

# OpenTheo

## August 22nd: Amos 3 & John 18:1-27

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The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy? The denial of Peter.

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## Transcript

Amos chapter 3. Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet? 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? Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy? Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt and say, 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 strongholds.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, an adversary shall surround the land and bring down

your defences from you and your strongholds shall be plundered. 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 part of a bed. Hear and testify against the house of Jacob, declares the Lord God, the God of hosts, that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel and the horns of the altars shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

I will strike the winter house along with the summer house and the houses of ivory shall perish and the great houses shall come to an end, declares the Lord. In Amos chapter 3 we arrive at the beginning of a new section of the prophecy with a dramatic summons to attention. Both Judah and Israel are addressed in the preceding chapter in the series of the eight oracles against the nations that climaxes with them.

In this new chapter the people of Israel are addressed but here defined as the whole family brought out of Egypt at the exodus. Israel and Judah are thereby connected. They are, despite the division between the two kingdoms, a single family sharing in the same spiritual condition.

The Lord here grounds the punishment that they will receive in the uniqueness of his relationship with them. The Lord had not known any other nation in the way that he had known them. He had heard their cries.

He had plagued and delivered them from the hands of their oppressors. He had led and provided for them in the wilderness. He had brought them into the promised land and given them victory over those within it.

With no other nation had he acted in such a fashion. Israel was, according to the book of Exodus, the Lord's firstborn son and as a father will punish his son in a way that he would not punish a child who was not his own. So Israel's special relationship with the Lord is the reason why they must expect judgment for their iniquities.

Israel's election was all too often treated as a basis for presumption and complacency. However this statement shows that it must be exactly the opposite. Because Israel alone among the nations has the Lord as their God, with them being his people, they must expect to face the judgment.

In verses 3 to 6 we are given seven rhetorical questions which are then followed by a further two questions that are set apart from them. Perhaps once again we are seeing something of an X, X plus one pattern with a complete sequence of seven being followed by extra elements that provide the climax to the sequence. The first question concerns two people walking together.

Do two people walk together in that manner unless they belong together? The second question, does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Daniel Carroll suggests that

on the basis of what we know about lions and the way that we could translate this verse it should be better read as snarl or growl. The same is the case with the question that follows. In both cases we have lions who are in possession of their prey and they do not want to have it taken from them and so they snarl or growl at anyone who might approach them.

The fourth and fifth questions are also a pairing, presenting us with the same event from two different perspectives. Once again a cause is being inferred from a particular perceived effect. The bird doesn't fall in a snare unless there has been a trap set for it.

Looking at that event from the other perspective, from the perspective of the snare, the snare doesn't snap unless it has been triggered by the bird. We should note a progression in the pairings to this point. First of all we have two people walking together.

Then we have the predator and the prey. Then we have the hunter and their quarry. In verse six we have a trumpet blown in a city with the figures of the prey and the quarry close in the background.

Who is the hunter or the predator in this instance? The city which is not here identified is thrown into confusion or fear by the blowing of the trumpet that announces the coming of the adversary. The preceding chapter of the prophecy had spoken about the lord sending fire against the walls of various cities and devouring their strongholds. Perhaps in Israel's complacency, believing that they were immune from the lord's judgment, that because they were his special people, the descendants of Abraham, they had the impression that they would not be punished like the nations.

They might think that the lord is their great defender but they would find that he is the hunter, the one who will snare them and judge them in their iniquities. Verse seven sets off the questions of verse eight from the other questions that precede it. The word of the prophet is connected to the roar of the lord as the lion.

Just as the lion's growl or snarl reveals that he has taken some prey, so the lord's actions and intentions are revealed through the words of his prophets. His roar is heard in their prophesying. From the words of the prophets can be inferred the actions and intentions of the lord, much as in the pairs of effects and causes in the rhetorical questions of verses three to six.

The prophet, as a servant of the lord, is a member of the divine council. In chapter seven, for instance, we'll see the lord declaring purposes to Amos, Amos praying for mercy for the people and then the lord relenting and not bringing the announced judgment about. In verse nine, the lord calls for witnesses.

He summons people from the strongholds in Ashdod and in the land of Egypt, from the Philistines and the Egyptians. They are to assemble themselves in the mountains of

Samaria, around the city, as if in a great amphitheater, and these great historic enemies of the people are to witness the violence and the wickedness within this capital of Israel. The lord would bring a great enemy upon them who would bring down their defenses and plunder their strongholds.

We can presume that this is a reference to Assyria. At various points in the text of Amos to this point, the metaphor of a lion and its prey has appeared. The book of Amos itself begins with the figure of the lion in Amos chapter one, verse two, and he said, the lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem.

The passages of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers. In verse four, we had a lion growling in the forest and a young lion snarling in its den. In verse 12, we have another picture of a lion who's been successful in capturing his prey.

He has snatched a sheep from the flock and the best that the shepherd can do is recover a few pieces of the animal as evidence that he has not stolen it for the owner. However, the sheep or the lamb has been almost completely devoured, so the best he can do is recover two legs or a piece of an ear. The people of Israel who lived in the capital of Samaria would face a similar fate.

As the lord, the great lion in this passage came upon them, only the smallest tokens of their former wealth and luxury could be recovered from the wreckage. The pairing of a bed and a couch can be seen elsewhere in Amos in chapter 6 verse 4. Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches. Although it has little impact on our understanding of the greater sense of the passage, the items that are in view here have been variously understood by the commentators.

Historically, many of the commentators have read the second item as containing a reference to Damascus. However, the word here has a different spelling from other uses of the word Damascus in the book. Others have suggested a footboard of a bed or have seen a reference to cushions.

Carroll argues that if we keep the original text but re-point it, reordering the vowels and the division of the words without changing anything else, we get a far more reasonable interpretation, a piece of a leg. This would also connect well with the image of the limbs of the animal taken from the mouth of the lion. Having spoken about the judgment upon Samaria, the political capital of the Lord then goes on to declare judgment against Bethel, its cultic centre.

Here the Lord's name is given as the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts. The elaborate nature of the divine name here probably serves to underline the solemnity of the statement that follows. Bethel had first been established as a rival cultic centre to Jerusalem by Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat.

He had erected a golden calf there, the golden calf at Dan, and placed an altar before it. In 1 Kings chapter 13, judgment was proclaimed against the altar by the man of God from Judah. That destruction would later occur through the reforms of Jezebel.

Here judgment is proclaimed both against the altars of Bethel and the horns of the singular altar. Presumably the singular altar is the great sacrificial altar, and the altars plural probably include one or more altars of incense. Bethel was, through the actions of Jeroboam I, connected with Israel's primal sin as a nation, and also recapitulated their sin with the golden calf at Sinai, along with the altar in Bethel that would be brought down.

The Lord would also particularly judge the wealthy of the land. He would strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory and the great houses. Israel had, as it were, been fattening themselves on a day of slaughter, and the wealthiest in this oppressive nation would face the most severe consequences.

One can imagine that the earthquake that would follow in a couple of years would have been a first sign of this coming judgment. A question to consider. Verse 7 declares, John chapter 18, verses 1 to 27.

which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he, so if you seek me, let these men go.

This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, of those whom you gave me I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into its sheath, shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood outside at the door.

So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves.

Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world.

I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I have said to them.

They know what I said. When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, Is that how you answer the high priest? Jesus answered him, If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, You also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, Did I not see you in the garden with him? Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

John 18 describes the betrayal, capture and trials of Jesus leading up to his crucifixion. His crossing of the brook Kidron should be related to David's crossing of that same brook in 2 Samuel 15 verse 23 during Absalom's coup. A number of the gospels explore this background for thinking about the betrayal, the arrest and the death of Christ.

Christ, like David, is retreating from Jerusalem. Like Absalom, the ruler of this age seems to have had his great triumph. His coup seems to have been a success and David is leaving the city.

Judas in these stories is like Ahithophel. He's the one who gives counsel to the opponents of the king and Jesus, as he crosses over the brook Kidron, ascends the Mount of Olives. He's playing out this story of David again and each of the gospels explores this in slightly different ways, thinking of the angels ministering to him, the various people that are met and the background of Abishai, who is the right-hand man to David, who wishes to strike down Shimei, who's cursing David to take off his head.

There are parallels there with the story of Peter, Peter who attacks the high priest's servant. In these parallels then we're seeing Jesus portrayed as the greater David, replaying the story of David but on a grander scale, not just dealing with the coup of one of his sons but dealing with the ruler of this age himself. Jesus enters a garden which

obviously carries all sorts of biblical resonances.

There will be another garden later on connected with the tomb and in Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, once again playing upon the Old Testament background, the background of the Garden of Eden itself. Jesus answers those coming to arrest him with highly significant words, I am, the same words that he uses of himself in chapter 8 verse 58 and they draw back and fall to the ground. This is a response to him using the divine name.

Once again we see very strong Christology coming through in the Gospel of John. Jesus' words in verses 7 to 9 where he speaks about none of his disciples being lost and his concern to protect his disciples show his commitment to suffer on behalf of the disciples and protect them even as they abandon him. The disciple who attacks the high priest's servant isn't mentioned in the other Gospels but here we're informed that it is Peter.

David Daube has suggested that an attack upon the right ear might be intended as a disqualification for priestly ministry. Whether or not this is the case, and I'm not entirely sure, Malchus could be thought of as Peter's opposite number. Both are servants of a high priest.

Peter is the lead priestly assistant to Jesus, a fact that is particularly significant from this chapter onwards in John, and the sort of laying down of his life that Peter has in mind, something that is mentioned in chapter 13 verse 37, is this sort of thing, actually fighting for Christ and being willing to die in that conflict. He's less prepared to lay down his life in the manner that Jesus actually requires of him. Jesus is said to act to fulfill the word that he has spoken.

Of those whom you gave me I have lost no one. That language of fulfillment connects Jesus' words with those words of scripture, that Jesus fulfills his own word like he fulfills the words of scripture itself. He must drink the cup that the father has given to him.

He must take that burden of judgment and punishment upon himself, the cup that belongs to Jerusalem and Israel for its sins, the Messiah is going to drink as the king of the Jews. Simon Peter sort of serves as a leading priestly figure among the disciples, and while Jesus is being tried before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter is denying Jesus in the high priest's courtyard. There's an important parallel and contrast being established.

Peter stands around the fire of coals, and note that there is also a fire of coals when Peter is restored in chapter 21 verse 9. The other disciple, which many have presumed to be the disciple that Jesus loved, was known to the high priest, as we see in verses 15 and 16. He seems to be well positioned, have good connections and access. Could it maybe be someone like Lazarus, or would it be Joseph of Arimathea, or would it be Nicodemus? We're not entirely sure.

We can speculate. Many have seen this as the disciple that Jesus loves, the one who writes the gospel. Jesus is questioned, but Peter is questioned at the same time, heightening the contrast between them.

Jesus' I am's contrast with Peter's not me. Peter is questioned by the servant girl at the door, primarily about his association with Christ's disciples, then by the servants and the officers warming themselves by the charcoal fire, and then finally by one of the high priest's servants, a relative of Malchus. And Peter's denial, along with the entrance into Jerusalem, is mentioned in all of the gospels.

This is a very significant event. Peter is very clearly not the hero of the story, nor are the other disciples. Jesus is the only hero of this story.

And the failure of Peter helps us to recognise that he is not the person that we're supposed to be looking up to primarily. He has his flaws, he has his failings. Note also that Peter is questioned about not just his direct association with Christ, but his association with the disciples of Christ.

We might fancy ourselves, if we were in the position of Peter, that we would stand up for Christ, that we would associate with him readily, that we would speak on behalf of the one who is our master. But yet, like Peter, we can so often be quick to dissociate ourselves from his people, to deny that we have any affiliation with the church when it embarrasses us, when it limits the degree to which we can fit in with the crowd that's around us. Like Peter, we can be tempted to deny Christ in denying our association with his people.

A question to reflect upon. Jesus almost exactly repeats the first words that he speaks in the gospel. For whom are you looking? Or what are you looking for? And he makes this statement twice in this chapter.

And he repeats the exact same question to Mary Magdalene in chapter 20, after the resurrection. The repetition of this particular question suggests that it is an important one for the evangelist. The evangelist wants to think about our relationship to this question, how we might respond to it as the readers of the gospel.

What response should an attentive reader of John's gospel give to this question?