

# **Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 9, Amos, The Judgment of Israel and Call to Repentance, Amos 3-6**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is session 9, The Judgment of Israel and Call to Repentance, Amos 3-6.

We are continuing to work our way through the book of Amos.

We saw in the last lesson that the first section of the book of Amos, chapters one to two, deals with God's judgment of the nations and the nations of Syria-Palestine that surround Israel. They are the target at the beginning of this section. But the punchline of the message and the punchline of Amos' preaching is that the Lord would not just roar as a lion and thunder as a storm against the pagan people around Israel, but God ultimately would judge the southern kingdom of Judah.

Finally, the eighth message is about the kingdom of Israel. While one or two specific sins were highlighted for each of the nations, there is a long list of Israel's sins. Again, they felt that they were superior to the people around them.

God reminds them that as his chosen people, they were more accountable than the nations because they had violated the specific covenant and commandments of the Mosaic law. So, we go to this passage at the end of chapter two, the eighth message against Israel, and the list of sins here reminds us again that the primary issue that the prophets deal with in terms of the people's behavior and lifestyle is their greed, their materialism, their oppression of the poor and the needy. This oppression of the poor and the needy grew out of the fact that when you make wealth and possessions and something other than God the ultimate focus of your life, you become obsessed, and you become desperate to gain those.

You'll do whatever it takes because you're no longer trusting in God. You're no longer content with him to meet your needs. You're looking for something that ultimately can't satisfy you and gradually become more and more desperate.

So that's why, as Amos focuses on the sins of the people, they have become so violent, so oppressive, so desperate in the way that they covet their neighbor's possessions. So, Amos says, they sell the righteous for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals, those who trample on the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted. A man and his father go into the same girl so that my holy name is profaned to lay themselves down beside every altar.

So, they are taking advantage of the poor in the courtroom. They're seizing their properties. A father and a son are sleeping with their slave girl, and a father and son having a sexual relationship with the same woman is something that Leviticus is going to say is an abomination to God.

And there is a list of things that are given there, these moral perversions, whether it's homosexuality or bestiality or incest or a father and son sleeping with the same woman. These are abominations before God. They are not simply ritual taboos.

They are things that are morally evil in God's eyes. So that's going on as well. Verse 8, they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and in the house of their God, they drink the wine of those who have been fined.

They see nothing incompatible with mistreating their neighbors and worshiping God. And although the Mosaic law said if you take the cloak of your poor neighbor as a pledge that he will pay back his loan, you are to return that every night. Here, reflecting the fact that they're not doing that, they actually bring these cloaks to the sanctuary.

They make a pallet out of that. They sit there and they offer their prayers and make their sacrifices. And they see nothing inconsistent with violating the law, mistreating their neighbor, and attempting to worship God.

In the house of their God, in their celebrations, or as they offer drink offerings, they drink the wine of those who have been fined. They've taken this from their neighbor, and they use it to celebrate and worship before the Lord. God reminds them, look, I have been faithful to you throughout your history.

I have protected you. I've watched over you. I've blessed you.

And yet you have returned my goodness with these types of sins and this type of dishonesty. The Lord says it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and who was as strong as the oaks. It was I who brought you out of the land of Egypt and led you 40 years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite.

I did all of these things for you. I brought you out of slavery. I defeated the Canaanite nations.

And yet, this is how you have repaid me. And this is the way that you've responded to this. Verse 11, I raised up some of your sons for profits.

The Lord gave them messengers to let them know exactly how they were supposed to live. Moses had said, God will raise up a prophet for you like me. And for every successive generation, they had the word of God.

They did not listen to them. The Lord also raised up some of their young men for Nazarites. And the Nazarites, by their vow, by their special lifestyle, did not cut their hair.

They did not come in contact with a dead body. They did not drink or use alcohol in any form. It was simply a symbolic way of reminding the people of their separation from God.

But verse 12 says, you made the Nazarites drink wine and commanded the prophets saying, you shall not prophesy. So even the special people that God had given to Israel to remind them of their special relationship with him and the special status they had did not honor those people. Now, as we look at this sin of injustice, and we've already talked about this a little bit, I want to help us to understand a little bit better why, in the 8th century BC, this particularly became an important issue.

Part of this was the result of the prosperity that had happened during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom and Uzziah in the Southern Kingdom. The growth of the monarchy and the bureaucracy and all of the things that were necessary to support that, the military, the administration that went along with that, meant that more and more lands were being swallowed up by the kings and the bureaucracy that was associated with the throne. Samuel had warned the people of Israel, look, if you make a king, what's he going to do? He's going to raise your taxes.

He's going to take your sons and daughters and put them either in his corvées or in his military. Part of that also involved ultimately swallowing up their lands. God had designed for each family and each clan in Israel to have their own land.

That land was never to be permanently sold out of the family so that that family, that clan, would be able to provide for themselves. But what was happening now is that the monarchy was swallowing up that land. A second thing that was going on is that there were specific economic policies that were related to Israel's prosperity.

Jeroboam II had made Israel more prosperous. He had expanded their borders. As a result of that, Israel has become more internationally significant.

It becomes important for them to sustain that prosperity to engage in trade with other peoples. What that means now is that land is going to be used in Israel to grow specific crops that were needed for trade rather than the land being used to farm and provide for the needs of the individual families and clans. John Walton, in the IVP Bible Background Commentary, gives us an explanation of this.

I want to read this. This is a lengthy quote but I think it helps us to understand the period. Jeroboam's long and effective reign made it easier to establish a comprehensive economic policy that concentrated on the mass production of export items such as grain, olive oil, and wine.

Large areas of the Shephelah and the lowlands had already been given over to wheat production, 2 Chronicles 26.10. Now, in the 8th century, the elite were able to impose this economic policy on the small hill country farms and villages. As a result, previous agricultural policies that attempted to distribute potential risk between herding and farming were overturned, and the land was given over to specific cash crops. The smaller holdings of the peasant farmers, overburdened with debts, were enclosed into larger estates.

This very efficient use of the land, however, eliminated the mixed crops that had formerly been grown in the village culture and more quickly exhausted the soil. Leaving fields fallow and grazing animals on harvested fields would have been eliminated or rigidly controlled. Under this new policy, an attempt was made to increase exports to the extent that there was a real hunger problem for the peasant class, while the nobility and the merchant class were able to indulge in the luxury goods supplied by their Phoenician trading partners.

Thus, in addition to facing rising prices at home on basic goods such as wheat and barley, the impoverished peasant farmers now found themselves in debt, servitude, or day labor. So, this had originally been set up to where families, clans, and villages could take care of one another and grow the crops and raise the livestock that they needed. Now the land was being used for these cash crops and the rich benefited from this, but the poor suffered.

We do not have in Israel the middle class like we have today. We either had those that were wealthy, that owned the land, that were part of the bureaucracy, that were associated with the monarch, those who were poor and lived a very subsistent living. Those were the people that were being taken advantage of and those were the people who were suffering from these specific policies.

A third thing that was going on, and this was part of the legal process, was a misuse of the biblical provisions regarding debt slavery and the sale of land as a way of paying off debt. Leviticus 25 talks about if a person was in debt, they could become a debt slave for six years. They were then to be released in the seventh year.

They could temporarily sell a piece of land in order to pay off the debt, but that land ultimately was to come back to that family because that was their inheritance from God. What was happening, again, is that wealthy landowners, these large estates, maybe people who had the backing of the king, who were responsible for growing

these cash crops, were able to use the debt of their neighbors as a pretext for taking their land. A subsistent farmer lived on the margins in ancient Israel so that anyone harvest could particularly devastate them.

The role of Israel as a society: God had designed them where there were not to be poor among them and that if there were people who were poor, they were to open their hands gladly. What was going on instead was that any type of debt was being used as a pretext now for seizing those lands. I think these people would have said, we're following the prescriptions of the law about debt slavery and the sale of property.

However, they were not following the intent of the law and the spirit of the law, which God had designed so that everyone could enjoy the benefits of the land. I think another thing that was going on is that as the Assyrians began to encroach on the territory of Israel and Judah, they placed the demand that tribute would be paid to them, and the burden for that tribute often came from the poor and the needy in the land that the kings of Israel and the rich bureaucrats looked to be the ones that would provide the crops, that would provide the services that were part of that tribute. Because of all of those things in the 8th century, we have a justice issue and a justice problem.

Amos in chapter 2, as he catalogs Israel's sins, is particularly going to focus on this. Again, there is this ethos throughout the minor prophets, throughout the prophetic literature in general, that forces us to think about the fact, how is my love for God being reflected in the way that I treat others? There's this dual aspect of God's covenant and God's love and God's commitments for Israel where he says, you love me with all your heart, but you're also to take care of your neighbor and love him as yourself. Israel was not doing that.

That becomes the basis for their judgment. In chapters 3 to 6, as we move to the next section of the book of Amos, we have an elaboration on God's judgment and how, why, and when this is going to take place. There's also a structure that I think we see in this section as well.

The second section of the book, chapters 3 to 6, elaboration on the judgment of Israel. In chapter 3, verse 1, we see this statement: hear this word. Chapter 4, verse 1, hear this word.

Chapter 5, the third time, same thing, hear this word that I take up over you in lamentational house of Israel. What we have here, an elaboration on the judgment of Israel, is that we have a call to hear the word of God in chapter 3, chapter 4, and chapter 5. Those are the three main messages in this section. Hear the word is a reminder that they need to listen and respond to the prophetic word.

God is about to send judgment but remember; the judgment is not fixed in stone. There is always the possibility that if people listen if they will respond to God if they will do the things that God has commanded them to do if they will change their ways if there's real repentance, the judgment can be avoided. The final sections of chapters 3 to 6, however, reflect the fact that Israel ultimately is not going to listen to this word because in chapter 5, verse 17, the word that we see there, chapter 5, verse 18, woe to you who desire the day of the Lord.

The Hebrew word *oy* was something that was often a part of a funeral lament. We have woe oracles throughout the prophets where basically the prophet is saying the target of this message is as good as dead because they're not listening to the message. Woe to the people of Israel who are longing for the day of the Lord, who think that God is going to roar like a lion and thunder like a storm to deliver them.

Ultimately, God is going to roar like a lion to defeat them and to judge them. Chapter 6, verse 1, same thing. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion and to those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria.

So, Amos does not just preach judgment against Israel, the northern kingdom, and his neighbors. Amos also preaches judgment against his own people, the people of Judah, and ultimately, that judgment will fall on them as well. One of the things that Amos has to do in this section, chapters 3 to 6, as he's elaborating on the judgment of Israel, one of the things that he has to do is that he has to get the people to challenge and to understand that their status as God's chosen people does not exempt them from judgment.

It does not give them a get-out-of-jail-free card. And so, in chapter 3, verse 1, here's what Amos says. Hear this word that the Lord has brought up against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up from out of the land of Egypt.

All right, you're accountable because God has done this great work for you. God's brought you out of slavery. God's redeemed you out of Egypt.

And the Lord says in verse 2, you only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for all of your iniquities. And that, therefore, would have been something that I think the people of Israel and Judah would have stumbled over because when the prophet says, you only have I known of all the families of the earth, there's their special status.

There's their honored position as the chosen people of God. But the conclusion that's drawn from that is, therefore, I will protect you and deliver you from all your enemies. That's not what it says.

The prophet says, therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities. And one of the things that runs through the book of Amos is this idea that Israel needs to give up on the notion that they think that they are exempt from judgment in a way that is not true of the other nations. Amos has already done that in chapters 1 and 2. The judgment that falls on the nations ultimately also falls on Judah and Israel.

He's going to make this point a number of other places where Israel can't rely on simply being the chosen people of God to think that they're going to be exempt from this. Chapter 3, verses 9 and 10 says this, proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod, we're talking about the Philistines, and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt. And say to these people, okay, we're going to bring the foreigners in here.

We're going to bring the Philistines. We're going to bring the Egyptians. And the prophet says, 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 stronghold. And so, what the prophet does is that he invites the people of Philistine Egypt to come in. He says, you want to see a real example of wickedness? You want to watch an R-rated movie and see violence and oppression that is going to surprise you? I want you to sit down and watch what is going on in the city of Samaria.

The Philistines and the Egyptians could learn from the wickedness of the people of Israel. That challenges their status. Chapter 6, the same thing in verses 1 to 3, woe to those who are at ease in Zion and to those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria.

Okay, now the prophet is going to say in verse 2, pass over to Calneh and see and go from there to Hamath the Great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you any better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory? O you who put away the day of disaster and bring near the sea to violence. Do you think that there is any way, even though you're living in wealth and prosperity, do you think that your wealth is somehow going to protect you against the invasion and the incursion of the Assyrians in the way that it's affected these other people? You're no different than they are.

The same trouble, the same adversity, the same devastation that has come down on these people is ultimately going to affect you. And the wealth and the prosperity that you have, it's not going to save you. It's not going to get you out of this problem.

In chapter 9, verses 7 to 10, the Lord says this to the Israelites. And again, this is a shocking message. I want you to just think about how an Israelite who's listening to

Amos and who believes in the traditions of how God has chosen Israel and saved them and made them as people.

Listen to what the prophet says. Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel, declares the Lord. You're no different than the people of Cush.

Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt? The answer would have been yes. And that was our great moment of salvation. We look to that as how God formed us and shaped us as a people.

But look at what Amos does with that tradition. He says, but did I not also bring the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? Look, you think this was some special thing. Your immigration from Egypt to the land is no different than me bringing the Philistines to the land from Caphtor or the Syrians from Kir.

It's just an immigration. That's not denying what the exodus was all about, but it's simply pointing out to the Israelites that they were in the same boat as all of these other people. And so, the Lord says, behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord.

So, you think that the exodus is a great moment. It was Israel's shining example of redemption and how God loved them and had delivered them. But in a sense, Amos places it in the same category as the immigration of these other peoples to simply say the Lord is going to judge them in the way that the Lord judges the nations.

As a result of that, if the people understand, and they will get this idea that God's judgment is going to fall on them just like the pagan peoples, they're no better, they're no different, ultimately that will change the way that they listen to the prophet's message. They will recognize the seriousness of the warnings that Amos is trying to give them. So, we go back to this.

The Lord says through Amos, you're the only family I've known. I have a special relationship with you. Therefore, I will punish you.

We have a series of rhetorical questions. Again, another cycle of seven here in the book of Amos, where every one of these rhetorical questions has a no answer. Again, a rhetorical question is when you ask a question, you're not looking for an answer.

You're trying to make the person think as you talk. Each one of these rhetorical questions is asking Israel to reflect on the seriousness of the warnings that Amos is giving them. Look, if a prophet is here warning you about something that is to come, there's a reason why he's here.



Maybe you should take that seriously. So, for each one of these rhetorical questions, there's a cause-and-effect relationship. There's an effect that happens, but there's a cause that's a result of that.

What Amos is trying to help them to see is that the reason, the cause for the fact that this effect, where a man is standing in front of them warning them of the judgment of God, the cause of that is God's anger and the approaching judgment that's about to fall on them. So, we begin innocuously with the first. It's a benign example, verse three.

Do not two walk together unless they have agreed to meet. If they're walking together, they have pre-arranged that meeting. Kind of an innocuous thing.

But listen to how this turns with the next rhetorical question. Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den if he has taken nothing? The answer to both of those is no. The roaring of the lion indicates the capture of prey.

The roaring of God from Jerusalem as the prophet is announcing that indicates something disastrous is about to happen. We get another ominous series of questions in verse five. Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth when there's no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground when it has taken nothing? So again, animals being taken as prey and honey, there's something disastrous that's about to happen.

Does that just happen accidentally? Does a trap just happen to be there? No, there's a cause and effect. And now, we get to what exactly and precisely is going to happen to Israel. Verse six says, is a trumpet blown in the city and the people are not afraid? The answer is no.

A trumpet indicated it was the emergency broadcasting system. It indicated an enemy's coming, there's some disaster, there's something approaching on the horizon. We need to get ready for this.

We need to prepare for war. We need to prepare to defend ourselves. The prophet's message is the trumpet blowing in the city, warning them about what's going to happen.

And then it says, the next, does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? Now this is, the Lord is about to bring calamity. And the things that are happening to Israel, they're not random accidents. It's not that they've had a series of national setbacks or misfortunes.

God has specifically brought this judgment against them. Now, I want to look at that statement: does a disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? I think we need to be careful not to build too much into that statement. It does not mean that God is the direct cause of every disaster that ever happens.

In an ultimate sense, that is true, but this is talking about a specific situation and a specific scenario. When a prophet is warning about tragedy and disaster that's about to happen, this is from the hand of God. Verse 7, for the Lord, does nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants, the prophets.

The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy? So, Amos is saying, my message to you, it's not just the words of a man. This is not just my opinion. I didn't just come up from the southern kingdom of Judah because I felt like sharing this with you.

God has brought me here. There's a cause and effect in all of this. And you should hear the roaring of the lion that is about to take place because that lion is about to consume you.

And so, throughout this section, what we're going to have is the roaring of the lion. And you have a group of people who think that God is going to protect them, God is going to bless them no matter what. In the southern kingdom of Judah, the people are going to respond to the preaching of Micah and say, you shouldn't preach these things.

Disaster is not going to overtake us. Is not the Lord in our midst? A problem for Amos and Micah, and many of the other true prophets of the Lord, is that there were always plenty of other prophets who were going to tell the people exactly what they wanted to hear. And they had a false understanding of the covenant.

They thought the covenant meant God blesses us; God provides for us, and God takes care of us no matter what. A biblical understanding of the covenant is that covenant always involves promise and obligation. And if they wanted to experience the blessings of the covenant, then they had to realize that it also carried with it certain responsibilities.

So, what is going to happen in this section is that we are going to see a number of warnings of the kind of judgment that God is preparing to bring upon the people of Israel. Amos's job as a prophet is to convey in human language the roaring of God as a lion and to make this judgment as awful and as terrible as he possibly can make it sound. We have the extreme white water of God's wrath.

We talked about that before as a way of, if it's bad enough, maybe these people will listen. If I know that we are about to be completely wiped out, maybe instead of just

brushing this prophet's message off, maybe instead of saying, we've heard it all before; we know about these warnings; prophets have been saying this to us for generations, maybe they'll listen. And so, I want us to hear the terror that should be in the hearts of the people as they hear the message that is about to fall upon them.

Jeremiah, preaching to the people of Judah, later would say that death is climbing through the window. And I think that's a fairly effective way of summarizing what Amos says as well. Verse 12 of chapter 3 thus says the Lord, as the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued with the corner of a couch and the part of a bed.

Whatever remnant is left over, there's not going to be much there. Chapter 3, verse 15, I will strike the winter house along with the summer house and the houses of the ivory shall perish and the great houses shall come to an end, declares the Lord. They had ripped off their neighbors to build these great estates.

They're not going to live there because God is going to destroy them. Chapter 4, verse 1, Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountains of Samaria. Remember, those are the wealthy women who care only about themselves, and they're crushing and oppressing the poor.

Here's what God is going to do to them. The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that behold the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with hooks and even the last of you with fish hooks. The Assyrians actually had a practice where they would put hooks through the mouths of their captors and lead them away.

So, imagine the fat cows of Bashan lounging in their luxury, living in the lap of luxury, oppressing the poor, concerned only about themselves. Ultimately, they are going to be degraded and taken away as exiles. I can't think of anything that's more degrading than having a hook to put through your mouth and being led away as a captive by this king.

That should make the people want to repent. Chapter 5, verses 16 and 17, are very similar to Jeremiah's later warnings about death climbing through the window. Death is going to be part of the reality of the lives of the people of Israel.

They lived during this time of great prosperity under Jeroboam. All of that's about to change. Chapter 5, verse 16, thus says the Lord God, the God of hosts, in all of the squares there shall be wailing, and in all of the streets they shall say, Alas, and alas.

They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing, those who are skilled in lamentation. And in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through your midst, says the Lord. You know, in the Exodus, God had passed through the midst of the people of Egypt to judge them and to save Israel.

Now the Lord is going to pass through Israel, and he's going to bring judgment upon his own people. Chapter 6, verses 9 and 10, here's the after-effect. When the Assyrian army comes through, and the Assyrians are not specifically mentioned here, but ultimately, they're the enemy that's going to bring this about.

In chapter 6, verses 9 and 10, death again is part of this picture, and it's pretty vivid. Verse 10 says, if ten remain in one house, they shall die. So, imagine a group of ten people that somehow have survived the onslaught, and they are going to die.

And when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house and shall say to him, who is in the innermost part of the house? Imagine being given the responsibility as a survivor to have to go in and clear the bodies out of that house. It almost would be better to be one of those victims inside the house. And if someone says, is there still anyone with you? He shall say, no, no one's left.

And then this person will also say silence; we must not mention the name of the Lord. They will come to a place after they have taken God for granted and thought that God was going to protect them no matter what, that they will say, don't even mention the name of the Lord. Let's keep it a secret that we're here because God may sweep us away in this judgment as well.

That's how awful and terrible this final judgment is going to be. Chapter 6, verse 14: for behold, I will raise up against you a national house of Israel, declares the Lord, the God of hosts. And again, the God of armies.

God is a warrior behind all of this. And they shall oppress you from Lebo Hamath to the brooks of the Arba. So that's the kind of judgment that is going to fall upon Israel.

And the prophet makes it sound as bad as it possibly can be, as awful and as horrible as it really will be, so that if they listen, then possibly the judgment can be avoided. There are a couple of other things just in terms of the theology of judgment in Amos 3 to 6. We've looked at this passage before, but Amos chapter 4, verses 6 to 11, reminds us that what is going on here specifically is God bringing upon the people of Israel the covenant curses that Moses had warned them about. God has given them cleanness of teeth and lack of bread.

They've had a lack of food. God has withheld the rain from you so that you've not had the rain that you needed for a good harvest. God has struck your crops with blight and mildew.

Your gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees, they have been devoured by the locusts. So, all things that God has specifically warned them about. I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt.

I killed your young men with the sword and carried away your horses. I made a stench of your camp. They've already experienced various types of military defeat.

We see that often in the conflict in the Old Testament between the Arameans and the Israelites in the time leading up to this. The Assyrians had been a thorn in Israel's side back in the 9th century, and Jehu had been forced to submit to them in 841 BC. So that is going to become worse.

That is going to become more intense. I overthrew you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. If people had already experienced that, you think they would realize that God was getting their attention.

You think that they would realize in light of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that God is displeased with our disobedience. We need to get this right. But what it says in Amos and repeatedly chapter 4, verse 6, verse 8, verse 9, verse 10, verse 11, yet you did not return to me.

I sent you every possible wake-up call that I could possibly send and you have not returned to me. Therefore, the ultimate covenant curse is going to come. I'd like you to notice what it says in chapter 4 verse 12, kind of the culmination of this.

I've done all these things that you have not returned to me. Here's the outcome. Here's the consequence.

Therefore, verse 12, chapter 4, thus I will do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel. Okay.

Now, personally, I can't read that verse without remembering a sign that I used to drive by almost every week in our hometown where a church, to announce the location of its church and its church services, had a sign prepare to meet your God, come to the First Baptist Church. Okay. This is a prepare to meet your God, however, that you don't want to experience.

Because remember, God is the roaring lion. God is the thundering storm. They have not obeyed covenant commands.

Therefore, prepare to meet your God. To develop this further, the idea of preparing and meeting with God, the verb qun, to prepare, and the verb liqara, the verb qara with the preposition la there, is used in Exodus chapter 19. When God first met with the people, when he appeared to them at Mount Sinai, and as God was going to

come down in the fire, in the smoke, and the thunder, they were to prepare to meet their God.

They were not to pass the boundaries or the borders that Moses had set up, or else they would be consumed by God as God met with them. They were to purify themselves. They were to sanctify themselves.

They were to get ready for what God was going to do because that was going to be the time when God would establish the covenant. Now, in light of this covenant, they are to prepare to meet their God because they are going to experience the ultimate covenant curse that God has brought against them. So, as we see these judgments that are going to come against them, the military defeat that God is going to bring, we understand that this is going to be God working out his covenant curses.

The other passage that I want to call to your attention that helps us to understand what the judgment will be for Israel in the 8th century BC is that Amos describes this in Amos 5, verses 18 to 20, as the coming day of the Lord. Amos 5, verse 18, again, is going to turn upside down Israel's expectations and Israel's understanding of what the day of the Lord would be like and what the day of the Lord was supposed to be. "'Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord,' why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness and not light.'" Again, because they were God's covenant people, they believed that the day of the Lord would be the time when God would come down and destroy their enemies.

Ultimately, we're going to be free. God will rescue us. God will save us from the Assyrians.

God is not going to let us down. Amos says, "'Watch out, your expectations about the day of the Lord are all wrong. It is not going to be a day of salvation.

It is not a time that you should be looking forward to like it were Christmas because God is going to ultimately judge his enemies. What Israel doesn't understand is they have become the enemy of God.'" Throughout the Old Testament, we have these holy war traditions where God would fight on behalf of the armies of Israel. In the Exodus, God fought against the armies of Pharaoh and drowned them in the sea when Israel had no strength of their own.

When Israel came into the land, God fought their battles for them. He brought down the walls of Jericho, and all the people of Israel did was walk around the walls, blow a horn, and believe and trust in God's deliverance. There were times when David went out to fight against his enemies, and they would hear the sound of God marching in the trees.

During the time of Jehoshaphat, one of my favorite stories in the book of Chronicles is that God says, "You're not going to go into this battle and wage war. What you're going to do is you're going to go into this battle, and the priests and the singers and the Levites are to lead you, and you're going to sing the enemy to death." All of these things reflected the idea that God fought Israel's battles for them. What the prophets do is that they take Israel's holy war traditions; they take Israel's Day of the Lord traditions.

When God came down and destroyed his enemy in a single day, they turned those traditions upside down and said God is now going to target Israel as his enemy. It reminds me as a baseball fan that sometimes your favorite player will play, and all of a sudden, he will become a free agent. The next time he plays your team, he's wearing an entirely different uniform.

Suddenly, the affection that you once had for that player has turned into animosity. God has become a free agent, and God is now wearing a different uniform. God's not wearing the uniform of the Israelites.

God's wearing the uniform of the Assyrians, and he doesn't do this capriciously. He doesn't do this because he wants to simply vent his anger. God is doing this as a way of bringing judgment against his people.

What the Israelites had forgotten about was that throughout their history, there were times when God had inflicted the judgment of military defeat on his people as a way of correcting them and trying to get their attention during times of apostasy. In the days of Samuel, when they were fighting against the Philistines, they were defeated. They thought that the solution was simply to take the ark of the Lord into battle and that God would show up and defeat his enemies.

Surprisingly, that day in battle, the Philistines won the battle. They captured the ark of God, and the people of Israel were defeated. Of course, ultimately, later, God defeated the gods of Dagon to prove that he was superior to them, but it was a reminder to Israel that God could break out against them as a roaring lion, even though they were his chosen people.

In the days of Solomon, after his apostasy, God warned that he would punish the house of David for the sin that they had committed. Ultimately, because of Solomon's idolatry and the foolishness of his son, the house of David lost the majority of their kingdom. That was always a reality.

The people of Jerusalem later are going to depend upon the fact, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. This is God's house. God will protect us.

God will watch over us. God will take care of us no matter what. Jeremiah reminds them, why don't you look back at your past history? Let's go back to the time of Samuel again, when the city of Shiloh, when the town of Shiloh that had been the place of the sanctuary, it had been the place where God's tabernacle dwelt, and the city of Shiloh had been destroyed.

God had not protected that city, no matter what, simply because it was the location of his sanctuary. The same thing potentially could happen to Israel. So there's this warning of military defeat in Amos chapter 3 to 6. There is this reality that God is about to break out in judgment against his people.

Theologically, these are the covenant curses. This is a time in Israel's history when Israel needs to prepare to meet their God, and this is a time when Israel is about to see the day of the Lord break out against them. But in the midst of these terrible warnings of judgment, there is also the prophet calling the people to repentance and to a change of behavior because these judgments can be avoided.

The prophet's word is not set in stone. Just like the ghost of Christmas future in the Christmas carol warning Scrooge of the shadows of the things that are to come, there is the possibility that if he reforms and changes his way, different things can happen. And so we are seeing the shadows of Israel's future.

This is what is going to happen to Israel if they do not change their ways. But in chapter 5, there are these urgent appeals. And remember, this is a major part of the book of the 12.

We saw it at the beginning in Hosea and Amos and Joel, and it carries all the way through where God is calling his people to repentance. And so in chapter 5, at the heart of this, seek me and live, but do not seek Bethel. Do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba, for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.

Your sanctuaries are not going to save you, but if you will turn back to God and you will revise your lifestyle, it will. Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench for Bethel. Seek good, chapter 5, verse 14, and not evil, that you may live.

And so, the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Chapter 5, verses 23 and 24 take away from me the noise of your songs, to the melody of your harps I will not listen, but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. So, what you should see in chapters 3 to 6



is that along with these horrible warnings of judgment, there is an urgent plea to repent and to turn back to God. I believe that a lot of people, and I think of people as we look at this from a modern and a contemporary perspective, a lot of people would look at the horrible things that we've read in Amos 3 to 6 and say, you know, this is why I don't really want to know.

This is why I'm not drawn to the God of the Old Testament. He's an angry, wrathful, judgmental God. But what I see here as well is the other side of God's character.

I see the reality of Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. He is a God of hesed, covenant faithfulness, compassion, and slow anger.

And even at this point in Israel's history, where they have angered him for hundreds of years and their covenant violations have become too severe for him to ignore, there is still, even at the end of the story, the possibility of repentance. In that passage in Exodus 34, the Lord says, I show my hesed and my covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations. I visit the iniquity of the fathers down to the third or the fourth.

The Lord may judge for three to four generations, but his covenant faithfulness, his love, his compassion, and his quality of being slow to anger are the characteristics that are most prominent in the Old Testament. And here we see that as well. There is judgment coming.

But the reason that God has risen up this prophet is that the lion is roaring, warning his people of the judgment that is coming and giving them the opportunity to repent. We see a God in the Old Testament who is holy, who does hate sin, and who ultimately must hold people accountable. But we also see a God who is not willing that any should perish and a God who does not take delight in the death of the wicked.

We see that here in the calls to repentance and the warnings of the prophet that are being given to us in Amos chapter three through chapter six.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is session 9, The Judgment of Israel and Call to Repentance, Amos 3-6.