfulness.” Roehrs-Franzmann calls them “a walking embodiment and proclamation of the total devotion to the Lord which should characterize the life of the whole covenant people”. (We might think of Samson, as in Judges 13:5; Samuel., as in 1 Samuel 1:11; and John the Baptizer, as in Luke 1:15, though the Bible’s text refers to the Nazirite vow only in Samson’s case.) Surely the honest people of Israel in Amos’s day would have to agree with the Lord’s claims, though Kretzmzann refers to their not appreciating their distinction in having prophets raised up for them. (Some contrast seems to be suggested between God’s faithful ministers and the Israelites’ unfaithful ones as described in 2:8.)

*declares the Lord:* confer above at 2:4 and earlier at 2:5, and other places, though the Hebrew verb is different in this case and in 2:16. Lessing refers to Wolff’s explanation that the expression used in these two places “indicates ‘a more solemn affirmation of the certainty that it is Yahweh himself who confronts Israel through the prophetic oracle.’”

2:12 *But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'*: again the Hebrew conjunction can be a simple “and”, but the ESV captures the sense with “but”. *CSSB* comments, “They showed utter disdain for God’s faithful servants and thus betrayed their callous insensitivity to God’s working among them.” Lessing notes that the two preceding examples are treated in inverse (chiastic) order. Regarding the Nazirites, *TLSB* comments, “Israelites had become so impious that even Nazirites were breaking their vows to God by taking alcohol”, though God’s statement through Amos is not simply that the Nazirites were drinking but that the people were causing the Nazirites to drink. Roehrs-Franzmann suggests, “they, by their luxurious and wanton lives, created a climate in which the Nazirite vow cannot be kept”. Lessing refers to Andersen and Freedman’s claim that the Nazirites’ drinking made them unfit for their calling. Regarding the prophets, *TLSB* comments, “Instead of listening to the prophetic Word and repenting, people tried to command the prophets, demanding changes in their behavior”, and *TLSB* points to the example of the priest Amaziah’s attempt to silence Amos in 7:12-13 and *CSSB* refers to the prophecy of 7:16. (We might think of various pressures on pastors in our time.)

2:13 *Behold, I will press you down in your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses down:* Luther refers a cart’s groaning beneath its load of straw to the people’s groaning beneath Assyrian chariots. Perhaps following Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann refers to the cart’s pressing down on the ground beneath it. *TLSB* explains, “Sheaves seem light, like a prophet’s words. But the bottom sheaves are crushed and smothered by the total weight.” Slightly different is *CSSB*: “A loaded cart crushes anything that falls beneath its wheels.” More different is Roehrs-Franzmann: “The picture of the unwieldy farm cart, overloaded with sheaves, halted and stuck where it stands, is in sharp contrast to the gifts of speed and power (all of them unavailing) pictured in 14-16. Before the God of judgment the swiftest and strongest are as helpless as a collapsed wagon.” More different still is Laetsch, who sees a threshing cart or sledge stopped by sheaves that fill up the rollers under the platform. Finally, after considering various possibilities, Lessing comments, “Yahweh is like a harvest wagon that is heavily loaded with Israel’s crimes. He is suffering under the weight of their ongoing transgressions.” (Is there some irony in sheaves as a sign of prosperity being used in a figure of speech about oppression of those who in their affluence exploited and oppressed the needy, poor, and afflicted? Perhaps confer Lessing.)

2:14 *Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength, nor shall the mighty save his life:* these are the first three of seven illustrations of the impact of God’s righteous judgment on Israel (how distinct the seven illustrations are is arguable, however, as the same “swift” is used in 2:14a and 2:15b; the same “mighty” is used in 2:14c and 2:16; and the same “not save his life” is used in 2:14c and 2:15c [and is perhaps also implicit in 2:15b]). Lessing traces out how the seven corresponds to the preceding number of nations and sins of each nation, including the eighth nation, Israel. Apparently following Keil-Delitzsch, Kretzmann says the swift “will not have time to escape”. Lessing says the strong will not “muster” his strength, and Lessing says the “mighty” is the “warrior”. The ones who should be able to endure and/or escape’s not doing so may be an argument from the greater to the lesser, how much worse it will be for those who are slower, weaker, and less-powerful. (Note that the greater were described as mistreating the lesser in 2:6-8 and benefitting from God’s saving deeds in 2:9-10 but resisting God in 2:11-2.) All would seem to perish in the end, though perhaps not the “stout of heart among the mighty” as in 2:16 (though see below). Lessing discusses dying under Divine judgment as implying spiritual death and so the whole person’s suffering the eternal torment called “the second death” in Revelation 20:14-15.

2:15 *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*: similarities with the preceding were noted above. Lessing describes the archer as the weapon-bearer in a two-man chariot. In this case, Kretzmann says the swift's "fleetness would not avail to carry him to safety". Lessing says the person in connection with the horse might be driving the chariot, though putting the swift in-between the two charioteers seems odd. (We might think of 1 Corinthians 10:12, "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" [ESV].)

2:16 *and he who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day*: Kretzmann refers to the "the champions of the army", Lessing to the elite warriors of the king's bodyguard and Israel's crack troops, and *TLSB* refers to "Israel's mightiest" fleeing naked from defeat. Kretzmann adds, "leaving behind the very garment by which the enemy seizes him". Lessing accents the fleeing naked and notes that it does not mean he will escape (confer 2:14). (We might think of Mark 14:51-52, perhaps a reference to the evangelist John Mark himself.) Regarding "that day", *CSSB* comments, "The day God comes in judgment—as he did through the Assyrian invasion that swept the northern kingdom away." (We might reflect on the Day of the Lord coming for us and what it brings in judgment and deliverance.)

*declares the Lord*: confer above at 2:11. Lessing in this place calls it "Yahweh's own signature."

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

*TLSB's* Law and Gospel Application Note for 2:4-5 says, "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."

*TLSB's* Law and Gospel Application Note for 2:6-16 says, "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." (Specifically, to receive that forgiveness through His Word and Sacraments, linked to the "prophets" He provides today.)

*GWfT* raises the possibility of Western democracies, including the United States, losing its initiative, capacity, and strength, as arrogant empires in Amos's day eventually now lie in dust. The study asks to what extent problems in our society have spiritual roots and distinguishes the Christian's approach to social problems from that of secularists. Ultimately, the study gives thanks to God for limitless forgiveness of our sins of commission and omission.

Next time, April 15, Amos 3:1-15

Closing Prayer & Benediction