

Amos, Part I: 1:1-3:2

1. Hebrew authors are well known for using parallel structure to “rhyme ideas”. This allows them to draw attention to the similarities between the parallel elements and to emphasize the breaks in parallelism. Where do you see parallel structure in this passage? What is it meant to convey?
2. “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins” (3:2). Is God not punishing the pagan nations for all *their* sins as well?
3. Israel's rich are accused of grossly oppressing the poor. However, God's punishment will not only fall on the privileged, but will disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable. Why does God do this?
 - a. The “Noah effect”—the sins of the leaders reflect a soured culture which can only be “reset” through calamity (think Exodus)
 - b. God's just nature demands punishment of the rich; collateral casualties are unfortunate but unavoidable
 - c. This question betrays the Western misunderstanding that God's blessing is primarily material; the key here is that God's *Spirit* withdraws from the rich while God walks with the faithful poor
 - d. When the people see their leaders turning from God they need to turn from those leaders, even if it means pulling a “Ruth” and joining another nation; remaining in the blast zone is a dangerous choice
 - e. None of the above; the real answer is: _____
4. *Proposition*: Just as “the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts” (Heb 12:6), in every act of God's judgment there is also mercy and love. God is “slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness” (Neh 9:17) and no punishment is simply retribution or cold justice.

Yet Amos describes God as roaring, ravenous lion (1:2; 3:8). Can this proposition stand up to Amos?

5. The prophecies against the nations in 1:1-2:3 condemn behavior largely independent of Israel or Judah (i.e., not aimed at them). God's condemnation of pagan nations is not new; Jonah was sent to call the Assyrians to repentance (“And should I not be concerned about Nineveh...?”). God's justice was visited on the nations, not because of a Deuteronomy-28-esque covenant, but because his just character demanded it.
 - a. What ***in the text*** indicates whether this is a natural consequence of sin rather than an “act of God”? Is this prophecy prescriptive or descriptive?
 - b. If this punishment is grounded on God's eternal nature, does God visit punishment like this against modern nations, albeit without the prophetic warning? Would God, say, visit punishment against a nation whose administration invades other countries on the basis of faulty information, a nation which practices torture and holds enemies without trial, a nation which kills the unborn wholesale and where minorities face disproportionate levels of imprisonment and death?
6. Paul reassures his Jewish readers that “...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). So when we read Amos 3:2, “you only have I chosen... therefore I will punish you”, we should not fear damnation. Still, ...to walk with God in the covenant of [adoption] is not a soft option (cf. Phil 2:12; 1 Pet 1:17). The Father requires his children to be perfect as he is perfect; the Son who alone knows the Father (cf. Mt 11:27) has said so (Mt 5:48)... Special privileges, special obligations; special grace special holiness;

special revelation, special scrutiny; special love, special responsiveness... the church of God cannot ever escape the perils of its uniqueness. [Motyer, *The Day of the Lion*, 68]

The prophets, while calling the nations and God's people through history to holiness and repentance have also given guidance to help us follow that calling: we are to **seek justice** for the marginalized (Isa 1:17, 58:6-7); not boast in riches but **be generous in giving** them away (Jer 9:23-24); **lament** (Lam 2:18); **seek the city's welfare** (Jer 29:7) and **cling to God's promises** of restoration (Isa 54-55, 60-66; Ezek 34:25-31).

RCRC, like many churches, gives to the poor, sends its people to minister abroad, and tries in its modest way to call attention to the sins of materialism. Where might we do more?

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Fun fact: Moab burned the king of Edom's bones to ashes. *The NIV Application Commentary*, at least, believes this may have been with the purpose of turning them to lime for use in plastering a house (which rates at least a 7 on the Hannibal Lechter scale).

Inspiring quotation: "I made heaven and earth, he says, and to you I give the power of creation. Make your earth heaven. For it is in your power. 'I am he who makes and transforms all things,' says God of himself. And he has given to people a similar power, as a painter, being an affectionate father, teaches his own art to his son. I formed your body beautiful, he says, but I give you the power of forming something better. Make your soul beautiful."

—John Chrysostom on Amos 5:8 [ACCS]

Leader's Introduction:

Amos' concern for the poor is well-known. If we want to walk away with a deeper understanding of God we need to look more closely at what is a carefully structured as well as impassioned book to see how it reflects God's nature. Amos' message is primarily one of woe to the nations and so it might feel remote from our world. God's character, however, is an unchanging point of contact.

In our age, we see national aggression, vast waves of refugees and global hunger. Domestically our country has repeatedly chosen troubling and sinful directions, culminating in a year which feels like a complete break with the past. It can easily feel like God is remote, his hand removed. There's no better time to think about Amos' message for God's interest in our lives and the affairs of the world.