

Dr. Robert Chisholm, Amos, Session 2, (B) A Prophet Entraps His Audience-Amos 1:1-2:16 Podcast Audio Overview

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The lion has roared; who will not fear. Wow, that's quite an opening, isn't it? Sort of sets an ominous tone right from the start. It really does.

It signals that something serious is coming, a reckoning. And today we're diving deep into that tone, into the words of the prophet Amos. Specifically, we're looking at Dr. Robert Chisholm's teaching, Session 2B, which he calls A Prophet Entraps His Audience.

Right. Amos 1.1 through 2.16. What makes Amos so masterful at this kind of, well, rhetorical trap? Well, it's a brilliant structure, really. He starts off by listing all these undeniable sins, these accusations against the surrounding nations.

Nations that Israel, his main audience, would probably see as enemies, right? Exactly. So the Israelites listening are likely nodding along, maybe even feeling a bit smug, you know, comfortable, approving. Thinking, yeah, get him.

Precisely. But then, wham, he just turns that spotlight, that condemnation, right onto them as this powerful reveal pulls you in, makes you feel safe, and then catches you completely off guard. So for you listening, our mission here is to unpack how Amos builds this argument, this trap.

We want to trace how it works, that surprising turn. And pull out some really crucial insights about, you know, divine justice, human accountability, things that still matter today. Definitely.

It's about understanding accountability, these specific charges against a chosen people, and lessons about responsibility that are, frankly, timeless. So where does he start? How does he begin setting this trap? Well, Dr. Chisholm points to this foundational idea, an overriding principle, in Amos 1.3 to 2.5. The core concept is that God holds all nations accountable. Right.

Not just Israel. No, everyone is accountable when they violate his universal standards of morality, of ethics. Why is that so significant? Why all nations? Because it's not some new rule just for Israel.

It actually goes way back, back to the Noahic Covenant, the agreement with Noah after the flood. The core idea there is that humans are made in God's image. So we have to respect that image in each other.

Violating that image, like through murder or other terrible acts, isn't just an offense against another person. It's disrespecting the creator himself. Exactly.

And that's a standard for everyone, everywhere, regardless of whether they have specific religious laws like the law of Moses. It's universal. So it's this pervasive, global kind of justice.

Does Dr. Chisholm give any more modern examples to show this still holds? He does. He points to Germany in World War II. The actions of Hitler and the Nazis- these horrific violations- led to a sort of corporate judgment on the nation.

Shows that divine judgment isn't always just individual. It can apply to whole peoples when they collectively go against these basic universal moral lines. It really sets the stage for better understanding how God's justice operates, well, everywhere.

And it's this very idea, this universal accountability that Amos uses so cleverly; he gets Israel comfortable thinking the judgment is only for those guys. Yeah, they're probably cheering him on internally. And then he just springs the trap.

How does he make that turn so sharp? He gets them completely relaxed, disarmed, thinking he's their champion. And then, bang, Amos 2, verse 6, the shift is abrupt. This is what the Lord says.

For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. Three sins, even for four. That's not literally counting, is it? No, no.

It's an idiom, a figure of speech. It means a full measure of sin, like the cup is overflowing. God's patience has run out completely.

Judgment is now unavoidable. It's a powerful declaration. And that first accusation against Israel, it's about injustice, right? Economic exploitation.

Yes. Selling the innocent for silver. The needy for a pair of sandals.

Which the source suggests means debt slavery. Right. And trampling on the heads of the poor.

Denying justice to the oppressed. It sounds depressingly familiar, honestly. It really does.

How does this connect back to Israel's own history? The source links it to 1 Samuel 8, doesn't it? It does. It argues this kind of systemic injustice wasn't totally random. It had roots way back when Israel demanded a king, wanting to be like all the nations.

They got their wish, but maybe didn't foresee the consequences. Exactly. That demand led over time to this huge royal bureaucracy.

And this bureaucracy had immense legal and economic power. Which led to people losing their land. Yeah.

Through heavy taxes, through debt they couldn't repay. It basically created this whole new class of people who were landless, working as day laborers, really oppressed. Which, you know, was totally against God's original plan.

God intended the land to be distributed among the tribes, didn't he? To give families independence. Precisely. Independence, self-sufficiency.

And there's a really stark story that illustrates this perfectly: Naboth's vineyard from the Book of Kings. Ah, King Ahab and Jezebel. Right.

Ahab wants Naboth's ancestral land. Naboth refuses because it's his inheritance. So Jezebel, embodying that corrupt king-like-the-nations mindset, sets up a sham trial, a kangaroo court.

Naboth gets falsely accused and killed. And Ahab takes the vineyard. It's a chilling example of the very injustice, the powerful exploiting the vulnerable and seizing land that Amos is condemning centuries later.

It shows how the system they asked for enabled this kind of abuse. Yeah, that story is powerful. It really shows how power can twist justice.

So after hitting the economic injustice, Amos moves on, right, to moral and religious failings. Yes. And this is where we get that really interesting phrase: father and son use the same girl.

What's going on? As the source notes, there's some debate. One view is pretty straightforward. Direct sexual exploitation, maybe of poor women, maybe related to cult prostitutes.

A clear moral sin. OK. But there's another view, maybe more recent, that connects it to something called the Marzish banquet.

Marzish, what's that? Sounds specific. It was apparently a kind of social club, pretty common back then in the Near East. Amos actually mentions it by name elsewhere in his book.

So like a men's club? Sort of. Father and son would go. There'd be drinking, carousing.

Yeah. Maybe even some form of ancestor worship involved. In this interpretation, the girl isn't necessarily a prostitute.

OK. She might be the hostess, or the term girl might be used as a metonymy, you know, a figure of speech where one thing stands for another, representing the whole idolatrous party itself. So whether it's direct exploitation or this idolatrous banquet.

Either way, the core issue is profaning God's holy name through immorality or idolatry or both. It's a serious charge. And it wasn't just that one thing, was it? There were other hypocritical practices happening even in their worship.

Oh, yeah. He calls them out for lying down near the altars on garments they'd taken as collateral from the poor. Which was against the law, right? Weren't they supposed to return cloaks taken as pledges by nightfall? Exactly.

Exodus 22 says you have to give it back by sunset so the person has something to sleep in. They were just ignoring that basic compassion, that law. And something about wine.

Yes. Drinking wine they had taken as fines in the house of their God. Basically, stolen wine used in worship.

It's hypocrisy piled on injustice. So it connects back to the two great commandments, doesn't it? Absolutely. It shows a complete breakdown.

Failure to love the Lord your God. That's the idolatry, the syncretism, the profane worship. And failure to love your neighbor.

That's the economic exploitation, the injustice, ignoring the poor. Vertical and horizontal dimensions of sin completely intertwined. Perfectly put.

A total failure of their covenant responsibilities. So injustice, immorality, religious hypocrisy. What's the third major accusation Amos levels? It's about disrespect for spiritual leadership.

And here, God himself steps in, rhetorically speaking, to remind them of his track record. Right. He recounts all the amazing things he did for them.

Immense things. Destroying the Amorites, remember? These were described as being tall as cedars, strong as oaks. The powerful Canaanites they faced during the conquest.

God cleared the way for them. And bringing them out of Egypt, of course. The foundational event.

Leading them through the wilderness for 40 years. Providing for them. Guiding them.

All to give them the promised land. These weren't small favors. They were massive acts of divine intervention and care.

And it wasn't just physical provision like land and safety. God also gave them spiritual gifts. Spiritual leaders.

Yes, exactly. He emphasizes that he raised up prophets from among their own sons. People like Samuel, speaking God's direct word.

And Nazarites from among their young men. And Nazarites like Samson, people specially dedicated to God. Right.

Individuals set apart who took vows, like abstaining from alcohol and not cutting their hair. They were meant to be living symbols of devotion within the community. These were God's gifts to guide them, to keep them close to him.

But Israel's response wasn't exactly grateful, was it? Far from it. It was actually shocking. God says, but you made the Nazarites drink wine.

You actively corrupted their dedication. Undermining their vow. And worse, maybe.

And the command of the prophets is not to prophesy. They literally tried to silence God's messengers. Wow.

So actively devaluing dedication, actively suppressing God's word. That's quite the charge sheet. It really is.

It shows this deep ingratitude, this resistance to God's guidance, his gifts, his very presence among them through these people. You know, comparing these charges- injustice, immorality, silencing prophets to what Amos accused the other nations of, like ripping open pregnant women or slave trading. An Israelite at the time might have thought, OK, what we're doing isn't that bad.

It's maybe technically wrong, but it's legal within our system. It's not like those pagan atrocities. Exactly.

They might have rationalized it, seen it as less extreme. And that's precisely where the brilliance of Amos's entrapment lies. He exposes that self-deception.

Because the judgment he announces is extreme. That imagery: I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. What does that tell us about the judgment? It's overwhelming, unstoppable.

Think of a massive, solid-wheeled cart piled high with harvested grain, pressing down with incredible weight. There's no escaping it. It signifies total, unavoidable destruction.

And it specifically targets their military strength, doesn't it? Which is ironic, given why they wanted a king in the first place. Hugely ironic. They relied on their military.

Wanted to be strong, like the nations. But Amos says that strength will utterly fail them. It's a complete military collapse, he predicts.

He lists it out, doesn't he? The swift won't escape. The strong won't muster their strength. The warrior won't save himself.

The archer can't stand his ground. The fast runner won't get away. The horseman won't survive.

Even the bravest, the most courageous soldiers among them will end up fleeing naked in utter panic and defeat on that day. It's total humiliation. And Dr. Chisholm points out the number of ways Amos describes this defeat: seven distinct statements of failure.

Yes. Three in verse 14, three in verse 15, one climactic one in verse 16. That number seven in Hebrew thought often signifies completeness, totality.

So it's a picture of utter, complete, sevenfold down, no escape. Absolutely none. Their military might, their national pride, completely dismantled.

Which then leads perfectly into chapter three, where Amos reveals this profound principle that underpins everything. The big takeaway. To whom much is given, much is required.

It's such a critical concept. God held the other nations accountable based on that universal moral standard, the Noahic covenant, right? Basic stuff. Right.

What everyone should know just by being human. But Israel, they had more. They had the law of Moses, the prophets, a much clearer revelation of God's specific will.

So they're held to a higher standard. Precisely. Which means that their sins, even the ones that might have seemed lesser to them compared to pagan atrocities.

Like seizing collateral or going to those Marseille parties or telling prophets to shut up. Yeah. Those things in God's eyes were potentially worse because Israel knew better.

They had received so much more light, so much clearer instruction. Their disobedience was a deeper betrayal. That is really challenging.

It forces you to think, doesn't it? Definitely. Before we look out at the world and condemn all the darkness and sin we see, we really need to look inward first. Self-examination.

Our job might be to shine as lights, but we have to do it humbly without being self-righteous. Recognizing that if we have more light, more understanding of God's will, we also have more accountability. It's a sobering thought, and it's driven home by how Amos introduces the next judgment speech right at the start of chapter three.

Hear this word against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt. Only you have I known from all the families of the earth. That word, yada, in Hebrew, is key here, isn't it? It's not just that God was aware of Israel.

No, not at all. Just awareness. As the source explains, yada in this kind of covenant context means so much more.

It's about recognition, about choosing. Like I recognize you as having a special place. Yes.

And I have chosen you. I recognize you as under my authority in a unique way. I have given you the covenant.

It implies intimacy, relationship, election. The source gives examples like Eli's sons and first Samuel. They worked in the sanctuary, but the text says they did not know the Lord.

Right. They didn't acknowledge his authority, his holiness. Even while going through religious motions, they didn't have that loyal, obedient relationship.

Contrast that with King Josiah later on. The prophet Jeremiah says Josiah didn't know the Lord. Why? Because he defended the cause of the poor and needy.

He showed his loyalty to God. He knew God through active obedience, specifically by pursuing justice for the vulnerable, like widows and orphans. His actions reflected God's heart.

So knowing God isn't just intellectual ascent or religious activity. It's this deep, loyal commitment shown through obedience, especially in how we treat others, particularly the vulnerable. That's powerful.

It really is. And Amos connects it directly to their judgment. Because of this unique relationship, this special revelation, this knowing only you have I know.

Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities. The logic is inescapable. Their special status didn't excuse them.

It made them more accountable. Privilege brings responsibility. Their closeness to God amplified rather than lessened the consequences of their sin.

Absolutely. God expected more because he had given them so much more. Their unique calling wasn't a free pass.

It was the very basis for this strict judgment. So wrapping up this part of our deep dive, the picture is clear. God holds everyone accountable to basic moral standards, universal standards.

Yes. But his own people, those who have received more revelation, more knowledge of his will, they face a significantly higher bar. And failure to meet that standard brings profound consequences.

And the really provocative thought, the one to maybe sit with, is this. If Israel, with their unique salvation history, their covenants, their prophets, if all that got unraveled because they failed to live out their calling. Failed to truly know God through obedience and justice.

What does that imply for us today? Given the light and understanding we have access to now, what does it really mean for us to know God? And how does that knowledge demand a deeper commitment, not just in our vertical relationship with him, but horizontally in how we love and act justly towards our neighbor? It's a question that really cuts deep and invites some serious personal reflection. Definitely something to mull over. And there's still so much more to unpack in Amos.

We haven't even gotten to some of the other fascinating parts Dr. Chisholm covers. Oh, yeah. Things like exploring that every effect has its cause or asking who invited these guys to the party.

And we definitely have to talk about the cows of Bashan at some point. We do. So plenty more to explore in future deep dives into Amos.

Absolutely. So stay with us for those next explorations right here on the Deep Dive.