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Amos Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview given by Steve Gregg, the prophet Amos is discussed in detail. Amos primarily prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel, which had become corrupt with the worship of Yahweh mixed with pagan practices. Despite not being a member of the prophetic guilds, Amos fearlessly spoke out against powerful leaders and nations, using repetitive forms of poetry to emphasize his message. The Book of Amos contains prophecies against various nations as well as against Israel and Judah, warning of punishments such as death, exile, and the destruction of cities.

Transcript

We're turning to the Book of Amos right now, and we're going to have an introduction to the book and go through and review the book from cover to cover. It will not be an in-depth, verse-by-verse study, but it'll be enough to give you a pretty good overview. And hopefully, you will sometime shortly after you hear these lectures get a chance to read through the Book of Amos, and hopefully benefit more from having heard these introductory ideas and this overview.

Amos was a man who lived and prophesied just in the early stages of Isaiah's ministry. Amos was probably older than Isaiah because he prophesied, Amos prophesied, during the time of King Uzziah. And Amos said that his great vision came to him, excuse me, Isaiah said that his vision came to him in the year that King Uzziah died.

You probably remember Isaiah chapter 6, verse 1, which says, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up in his train filled the temple. That's Isaiah 6, 1, I believe. And so Uzziah died at the beginning of Isaiah's ministry, but it was during Uzziah's lifetime that Amos prophesied.

So he's a little earlier than Isaiah. And unlike Isaiah, Amos prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah was in Jerusalem and in Judea, and these two nations had split in two some 200 years earlier, in the time of Rehoboam, when the northern ten tribes split off from the southern tribes and formed its own nation.

The northern kingdom was called Israel, the southern kingdom was called Judah. And

Isaiah was in Judah, in Jerusalem, the capital, and that's where he wrote. But Amos, though he was from Judah, actually was an international missionary.

He actually went up to the northern kingdom, and his entire message was addressed to the northern kingdom. I think there's like one verse that might be addressed to Judah in it, where he says, Woe unto you who are at ease in Zion. Well, Zion is Jerusalem.

But that's about the only reference, besides an oracle against Jerusalem or Judah, that comes early in the book, along with oracles against other nations. But the prophecy of Amos was primarily directed against the northern kingdom. Now, the northern kingdom, when it split off from Judah, had set up its own independent shrines to worship God.

We might say Yahweh, who is Israel's God, but we're not sure they were worshipping Yahweh. They set up two golden calves, one at Bethel in the southern part of their country, and one at Dan in the northern extreme. So they had two shrines that were more or less pagan.

They had these golden calves there, which obviously means they started off on the wrong foot, even in the beginning of their religion, but they added a lot of Canaanite practices, too. So the religion of the northern kingdom was not very close and certainly not very pure in terms of its relationship to the religion that God gave to Israel through Moses. And so the people, because of their corrupt religion, and also just because people don't even live up to the ideals of the religion that they choose, they had become a very corrupt nation, and they were soon, actually, within about 30 years of Amos' prophecy, they were going to be destroyed by the Assyrians.

So the nation to the north of Judah, Israel, Amos was sent up there to prophesy against them because of this impending doom. I mentioned that people don't even live up to the standards of their own religions. Certainly very few people make a serious or valiant attempt to live up to the values of true religion, of biblical religion, but people compromise.

They make new religions that they think they can live with. I remember back in the 70s there was an eastern guru, many of you may remember, Rajneesh, Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh, who moved from India to Oregon and set up a cult up there. And his followers only had one requirement, and that was to wear orange.

Well, they had to wear a pendant with his face on it, then they had to wear orange. That was the whole requirement of their religion. You'd think that'd be a pretty easy religion to live by, unless you hate orange, but they made it so there were no moral requirements.

You could fornicate, you could get high on drugs, you could be a drunkard, you could do anything immoral, but as long as you wore orange. It's obviously a man-made religion,

and one made to be, to lower the bar far enough that everyone could feel comfortable with it. But they were so rebellious they didn't even live up to that.

They eventually insisted that they wanted to wear purple as well, and so many of the Rajneesh followers began to wear purple. So they couldn't even live up to the one rule that they had. And so people do tend to define spirituality down to the level they think they can live by, but even then, they can't live by it.

You know, when you talk to somebody about Christ, and they say, well, I think I'll go to heaven if I just do the best I can. You say, okay, so that's your religion, just do the best you can. Have you done the best you can? Well, obviously not.

No one has done the best they can. So you're condemned by the only religion. You made your own religion, and then it condemns you.

You see, that's what happened to Israel in the north. They started out with Yahweh, then they added golden calves, and then they added, you know, pagan rites and so forth, and you couldn't even live good lives even according to their downgraded religion. And so they were very corrupt, and they were very offensive to God.

God still remembered that he had made a covenant with them, though they had broken free from it in their minds. He considered them still obligated. And so he's very upset with them for their unfaithfulness to him, of course.

And that's why Amos was sent up there. Now, Amos was not a clergyman. He was not somebody who had a prophetic background or a priestly background.

Lots of the prophets were priests. You know that. Jeremiah was a priest.

Ezekiel was a priest. Zechariah was a priest. A lot of the men who were called to be prophets, John the Baptist was a priest.

They were born from the priestly lines. And often they started prophesying the same year of their life, the 30th year of their life, when they would have become active in the priesthood. But Amos was not one of them.

He didn't have a religious vocation. He was not a priest, and he wasn't even one of the other prophets. There were prophets who we don't know very much about because they didn't write books.

Israel had writing prophets like the ones who wrote the books in our Old Testament, and Israel had non-writing prophets, people like Elijah and Elisha, who didn't write anything. Well, if they did, we don't have any record of it. And other unnamed prophets sometimes show up to rebuke somebody and then disappear without even their name ever being given.

So God had many prophets, but in Israel in the north, Samuel had established what they call prophetic guilds. Some people call them schools of the prophets, though we don't have any evidence that they were holding classes or being taught. Most Bible scholars would call them prophetic guilds.

Even the Bible doesn't even use that term, but they're sons of the prophets is what they're called. Certain places that Samuel went, he had these groups called sons of the prophets, and he ministered among them, and they apparently were prophets too of the lesser sort. He was their mentor.

And he had prophetic schools like this in like five different cities in Israel in the north. At a later time, Elijah seemed to be the mentor of these sons of the prophets, and then Elisha. And we don't know much about who else may have been in their day, but Amos was mistaken by a certain person we'll see in chapter 7, the priest of the Temple of Bethel, which was, of course, one of the golden calf temples.

So he's a pagan priest. He spoke to Amos as if Amos was a professional prophet. And Amos said, I was not a prophet.

I was a son of the prophets. You know, he wasn't one of the prophetic guilds. He says, I was a herdsman.

I was a piercer of sycamore figs. So he was just a he was actually a migrant farm worker is what he was. And God called him from that to go across the border into another country and to denounce them in their capital cities and in their temple cities.

And Bethel was a temple city for the northern kingdom. Samaria was the capital city of the country. And this whole region was going to be devastated and destroyed within 30 years by the Assyrians.

And so Amos was sent to prophesy to them. By the way, Hosea was also at another time. But and some of the prophets in the south, like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who were from Jerusalem, they didn't necessarily go up into the northern kingdom process, but they had a few chapters here and there where they denounced the northern kingdom.

But, of course, in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's days, the northern kingdom was gone. But they still spoke sometimes about the sins of those people that had brought ruin on them. The city that he lived in or the town, probably more properly, it's called Tekoa.

We don't know very much about Tekoa, but we know where it was. If you go south of Jerusalem, about six miles, you come to Bethlehem. If you go another five or six miles south, you come to Tekoa.

So they were about a dozen miles away from Jerusalem, but out in a rural area. And

again, he was a farm worker. So he wasn't really a city slicker at all.

And yet he sent to these capital, these cities to prophesy against them. In the northern kingdom, the king at this time was Jeroboam II, who was a bad king. And the king in Judah was Uzziah in Jerusalem, who was a pretty good king.

And for both countries at this particular time, it was a fairly prosperous period. That is, the kings, Jeroboam and Uzziah, both ruled over fairly prosperous times. But the prophet predicts there's going to be disaster and famine and loss of everything.

And he rebukes those who are uncomfortable and so forth. Not because comfort is a bad thing, but because this was no time to be comfortable. They were actually complacent, and their nation was falling apart.

We might have people like that in our country right now, who, you know, they can see things aren't all that good, but they have no idea how rapidly things are falling apart. And so they're complacent. As long as they got their money, as long as they got their television sets, as long as they got their comfortable couches and beds, they don't want to be bothered by the disaster that's coming.

And that's how it was in Amos' day. And he rebukes them for that very thing, for being too complacent and comfortable at a time when they're really in a lot of danger. Now, it mentions in chapter 1, verse 1, that he prophesied this two years before the earthquake.

Well, since he was prophesying during the time of Uzziah, it was an earthquake that came during the reign of Uzziah. And we happen to have another reference to that same earthquake over in Zechariah, one of the almost the end of the Old Testament. In Zechariah chapter 14, in verse 5, Zechariah says to a later generation, a considerably later generation, he said, Then you shall flee through my mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.

Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. So, it was apparently a very memorable earthquake. Now, if you talk to people in California about, you know, the earthquake, they say, which one do you have in mind? I've lived through about 30 of them, you know.

But they apparently didn't have earthquakes commonly, and there was an earthquake in the reign of Uzziah, and it was two years before that earthquake that he wrote. Now, you might ask, how could he say, I'm writing two years before an earthquake, if the earthquake hadn't happened yet? Was he prophesying? No, I think it's more reasonable to assume that he wrote the prophecy down later. He prophesied two years before the earthquake, but by the time he was writing his prophecies down, probably the earthquake had occurred, and therefore he could date it from that.

He might even be implying that his prophecies two years before the earthquake were a

warning, and the coming of the earthquake two years later was something of a confirmation of, you know, God trying to get their attention. But we don't know what year the earthquake was. We know approximately he must have prophesied between 753 and 749 B.C., which, again, is just going to be 30 years before the fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians, forever, the end of Israel.

Now, Judah survived that by a considerable number of years. The Assyrians, after they conquered Samaria, the northern kingdom, they retreated and came back later to attack Jerusalem. About 701, I think it was, that they came against Jerusalem, and they besieged it.

But Hezekiah called on the Lord, and the Lord sent an angel to kill 185,000 Assyrian troops as they slept. That hardly seems fair. But since 185,000 troops were killed in one night of the Assyrians, the Assyrians kind of took that as a bad portent, and so they withdrew and Jerusalem was delivered.

So whereas the Assyrians wiped out the northern kingdom permanently, the southern kingdom survived the Assyrian period. It later succumbed to the Babylonian period, but that's another story, another time. So the timing of this would be shortly after the death of Elisha, the prophet.

So this northern kingdom had had the ministries of Elijah, and then after Elijah was taken up, then Elisha, and then Elisha died in the reign of Jehoram, and then comes up Jeroboam, and during his reign, a prophet from the southern kingdom is sent up to them. And so they've had a series of prophets warning them, maybe not nonstop, but certainly not much of a gap between them. I've already mentioned that we had schools of the prophets in the northern kingdom, and he was not part of them.

The only historical information in the book, as opposed to prophetic predictions, but the actual narration of historical information is found in a brief passage at the end of Amos 7. And we might look at that, that's the one I alluded to, where Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, assumed that he was a professional prophet. Verses 10 through 17 of Amos 7 are the only verses that have any historical information at all about the prophet or about his time. The rest is all prophecy.

If you look there at Amos 7.10, it says, Now remember, this priest was not a priest of God. He was not a Levite. The Levite priests were serving in Jerusalem at the temple there.

And in fact, when Jeroboam had founded the northern kingdom in rebellion against Rehoboam, the southern kingdom, he started, the Bible says he started appointing non-Levites to be priests at his Bethel and Dan altars. And this offended the Levites. And so a lot of the Levites left the northern kingdom and went back to Jerusalem in the south because they could be special there.

And so these priests at Bethel were not Levites, therefore they were not sanctioned by God. Neither were the golden calves, obviously, and neither was the temple there, or the altar. In fact, when this altar at Bethel had first been built by Jeroboam, 200 years before this, a prophet unnamed came and prophesied against that altar at Bethel and said, This altar is going to be destroyed and a man named Josiah is going to come someday and burn the bones of the priests of this altar.

And he did. Actually, Josiah, who came after Amos this time, actually did exhume the priest's bones and defile them and so forth at this altar. But this altar is still standing at this point.

And Amaziah was the name of a guy who was a priest there at this time, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam, the king of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear his words. For thus Amos has said, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land.

Now, this report was sent and filed in the courts of Jeroboam, the king, but we don't read of him acting on it. Either he just didn't think Amos was that much of a concern, sort of like Pilate didn't think that Jesus was much of a concern. Pilate was heading up a powerful Roman legion or whatever in Jerusalem, and Jesus was just this peasant preacher that had some people who liked him.

Even though the Jews who ruled the Jewish people, they said that Jesus was against Rome and against the emperor, Pilate wasn't buying it. Pilate just said, no, I can't find anything wrong with him. Take him and let him go.

Of course, they persuaded Pilate to change his mind, but when Jeroboam heard about Amos, he must have thought, who cares, he's a peasant. The guy's not a powerful, important, influential person. What do I care? So we don't read of any interference in Amos' ministry that came as a result of this report against him.

But it says in verse 12, Then Amaziah said to Amos, go, you seer. A seer is, of course, another word for a prophet in the Old Testament period. Flee to the land of Judah.

There eat bread, and there prophesy. But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is the royal residence. Now, I think Amaziah knew that Amos had come from Judah.

He says, go back home where you came from. Go back to Judah. Make your living prophesying there.

Eat your bread. Some of the prophets, some of the true prophets, criticized the false prophets saying they'll prophesy peace to anyone who puts bread in their mouth. They were professionals.

Every court of every king in every Middle Eastern country had prophets. Of course, where they weren't in Israel or when they weren't in Judah, they were false prophets. But every nation had false religions except for Jerusalem and Judah.

And they all had their own prophets, and these prophets would counsel their kings. So there were like prophets on staff. They were like cabinet members of the king's courts, and so they made their living prophesying.

And Amaziah is assuming Amos is one of those. He says, go eat your bread in your own hometown back in Judah. Go prophesy there.

But don't prophesy here. This is the king's table here. This is where the king likes to come and worship, and he doesn't want to be bothered by people like you saying the kind of things you're saying.

That's a little bit like when the Sanhedrin told Peter and John to not speak anymore in the name of Jesus because it made them uncomfortable. This was their territory. Don't do that anymore.

And remember Peter said in Acts 5, well, we must obey God rather than men. And that's kind of how Amos responded. He certainly wasn't intimidated.

Amos answered and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Sycamore figs at a certain point in their ripening have to be manually pinched or pierced or else they don't ripen properly. And so they had to have these guys travel around to the different orchards.

Actually, sycamore figs were not actually native to Tekoa where he lived, so he must have gone around and done it in regions around him further out. But at the right time, they have to pierce these figs so that they'll ripen. And so that was his seasonal job.

The rest of the time, I guess he was just tending sheep, probably not his own sheep, probably just kind of hired himself out. So he says, and the Lord, he says, the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, go prophesy to my people Israel. Now, therefore, hear the word of the Lord.

You say, do not prophesy against Israel and do not spout against the house of Isaac. Therefore, thus says the Lord, your wife will be a harlot in the city. Your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.

Your land shall be divided by the survey line, and you shall die in a defiled land. And Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land. Now, when I heard that, I imagine Amaziah thought, I wish I hadn't said anything.

Your wife's going to be a whore, you know, in the city, probably meaning because she'll

be a widow. And, you know, in a corrupt world, she won't be able to support herself. She can't be a priest like her husband was.

And when he's dead, she'll just kind of resort to what women often had to resort to when they couldn't get regular jobs. And so it's not a very good word to him. But then Amos is saying, you're trying to tell me not to speak in the word of the Lord.

And God told me to. This is what's going to happen to you. Now, there are some rhetorical devices that Amos uses quite a bit, and a lot of them have to do with repetitious phrases.

Like most prophets, he wrote in poetry. Almost all the oracles in the biblical prophets are written in poetry. That's why when you look at your page, now, if you have the King James Version, they don't set it off like this.

The King James Version, every verse is its own paragraph. But in modern translations where they actually break the text into paragraphs, and you can say, okay, here's a new one here, and here's a new one here, after several verses. They also, when it comes to poetry, they set the text a little differently.

As you can see, if you have anything besides the King James, and you're looking at this, you can see that it's set off from poetic verse. That's how it is with Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and the prophets for the most part because that's how poetry is identified by the typesetters. Now, he uses a lot of repetition.

The first two chapters are made up of eight short oracles against different nations. And they all begin with the same repetitious phrase, which is for three transgressions of, and then insert the name of the nation involved, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment. Each one of these begins with that.

For three transgressions of so and so, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment of it. Why does it say for three transgressions and for four? You might think, well, maybe when you read the whole segment that's addressed to that particular nation, there may be actually three complaints in there or four, but there aren't. Usually there's only one, maybe two.

So why does it say for three and for four? This is actually a Hebrew poetic device that you find elsewhere too. For example, in Proverbs. In Proverbs 6.16, Solomon says, There are six things the Lord hates, but seven are abomination to him.

Or in Proverbs 30, there's quite a few of these numbers, verses. They say, you know, there are three things that are too wonderful for me. Yay, four that I cannot understand, you know, or something like that.

There's actually quite a few of those kinds of prophecies where it gives a number and

then it gives the next number for some reason. And it's not known why. It's almost like he says, I can't really give an exhaustive list.

You know, I could think of three or four if I think longer, maybe five if I thought long enough. You know, this is not an exhaustive list. In other words, this for three or four or who knows how many, you know, just a lot.

Too many. But also the fact that it's three and four instead of, let's say, six and seven, like Proverbs 6 has, may suggest that three and four make seven. And seven to the Jewish mind conveys the idea of completeness or perfectness.

Seven is the number of perfection and completeness. And therefore, it may say that all these nations have had enough transgressions for God to say that's enough. The cup is full.

It's time for me to pour this cup of judgment out on you because you've got the complete number of tolerable offenses, three and four. So it's not clear exactly why he does that, but you find it, for example, in chapter 1, verse 3, for three transgressions of Damascus and for four. Then in verse 6, for three transgressions of Gaza and for four.

I will not turn away the punishment of it. Verse 9, for three transgressions of Tyre and for four. I will not turn away its punishment.

Verse 11, for three transgressions of Edom and for four. I will not turn away its punishment. Verse 13, for three transgressions of the people of Ammon and for four.

I will not turn away its punishment. Then in chapter 2, verse 1, for three transgressions of Moab and for four. I will not turn away its punishment.

Verse 4, for three transgressions of Judah and for four. I will not turn away its punishment. It starts to sound predictable.

Then in verse 6, for three transgressions of Israel and for four. I will not turn away its punishment. Now each time, the rest of the prophecy against each one of these is different and tailor-made for the group, something they were doing that's especially offensive to God.

And then at the end of that, there's a repetitious phrase. For example, you'll see in chapter 1, verse 4, it says, I will send fire into the house of Hazeal, which is a Syrian town. And this particular prophecy is against Syria and Damascus.

And it says, I will send fire unto the house of Hazeal, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. Now, I will send fire on blank, and it will devour the palaces of blank, is the same formula or template that's used really for all of them. If you look down to the next one, the one that's against Gaza, it says in verse 7, chapter 1, verse 7, I will send a fire

upon the wall of Gaza, which shall devour its palaces.

If you go on down to the prophecy against Tyre in verse 10, I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces. And this is the same through all of these prophecies, except, I believe, the last one, which is the longest and doesn't really close with that. So we have these prophecies.

It's sort of like when you read the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation, chapter 2 and 3. There's this template they all follow. To the angel of the church of so-and-so, write, I know your works. You do this, this, but I have this against you.

Then he tells them to repent, and then he says to him that overcomes, I will grant such and such. To him that has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This template is used for all seven of the letters in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. And so we have these eight prophecies that have kind of the identical openings and closings, but the interior of the prophecy is customized to what God's particularly mad at them for.

Now, I also want to point out who these groups are. Damascus, the first one mentioned in verse 3 of chapter 1, is the capital of Syria. And so the fire on Hazel is, you know, actually Hazel and Ben-Hadad are not places, they are kings.

Hazel was a king, and Ben-Hadad was his son, but they were of Syria, so it's related to Damascus. In chapter 1, verse 6, it's against Gaza, which is one of the five Philistine cities in Palestine. The Philistines actually had come to Palestine, you know, before the time of the patriarchs, before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They had invaded and settled five cities, mostly along the coast of Palestine. And these five cities are mentioned many times in the Bible together, because they were the Philistine territory, they were Philistia, the Philistine cities. And one of them was Gaza, which is mentioned here.

And, of course, there's a Gaza in Israel today too, which is in the same general region. Another was Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron. These are all mentioned in verse 8 in this prophecy against Gaza.

And the fifth one was Gath. Remember, Goliath was from Gath. Gath is not mentioned here.

The other four cities are, but it is not mentioned because it had previous to this been subdued and defeated by King Uzziah. So Uzziah had already, you know, taken care of Gath, but there's still punishment to come on the other four Philistine cities that are mentioned here. When it comes to Edom, now Edom, of course, was the people of Esau.

And Esau was the brother of Jacob. So this, you know, these people were related to Israel

somewhat, but they were always perennially hostile to Israel. They almost never were friendly.

Israel had them under tribute for a while, but they broke free from that. And the Edomites don't exist anymore. The last known Edomite was Herod the Great around the time Jesus was born.

The Babylonians conquered the Edomites, but the Edomites were not necessarily all driven out of their land. And then later on, the Nabateans invaded and took over the territory. And a lot of the Edomites fled to southern Judah and started a kingdom there called Idumea.

And Herod was from Idumea, so he was an Edomite. But the Edomites pretty much died out and intermixed with other people and stuff, so there aren't any Edomites now. And the punishment that's going to come on Edom that he mentions is the Babylonians coming to judge them, of course.

Now in verse 13, the people of Ammon were also relatives of a sort to Israel. The Ammonites and the Moabites, the Moabites are mentioned in chapter 2, verse 1. Ammon and Moab were brothers of each other. The man Ammon and the man Moab were brothers.

They were the two sons of Lot whom he fathered by his two daughters. And he was, of course, Abraham's nephew. So the Ammonites and the Moabites were somewhat related through Abraham's connection to Lot.

And then Edom was connected to the Israelites through his being the twin brother of Jacob. But all these nations, though somewhat biologically connected to Israel, were hostile and never really friendly. And they all came under their judgment at various times.

For one thing, in 734 B.C., which was just about 15 years after this, after Amos prophesied, the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser, the third king, came and he invaded all these cities and was not good to them. Later on, the ones that still existed were wiped out by the Babylonians. So these cities, these peoples, most of them don't exist anymore.

There's no Moabites, there's no Ammonites, there's no Philistines, there's no Edomites. It's like four of these nations don't even exist anymore. Of course, there's still Syria and Israel, but you don't really have most of these nations anymore.

And he was prophesying their doom because of various things they did wrong. Now, not much has to be said about what they did wrong, because it's self-explanatory when you read it. They were just bad people.

They did criminal acts. They were unjust. They were cruel.

Some of them are blamed because they, like the Gath—excuse me, Gaza, and Ammon, I believe. No, Gaza and Tyre are blamed for having kidnapped whole communities of the Jews and selling them into slavery to the Edomites. Now, that's what they did wrong.

The Moabites, it's kind of interesting here what it says about Moab in chapter 2, verse 1. For three transgressions of Moab and for four I will not turn away its punishment because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. Now, commentators are very perplexed by this because there's no record, they say, of the king of Moab burning the bones of the king of Edom to lime. Usually, most commentators say, well, at some point unrecorded in history, apparently the Moabites exhumed the bones of a dead king of Edom and burned them to lime, which they would use for mortar in their buildings and things like that, and that that was just showing disrespect.

But actually Israel did that kind of thing to their enemies too, and I don't know why God would be so offended by this being done to the king of Edom, who was a bad guy anyway. But I think there's a reference to this act, but it's obscure. In 2 Kings, and I'd like to turn you there and show you what I mean by it's obscure.

The way it's worded, it's not entirely clear that this is what it's talking about, but it seems most likely that it is. This happened about 100 years before Amos' time. And if you look at 2 Kings 3, I'm going to start reading it.

Well, I don't want to read the whole thing. What we have here is that the kings of Israel and Judah and Edom are confederate in a particular battle against the Moabites, and they attack the Moabites but have a hard time with them. But a prophet comes, Elisha, actually the prophet, in verse 14 said, As the Lord of hosts lives before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you.

He speaks to the king of Israel, who is a Jew. So he said the king of Jehoshaphat of Judah was there too, and he was a good guy. So he said if he wasn't here, I wouldn't even talk to you, king of Israel.

But since he is here, I'll give you counsel. He says, Now bring me a... the problem, I didn't mention this, they had come to a point where there wasn't enough water for their troops. So the kings of Judah, Israel, Edom, and their troops were kind of dying of thirst.

And so Elisha says, Bring me a musician. And as it happened, when a musician played, that the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha, and he said, Thus says the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. For thus says the Lord, You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain.

Yet this valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink. And this is but a trivial thing in the sight of the Lord. He will also deliver the

Moabites into your hand.

Also, you shall attack every fortified city and every choiced city, and you shall cut down every good tree and stop up every spring of water and ruin every piece of good earth and of land with stones. Now it says, Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by the way of Edom, apparently on the ground, it wasn't raining, and the land was filled with water. And when the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered, and they stood at the border.

Then they arose up early in the morning, and the sun was shining on the water, and apparently it looked red, because the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood. And they said, This is the blood of the kings that have surely struck swords and have killed one another. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

So they saw this water, but they thought it was blood because of the way the sun was reflected on it. They thought, Oh, these three kings that came against us, they're not friendly with each other anyway. They must have killed each other.

Now, big slog, let's go out and just spoil them, let's take plunder from them. They should be easy to plunder since it looks like they're all dead. So when they came to the camp of Israel, and this is where we're getting to the point that I think is mentioned in Amos.

Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites so that they fled before them, and they entered their land, killing the Moabites. Then they destroyed the cities, and each man threw a stone in every good piece of land and filled it, etc., etc. And then it says in verse 26, And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too intense for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not.

Then he, that is the king of Moab, there's some he's in here we got to identify. The king of Moab, it says, took his eldest son, who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel, so they departed from him and returned to their own land.

Now here's the thing. When the king of Edom was not able to prevail, he took 700 choice soldiers and tried to break through to get to the king of Edom for some reason. I guess to pick off the easiest king first and then work on the other ones afterwards if he can do it.

But he couldn't get to the king of Edom. So it says, So he, the king of Moab, took his son who would have reigned after him and sacrificed him on the wall. The impression is the king of Moab sacrificed his own son.

But the he is ambiguous. Who's the he whose son was sacrificed? It says the king of Moab went and tried to get the king of Edom but couldn't, but he sacrificed his son. I take it he was not able to capture the king, but he was able to capture his son.

And I think he killed, I think he sacrificed the king of Edom's son. In which case Amos would be able to say the king of Moab burned the bones of the king of Edom. That is the heir to the throne.

It's a very obscure passage in Second Kings. And I've never, I've never seen a commentator connected to this. But it's the first thing I thought of when I thought of this.

Well, that looks like it was the king of Edom. His son who would have reigned after him, it says, was captured by the Moabites. And his bones were burned as a burnt offering.

So I think that that's probably the incident that Amos is referring to. Otherwise, it is some unknown incident. But it seems to fit.

And it happened about 100 years before Amos' time. Now, what we see then is the first six oracles are against pagan nations. The first pagan nation, Syria, and the second, which is Philistia, and the third, which is Tyre, are all unrelated to the Jews.

They surround them, but they're all totally pagan. Then we've got Edom, Moab, and Ammon. Or not in that order, Edom, Ammon, and Moab.

They are related to Israel. They're still pagan. But they're a little closer to home.

A little closer in relation to Israel. But then comes Judah and Israel. They're the last ones.

So it's like it gets closer and closer to the people that Amos is prophesying against. The nation of Israel is his main target. He first prophesies against people who are not even related to him, but are enemies, pagan enemies around him.

Then people who are kind of slightly related to him, but still enemies. And then Judah, which is much closer to them, even of the same race. And then Israel.

It's almost as though he's saying, before I prophesy against you, Israel, I'm going to prophesy against people that you agree with me about their bad. I'm going to get you on my side. Kind of warm you up to what I have to say to you.

Because you're going to agree with what I have to say about the Philistines. You're going to agree with what I have to say about the Syrians and the Edomites and Ammon and Moab. And you might even agree with what I have to say about Judah, because they're your enemy too at times.

But now, since I've got you agreeing with me, I'm going to go and speak to you. And he does that longest in chapter 2, verse 6 to the end of that chapter. But Judah is mentioned briefly in chapter 2, verse 4. Now, that's the whole prophecy against Judah in this whole book.

The rest of it's pretty much against Israel. Interestingly, though, while the pagan nations

were accused of crimes that had to do with crimes against humanity, Judah was blamed with breaking the covenant. He doesn't really mention any of their crimes apart from that.

But he says, because they have despised the law of the Lord and have not kept his commandments. Instead, their lives, which is a term for idols, have led them astray. So they've left God.

The other nations haven't left God. The other nations never knew God. But Judah had been in covenant with God, but so had Israel been.

When it comes to prophecy against Israel, that's in verse 6 of chapter 2. And we may come back to some of that, but I just want to show you before we do that, some of the other examples in the book that I was talking about, his frequent use of repetition. Other ways he repeats himself. Are, for example, there's passages where five times in a row he says, yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.

And this passage is actually in chapter 4. In chapter 4, he prophesies, of course, against Israel. But he several times tells what he's going to do to them and what is they've done to make him angry. But at the end of each stanza, as it were, he says, as we see in verse 6, at the end of verse 6, yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.

Now, in verse 6, he actually tells them that he's going to give them or he has already given them cleanness of teeth, which is just a way of saying they don't have enough food to get their teeth dirty. He says, I also gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places. Yet you didn't turn me.

So here you're starving to death and God's trying to get your attention. He's like firing a warning shot across the bow before he judges you, hoping you'll surrender and turn back to him. But you didn't get the message.

You know, you're starving to death, but you're still not turning back to me. And in verse 7, he says, I also withheld rain from you. And he goes on to talk about how that affected their harvests and also their drinking water, because he says in verse 8, so two or three cities wandered around from city to city to drink water.

But he says, but they were not satisfied. Verse 8. Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. So again, he says, I did this other thing and you still didn't return to me.

Then he talked about how he ruined their crops in verse nine. I blasted you with blight and mildew when your gardens increased your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees. And the locust devoured them.

Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. And this goes on. He talks about more things he's done that.

But he keeps saying at the end of verse 10, for example, yet you have not turned to me, says the Lord. Verse 11 and the first 11. Yet you have not turned to me.

And then. Let's see, that might be the last time. Yeah, but he's got five times, six times.

He says, yet you have not turned to me. It gets to be a little repetitious, but that's how poetry sometimes is. Amos is fond of using repetitious forms of poetry, apparently, in getting the point across.

In another chapter, chapter five, we have another kind of group of repeated statements in chapter five, verse four. He says, for thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek me and live. Then in verse six, he says, seek the Lord and live.

And then in verse 14, he says, seek good and not evil, that you may live. So again, there's this seeking that they're going to do so that they can live. He says, first seek me.

Then he says, seek the Lord. This is seek good and not evil. And seeking God, of course, does involve seeking what he sees as good and not evil.

So that's another time we see this repetition of the same phrases. There's another phrase that's used twice. It's kind of a strange one.

In chapter eight, verse eight. And then in chapter nine, verse five. In chapter eight, verse eight.

He says, shall the land not tremble for this? And everyone mourns who dwells in it. All of it shall swell like the river, heave and subside like the river of Egypt. Now, the river of Egypt, the Nile, actually, it actually goes up and down during flood seasons.

It can be as much as 20 feet deeper or less deep at different times of the year. So he's talking about how the river of Egypt, it heaves and it subsides. He says that's how the land's going to be.

It's going to be like earthquakes or, in fact, that could be referring to the earthquake that came two years later. In any case, he's talking about the land that would heave like a river. You don't usually think of a river heaving, but the river of the Nile does do that.

And also in chapter nine, in verse five. He says, the Lord God of hosts who touches the earth and it melts and all who dwell there mourn. All of it shall swell like the river and subside like the river of Egypt.

So, again, he uses the same phrases repeatedly. And this is not just because he lacked creativity. It's just it must have appealed to him to have them recognize.

Oh, I heard that phrase earlier, not long ago. You said that before. I need to pay attention to that.

Another thing he does in terms of his style of writing. He likes to use rhetorical questions a lot. Everyone knows what a rhetorical question is, I suppose.

But, you know, the kinds he asked are kind of like, is the pope a Catholic? You know, does a bear poop in the woods? You know, I mean, those are kind of rhetorical questions that people sometimes use, which is a way of saying, obviously. Right. I mean, a rhetorical question of that type is whether it's just saying, duh, obviously, who wouldn't know that? And and those kind of rhetorical questions are kind of peppered in in a couple places.

In Chapter two, for example, verses three through six, Chapter three. The notes are wrong. The notes say Chapter two.

It's Chapter three, verses three through six. And some of these some of these lines you'll probably be familiar with. He says, can two walk together unless they are agreed? The obvious answer is supposed to be no.

Will a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey? Apparently not. I don't know lions actions that well, but I think. By the way, Amos knew lions and he makes frequent reference to the lions because he's a shepherd and and he was a shepherd out in a rural area.

And lions in the thick of the Jordan are mentioned many times in the Bible. David said he wants to deliver his sheep from a lion and once from a bear. And so shepherds were always having to deal with lions that wanted their sheep.

So he wants to know more about lions than I do. But he said, well, a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey. Apparently not.

Will a young lion cry out of his den when he has caught nothing? The answer is supposed to be no. Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth where there is no trap for it? They would kind of throw these nets, weighted nets up at birds if they weren't too high up and they'd kind of tangle them. And the bird would fall to the ground.

Is that going to happen to a bird if there's not someone who set a trap for it? No. Will a snare spring up from the earth if it has caught nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in the city, will not the people be afraid if there is calamity in a city? Will not the Lord have done it? Now, all these things are supposed to be self-evidently obvious. How they all fit together is a difficult thing.

Sometimes say, OK, what's the point here? I can see that the point would be this, but this one's a different one. Like, will a lion roar if he doesn't have any prey? Well, it's interesting in chapter 1, verse 2, his prophecy begins saying, The Lord roars from Zion and the strength of, excuse me, and utters his voice from Jerusalem. The pastors of the shepherds mourn.

The top of Carmel withers. God's roaring like a lion. The shepherds are afraid.

But when he says, will a lion roar when it hasn't got any targets, any prey in mind? He could be saying, you know, would God be roaring as he is now if he doesn't plan to pounce upon you, as I'm saying? But you can't apply the same lesson to all of these. All of these are kind of different from each other. So they might just be saying, aren't some things obvious? I mean, it could be that's all that these all are saying.

Isn't this obvious? Isn't this obvious? Isn't this obvious? Well, then, isn't it also obvious that surely the Lord God does nothing? Verse 7, unless he reveals his secret to his servants, the prophets, a lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? So he's kind of comparing God speaking through the prophets is like the lion roaring before he pounces on his prey.

Now, when he says the Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy? We'll find that, you know, the the priest at Bethel had told him, stop prophesying here. I can't stop. Sorry, the Lord spoke.

I can't stop. Who could who could not prophesy if the Lord spoke? And that's not the only time that he's responding. Also, to Chapter 2, verse 12, where God is rebuking Israel.

And he says, you gave the the Nazarites wine to drink and you commanded the prophets saying, do not prophesy. Now, the Nazarites were people who separated themselves to God in a special vow, according to Numbers, Chapter six. And they wouldn't eat anything from the grapevine.

They wouldn't drink wine or grape juice or anything like that. That's part of their vow. He says these people were telling the Nazarites to drink wine and they don't like people who don't corrupt themselves.

Ever notice that if you have unsafe friends, like if you go to a party and there's unbelievers there, let's say you're visiting a friend and they have a party and everyone's drinking and you don't care to drink. You know, they're not happy that you don't care to drink. It's not OK.

You know, they want you to be doing what they're doing. They don't want it to seem like you're better than they are in any in any measure. And they and some people resent it.

Same thing, I think, if you go to a party where people passed around a joint back when it was illegal, back in the hippie days, I was with a friend at a party there. I took my guitar and was singing Christian songs to them and they listened, but they passed around a joint. I just passed it by.

They don't. What? You're too good for this. You know, it's like they they kind of know in their heart they're not doing the right thing.

But as long as everyone else is not doing the right thing, they don't feel exposed. You know, but let one person break the curve and suddenly they don't like it. I've often told this story.

Heard from Arcee Sproul once on one of his lectures. He said that when he was in college, there was a professor that gave really hard tests. And.

And one of the tests was so bad that the professor was disgusted as he handed out the papers the next day, he would name the student and say F. Name the student, say F. Every student got F except one woman. I forget her name. I'll say her name is Judy Jones.

He said, Judy Jones, 100 percent. Arcee Sproul said the whole class groaned. They didn't congratulate her.

They didn't say, way, way to go, man. I couldn't I couldn't make this test. I couldn't rock this test.

But you really rocked it. You know, that's not that's not how sinners are. They don't like someone to succeed where they fail.

If they fail, they'd like everyone to fail because then they don't feel like such a failure. You could actually say the test was unfair, but not if somebody aced it. You can't say the test was unfair because if you study as much as she did, you could have done, too.

So, I mean, this is how people are. They want, you know, the Nazarites drink wine. You guys stop being so separated.

Stop being so devout. And they tell the prophets, don't prophesy. And of course, we know that that's, you know, we just read that he said in Chapter three, the Lord has spoken.

Who can but prophesy? You can't stop prophesying when God wants you to. You remember Jeremiah, the prophet, wanted to stop prophesying. You probably remember that story.

Jeremiah got in a lot of trouble for prophesying. He didn't have a lot of followers. He had a lot of critics.

And in Chapter 20 of Jeremiah, in verse nine, he said, Then I said, Jeremiah said, Then I said, I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name. I just get into too much trouble when I'm speaking for God. So I'm just going to zip my lip and not say anything anymore.

But he says, But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I was weary of holding it back and I could not. So when a person is a prophet, I guess you can't really easily get them to not prophesy.

And if they don't want to, if they're afraid of the consequences of them prophesying, they can't hold it back because the fire in their bones. So Amos knew that the Lord has spoken. Who can but prophesy? You tell me not to prophesy.

It's not going to work. Might as well go talk to that stone and tell it not to be a stone. Because I'm a prophet and God has spoken.

I'm not going to be quiet. So these are some of the ways that he has peppered his his narrative with rhetorical questions, with repetitious phrases. Now, what I'm going to do, we're going to take a break.

And in about 10 minutes, we'll come back and I'm going to just kind of scan through the book. And I'm going to just kind of scan through the book.