

# “All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 3:1-15

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 April 15

Rev. Dr. Jayson S. Galler, Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX

<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 are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them):

- I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)
- II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)
  - A. Accusations Lodged against Israel (3:1-4:13)
    - 1. **Yahweh’s exclusive relationship with Israel (3:1-2)**
    - 2. **Prophecy verified (3:3-8)**
    - 3. **Proclamation concerning Israel’s guilt and punishment (3:9-15)**
    - 4. Condemnation of the rich women of Israel (4:1-3)
    - 5. Indictment of sacrificial sins (4:4-5)
    - 6. Failure to respond to Yahweh’s rebuke (4:6-13)
  - B. Lamentation for Israel (5:1-3)
  - C. Exhortation to Seek Yahweh (5:4-17)
  - D. Judgment on the Day of Yahweh (5:18-6:14)
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Yahweh’s exclusive relationship with Israel (3:1-2):

3:1 *Hear this word that the Lord has spoken*: The call to “hear” in 3:1 seems to be restated in 3:13, where it seems to be directed to others than Israel (other repetitions in subsequent chapters are variously taken as breaks and connections). Lessing connects the call to “hear” to the *Shema*, the call for Israel to hear that Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one, and so connects Amos to Moses and suggests the people have renounced that confession of Yahweh. Amos is speaking of the Lord and for the Lord: in the first part of the verse of the Lord in the third-person “the Lord”, and in the second part of the verse for the Lord in the first-person “I”. See also the Lord’s speaking in 3:8 and similar expressions used throughout noted there and throughout. Roehrs-Franzmann suggests, “This oracle is probably designed to meet an objection made against Amos’ oracles of doom. ‘We are God’s chosen people,’ the Israelites would say; ‘How dare you threaten us thus? God will not deny Himself and forsake His elect, to whom He has pledged Himself.’ Amos’ answer is that election is not only privilege, certainly not a magical protection against all evil; election establishes a personal bond between God and His chosen ones and involves responsibility.” (Confer Luther.)

*against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt*: In the preceding judgment against the nations (1:3-2:16), the southern kingdom of Judah was addressed in 2:4-5, and the northern kingdom of Israel was addressed in 2:6-16. Now the two seem to be addressed together as “Israel”, that is, “the whole

family” (confer 3:2), recalling the common descent from Jacob/Israel and his twelve sons, the tribes inheriting the land did not include Levi or Joseph but Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s two sons. Kretzmann comments that the exodus “resulted in their becoming His covenant people”, though arguably God’s covenant relationship goes back further, depending on which covenant you consider, to Abraham, Noah, and the like. (*GWfT* asks when and how God made us His own and refers to Titus 3:5-7.) *TLSB* comments about reminding “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.” However, as Roehrs-Franzmann notes, “in the following, Samaria (the northern kingdom) alone is prominent”; Keil-Delitzsch suggests the southern kingdom is included at the beginning “to indicate at the very outset that Judah might anticipate a similar fate if it did not turn to its God with sincerity.” “Land” here is the Hebrew *'erets* distinct from “earth” in 3:2 where the Hebrew is *'adamah* (confer the use of both in 3:5). Egypt is mentioned again in 3:9. The deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt points forward to our deliverance from sin that makes us the new covenant people of God. We arguably all what Lessing calls the “future ideal Israel”.

3:2 *You only have I known of all the families of the earth*: “You” is masculine plural. “Only” is notable for its distinction. “Known” can refer to marital intimacy and unity, and God’s relationship with His people, as Christ’s with His Church, is indeed to be reflected in the right relationship between a husband and a wife (Ephesians 5:22-33). Laetsch says “only” is emphasized by position, “you” by the full pronoun instead of the suffix, and “knew” by position. “Families” ties back to 3:1. *CSSB* comments, “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.”

*therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*: Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “The punishment which threatens Israel is not a contradiction of her election but a consequence of it,” and Roehrs-Franzmann notes that John the Baptizer attacked the same complacency of the people in his day. *TLSB* comments, “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.” Of course, God has also pronounced judgment against all the other nations around the combined kingdom of Israel in 1:3-2:3, but, Kretzmann suggests, “the greater the privileges granted, the heavier is the punishment for the abuse of them, as the transgression is made worse by ingratitude.”. Perhaps somewhat contrary is Luther, “God chastises His own children so that He may afflict even more severely the wicked who do not come to their senses, so that He may rage against them even more harshly. *TLSB* notes that six rhetorical questions leading to a seventh climactic one all follow, emphasizing “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.” *CSSB* sees the rhetorical questions as leading up to vv.7-8, and *CSSB* comments that each is a picture of cause and effect drawn from daily life; Roehrs-Franzmann suggests 3:3-5 speak to no effect without a cause and 3:6-8 speak to no cause without an effect. However, Keil-Delitzsch says the contents are not to be reduced to the general thought of connecting cause and effect but that “the utterances of the prophet originate with God”; Keil-Delitzsch lays out specific connections, and Kretzmann, indicated below, usually

follows. Luther also expresses correspondence with each question. (Confer punishment for transgressions in 3:13.)

Prophecy verified (3:3-8):

3:3 *Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?:* We might imagine that people can bump into each other and walk together, but the question expects the answer “no”. Laetsch says the Hebrew “never denotes an accidental meeting, the meeting is always at an appointed place, by agreement.” Kretzmann comments, “Jehovah and His prophet are in perfect agreement, as the sequel was bound to show.” We might reflect on our walking together. Like Luther and others, Laetsch seems to take the verse of God and His people and says God asks: “How can we continue to walk together as we have through the centuries if you no longer are agreed to walk with Me, loving Me, obeying Me, serving Me, as you agreed to do? Your disagreement with Me will be the cause of your irreversible destruction, your ruin, the inescapable effect of your refusal to keep on walking with Me. I warn you before our ways will be definitely and forever parted!”

3:4 *Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?:* I certainly do not know all the reasons why a lion might or might not roar in the forest, but the question expects the answer “no”. See also the lion roaring in 3:8 and the lion’s mouth in 3:12. Kretzmann suggests that the prey is Israel; Keil-Delitzsch says the prey is in sight and so the lion roars and immediately springs.

*Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing?:* Presumably “he” who has taken nothing is the young lion from this half verse and not the lion from the preceding half verse, though Keil-Delitzsch note that there are young lions that cannot yet go in search of prey but that this is a different young lion that already goes in pursuit of prey. Regardless, the question expects the answer “no”. Kretzmann comments, “Jehovah already has the guilty people in His power and is ready to carry out His judgment upon them.” Keil-Delitzsch note that the metaphors in vv.4 and 5 express different thoughts: from a nation’s being ripe for judgment and that God has it in its power to Israel’s deserving the destruction that threatens it.

3:5 *Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth when there is no trap for it?:* A bird might fall to the earth after hitting one of our clean Sanctuary windows, but the bird is not likely to fall into a snare on earth when there is no trap on the earth for it. The question expects the answer “no”. Note the seemingly synonymous uses of the Hebrew words translated “snare” and “trap” (though disputed by Keil-Delitzsch) and the parallel uses of “earth” in this half verse and “ground” in the next one (confer and compare 3:1-2 above). Kretzmann comments, “Could destruction come upon Israel if his own sinfulness did not draw him into it?”

*Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing?:* We might imagine something else setting a snare off, the snare enclosing nothing, or the snare malfunctioning, but the question expects the answer “no”. Kretzmann asks, “Did Israel, knowing his own corruptness, hope to escape destruction, which was bound to take hold of him?”

3:6 *Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?:* Trumpets blown as a warning of an impending attack are clearly in view, but trumpets could also be blown for other

reasons (for example, Lessing gives as an offensive signal, and I think of joy and celebration), though the question expects the answer “no”. See also the fear in 3:8. Kretzmann comments, “the message of the prophet was intended to awaken the people of Israel to the peril of their position.”

*Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?:* Again, the preceding six questions expecting the answer “no” lead the hearer/reader to answer also this question with “no”. We recognize the Lord’s sovereignty and omnipotence, but we also distinguish between His antecedent will to save and His consequent will to damn those who refuse His salvation. *TLSB* notes that sin does not originate with God and that God permits disasters (Hebrew “evil”) as a consequence of sin, and it cites John of Damascus’s understanding of “evil” as from our fallen perspective, while our redeemed perspective sees them as “ambassadors of conversion and salvation”.

*3:7 For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. :* The “For” (Hebrew *kee*) would perhaps indicate the reason for what follows in 3:8 (as the ESV translates and punctuates, the verse is a sentence fragment). *TLSB* comments, “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).” Keil-Delitzsch also seems to think of the Lord’s purpose of calling people to repent, as does Laetsch seem to see the secret purpose as a warning and call to repentance. Perhaps more to the text itself, Roehrs-Franzmann explains, “V. 7 interrupts the sequence of questions and seems, at first glance, to interrupt the argument. But it is essential to the thought. Amos’ hearers would agree that it is the Lord who sends misfortune on a city; they would also agree that the Lord God announces the coming disaster through His servants the prophets. Surely, then, the prophetic word which the prophet MUST speak (as surely as a man instinctively fears when he hears the lion’s roar) has God’s authority for it even if it be a word of disaster and doom.”

*3:8 The lion has roared; who will not fear?* Regarding the “lion” and “roaring” see 3:4a and 12; regarding the “fearing” see 3:6a (though separate Hebrew words are used).

*The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?* Regarding the “speaking” see 3:1, and see related expressions in 3:9; 10, 13, and 15; and 11 and 12. Roehrs-Franzmann suggests the oracle of 3:3-8 also meets an objection from the people, “Who are YOU to threaten Israel with doom? By what authority do you say these things?” Roehrs-Franzmann says the Lord God is the cause and Amos’s prophetic speech is the effect. *TLSB* comments, “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.” The parallelism does seem to cast the lion with the Lord, but the fearing and prophesying seem somewhat less parallel, though prophets certainly prophesy in part to save their own skin, even if those who hear them are lost for their rejection of the Lord’s word through the prophets. Kretzmann comments, “the servants of God are bound to make known His holy will, regardless of the manner in which their hearers react to the truth.”

Proclamation concerning Israel's guilt and punishment (3:9-15):

3:9 *Proclaim ... and say*: presumably the prophecy spoken by the Lord's speaking described in 3:8. Confer "declares the Lord" in vv.10, 13, and 15 and "thus says the Lord God" in v.11 and 12. Keil-Delitzsch says the prophets are addressed.

*Strongholds in Ashdod ... strongholds in the land of Egypt ... Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria*: "Strongholds" are also mentioned in 3:10 and 11; here not so much the strongholds themselves as the people in them as in 3:10; Keil-Delitzsch refers specifically to the inhabitants of the palaces (the royal nobility?) as the only ones who could pronounce a correct sentence upon the activities of the palaces of Samaria. As noted at 1:8, Ashdod is one of the strongholds of the Philistines, itself subject to judgment for its sins; Keil-Delitzsch says it is mentioned by way of example (presumably including all the others?). Egypt had not been condemned in the preceding section but, as *TLSB* notes, was a "Perennially powerful nation from which the Lord delivered Israel during the exodus" (confer 3:1). These sinful enemies of the united kingdom of Israel are summoned to gather on the mountains of Samaria where, *TLSB* suggests, "one can see the entire city", presumably *TLSB* means the northern kingdom's capital city of Samaria, though more than just that city is arguably being judged. *TLSB* comments, "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 perpetrated therein." We might discuss whether the proclamation of the prophecy is a "threat".

*see the great tumults within her, and the oppressed in her midst*: "Seeing" is the purpose of the assembling. Regarding the great tumults, *CSSB* comments, "The result of a violent, selfish power structure that was heedless of the justice called for in God's law." Regarding the oppressed, *TLSB* comments, "Innocent and poor were regularly denied justice, as Amos emphasizes (2:6-7; 5:11-12; 8:4-16)."

3:10 *They do not know how to do right ... those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds*: Kretzmann remarks that the people did not know how to do right because they "so thoroughly" had become "accustomed to unrighteousness". Roehrs-Franzmann notes, "The treasures stored up in Samaria are called violence and robbery because they have been acquired by violence and injustice. "Strongholds" of Ashdod and Egypt were mentioned in 3:9, presumably with their people as here, and they will be mentioned again in 3:11. Perhaps there is irony in the strongholds as places of oppression, when they should be places of safety?

*declares the Lord*: confer the same expression in 3:13 and 15 as noted above at 3:9 and the similar expressions there and in 3:8, 11 and 12.

3:11 *Therefore thus says the Lord God*: confer the same expression in 3:12 and similar expressions in 3:8-9 and 3:10, 13, and 15.

*An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered.*: *CSSB* names the adversary: "Assyria", but Laetsch says the Lord withholds the name from Israel to keep them in "agonized uncertainty". "Strongholds" were mentioned in 3:9 and 10. *TLSB* comments, "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." *CSSB*

notes of the strongholds that would be plundered, “Those that Samaria’s wealthy had greedily filled with plunder.”

3:12 *Thus says the Lord*: confer the same expression in 3:11 and similar expressions in 3:8-9 and 3:10, 13 and 15.

*As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear*: Confer the mentions of a lion in 3:4a and 8. Parts of a sheep rescued from a lion’s mouth can bring to mind David’s telling Saul about rescuing sheep from lions’ mouths in 1 Samuel 17:34-36, and the reference may be intended to evoke ideas of faithful kings over the united kingdom of Israel. *TLSB* comments, “In reporting a sheep killed by wild beasts a shepherd would often produce the victim’s remains as proof of what happened”. *CSSB* explains that such reporting was done to prove that the sheep was not stolen by the shepherd.

*so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed*: The figure of speech (simile, since it uses “as”) is concluded. Roehrs-Franzmann says “rescued” seems to be ironic. *TLSB* comments, “The once mighty house of Israel is being reduced to a few scraps of furniture.” *CSSB* refers to a “mutilated remnant”. The NIV text reads “those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches”, with a text note indicating that “The meaning of the Hebrew for this line is uncertain” (Roehrs-Franzmann calls the words “obscure”), though one can readily see how the ESV’s rendering completes the simile better than the NIV’s rendering. For his part, Luther has a different view and likes his meaning. Roehrs-Franzmann comments, “There will be just enough ‘rescued’ from destruction to testify to Samaria’s death by violence.” I was reminded of the Roman Emperor Vespasian’s construction of the Arch of Titus’s depicting spoils from the Romans’ destruction of Herod’s Temple, including a menorah (perhaps confer the plans for the Arch of Trump?).

3:13 *Hear and testify against the house of Jacob*: As noted at 3:1, the call to “hear” there seems to be restated here, where it seems to be directed to others than Israel. Exactly who is being addressed in this case is not immediately clear. One might think of the strongholds of Ashdod and Egypt back in 3:9 (confer *CSSB*, Kretzmann, Keil-Delitzsch, Laetsch); Roehrs-Franzmann thinks the words bid the mighty and rich in Israel, but Laetsch thinks of a humiliation for proud Israel in that even the foreigners testify against it. The “house of Jacob” is equivalent to the “house of Israel” with Jacob’s renaming as “Israel”. Again both northern and southern kingdoms could be in view (confer Keil-Delitzsch). *TLSB* seems to take the particular name of the Lord as the “God of hosts” as an indicator that the angelic armies and heavenly council are being addressed. Taking the Philistines and Egyptians, *CSSB* comments, “Even these pagans will agree with God’s judgment.”

*declares the Lord God, the God of hosts*: confer the same expressions in 3:10 and 15 and the similar expressions in 3:8-9, 11, and 12. The reference to the heavenly armies might be especially appropriate in a prophecy of a military’s destruction.

3:14 *that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions*: Punishing for iniquities was mentioned back in 3:2. Israel is reduced back to one or taken collectively as one.

*I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground:* The theme of punishing for sin continues. We saw possible references to the altars of the pseudo-temples of Bethel and Dan back in 2:8. Since horned animals were bold, horns were images of power, but the horns of the altar are said, for example, to have helped hold the wood and sacrifice in place and were where refuge was sought, so an altar without horns, as *TLSB* notes, would render the altar “useless for sacrifice and for protection”. Laetsch seems to go past the sacrifice to the “sure, reliable forgiveness and salvation, defending the sinner against the accusations of Satan and his own conscience.”

3:15 *I will strike ... shall come to an end:*

*the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses:* The jump is arguably from the pseudo house of the Lord in 3:14 to the houses of the people in 3:15. *TLSB* comments, “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.” Laetsch says the different “houses” could refer to separate “apartments” in the same house. Regarding specifically the houses of ivory, *TLSB* comments, “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.” Keil-Delitzsch says primarily the royal palaces, though perhaps other wealthy nobles had multiple houses. (Perhaps coincidentally New York State Governor Kathy Hochul has proposed new taxes on high-end second homes in New York City.)

*declares the Lord:* confer the same expressions in 3:10 and 13 and the similar expression in 3:8-9, 11, and 12.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

*TLSB*’s Law and Gospel Application Note for 3:1-4:5 says, “Wealth, compromise of confession, and indifference suffering tempt the ‘new Israel’, the Church, still today. Recognizing such failures in ourselves should move us to repentance and increased gratitude for Christ, who was rich, yet became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become eternally rich (2Co 8:9).”

Next time, April 22, Amos 4:1-13

Closing Prayer & Benediction