

Amos Chapters 1-2 – John Karmelich

1. Why is everyone accountable to God in the first place? Why can't we just enjoy life as much as we can and then tell God how our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds? Why should we study all of the biblical laws about how to live and try to obey them? The answer is whether we like it or not, there is a purpose for living greater than just trying to get as much out of life as possible. That is, there is a God who created us and He demands obedience to what He desires of us. To say all of this another way, God holds us accountable for what we do know about Him. That's the message of the book of Amos in a few thoughts. The point is God holds us accountable for what we know about Him, be it a little or a lot or what we could have known about Him based on where we are in life or what information is available about Him.
 - a) With that said, let me give you a few details about Amos. He lived in the Northern Israel Kingdom probably around the same time as Hosea, but they never mentioned each other. Each of them have separate messages for the Israelites living at that time and each of them were called to preach to the Israelites to use their lives to make a difference for God before it's too late. It's as if God says to us, "I'm holding each of you accountable for what you do know about Me and what we did with that knowledge." That's Amos in one thought.
2. Before I get into the "who, what, where's and why's" of Amos, let me state my title for this lesson: "We are accountable for what we know about God". I would argue it is the key point of these two chapters. As I've preached in the first two paragraphs, it's the idea that God holds us accountable based on what we do know about Him or could have known about Him. That applies to Gentiles (anyone who is not Jewish) as well as Israelites. So what are we accountable for? Let me explain:
 - a) Do you enjoy studying your bible? That's a good thing as the effort to learn about God is also drawing us closer to Him as we think about what a passage says. The bad news is He will hold us accountable for what we have learned about Him. I'm not saying we've got to be perfect, but I am saying God expects us to live differently based on what we have read and learned about Him.
 - b) So are you saying it's better to be naïve about what God demands of us? Of course not. I am saying that God's standards for those of us who know our bible are higher than those who know little about Him. I believe God will fairly judge people based on what they did know about Him or could have known based on what information is available to us when we lived. In summary, I'm just saying there is a price we pay for learning about God! I've always held the view that God will judge Christians based on two criteria: The first is the obvious question of whether or not we believe Jesus died for all our sins. The second one is, "What did you do with that information?" OK, enough guilt here, back to Amos:
3. It's best to think of Amos as a "nobody" (untrained to be a witness) that God called to be a witness for Him. In the opening verses of Chapter 1, Amos describes himself as a shepherd living in the Southern Israel Kingdom who God called to go preach to the Northern one.
 - a) If you think that God can't use you or me to make a difference for Him, realize that Amos came from a "nothing" of a profession to be used by God and be known throughout most of human history to be one of the prophets in the bible. While you and I can't write one of the bible books, we can be used by God to make a difference for Him if we're willing to go submit our lives to His will. That's the big lesson to get out of Amos!
 - b) The next thing to learn requires a little knowledge of Hebrew. In that language, there is a separate concept for one, two and "more than two". The only English equivalent is when we jokingly say, "I'm having all my friends over for dinner, both of them!" My point is the word "both" is an English word for "two". In Hebrew thought, there is one, two and more than "two". I'm teaching you this, because we're going to see a style of poetry that's stated over and over again in these two chapters. The short version there is "three of something" and then there is "four of something". Let me explain what that means:

- c) That's Hosea's way of saying, "This group is guilty of all of these things. In fact it's worse than that!". If we get the idea of "three" being a plural form, then the concept of more than three" is worse than what we think! My point is Amos used a style of poetry to tell us that "It's worse than we think" using the words for "three" and "four" to express that concept.
 - i) That's what the "three and four of something" poetic idea is all about that we will see in these two chapters.
- 4. The reason I'm telling you all of this, is Amos is going to describe specific nations that are around Israel as if to say to each of them, "We think they are guilty of this, but it's actually worse than we realize" as God describes their sins as collective groups. After Amos picks on some of the nations that are around Israel, he uses the same "three and four" poetic styles to describe Israel's sins.
 - a) Amos describes the sins the Southern Israelite Kingdom and then in detail of the Northern Kingdom to show that the sins of God's people are worse than the other nations.
 - b) That's an example of how the people who know about God are held to a higher standard because they or we know more about God and what He demands of us.
 - c) A reason scholars believe Amos was called to preach to the Northern Kingdom is because he picked on them last! Yes we will get other reasons later in the book, but that's a big clue based on the order or these prophetic poems written in the three and four style.
- 5. My next question is when was Amos written? He tells us in the first few verses who the kings are (of the Northern and Southern Israelite Kingdoms) when he wrote this book. He also tells us that what He wrote came two years before the earthquake. Scholars speculate when that earthquake did occur, but it was obviously a big enough of an event, that those Israelites who lived soon after that time would know when it was. I'll talk about those specific kings were when we discuss the opening verses of the text. All you have to know for now is that Amos wrote this book about 750 BC give or take a few decades.
- 6. That leads to us to the big and important question of "why"? Why did Amos write this book and why should I use some of my valuable time to study it? First, it's not so we'll become experts on ancient history in the Middle East. It's so that we grasp the idea that we're accountable to God for what we know about Him. It's both good and bad news. The good news is we can draw closer to Him as we learn about Him through His word. The bad news is we're now accountable for what we do know about Him. If I had to summarize the lesson in one thought, that'd be it.
 - a) However, there are a lot of specific's to be learned from studying the details. For example a lot of the punishment Amos predicts to specific places near Israel is based on how those groups treated the Israelites. If you know history, Amos's predictions came literally true within a few centuries of Amos writing them. The lesson for us is that God cares for those of us who trust in Him, and we can have assurance that He will punish those who've hurt us. This will occur if for no other reason than to prove to the world that "God is God and we have to deal with it." By God punishing nations that have done harm to the nation of Israel, that's how He gets involved in world affairs to prove He's God.
 - b) If that is true, why does God allow so many horrible things to occur? The short answer is that God allows free will. If an angel popped on the scene every time we were about to do a sin, we would soon be complaining that God doesn't give us a chance to prove ourselves to Him. My point is God allows many horrible things ultimately to prove He's God and to prove He will win on His timing. In the meantime, God expects us to be His witnesses to those around us and live as He desires as a witness for Him.
 - c) Finally, these chapters discuss God's complaints against Israel themselves. It's His way of saying, "Here is how we're messing up and here's the punishment that's coming unless we change our ways." It's the tough love reminder that God's in charge, He demands that we live as He desires and we can suffer in this lifetime when we fail to live as He calls!
 - d) I realize the book of Amos message of repentance is a tough lesson to grasp, but ach of us as Christians need to realize how we are accountable to God if we're called to be a witness for Him. With that said, it's time for us to get started on the details:

7. Amos Chapter 1, Verse 1: The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa--what he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.
- a) If you're still curious who Amos is, he tells us himself, in Verse 1. He describes himself as a shepherd in Tekoa two years before "the" earthquake" at the time of two specific kings in the Northern and Southern Kingdom. Some background notes would be helpful here.
 - i) In Hebrew, there are two similar words for shepherd. The term shepherd is used a lot in the bible to describe God watching over His people. To make it obvious that Amos is not using shepherd as a metaphor, he uses a different word for shepherd, which means just that, someone who literally watches over the sheep.
 - ii) Tekoa is a small village about 10 miles from Jerusalem if memory is correct.
 - iii) The point here is that Amos thought of himself as a "nobody from nowhere" that was called by God to be used by Him. When people ask me, "Why did God pick you or me to be a witness for Him?" I respond with "why not you?" God can and does pick anybody willing to be used by Him and not necessarily a person with a highly trained religious background!
 - iv) As to the earthquake, some scholars are convinced it was "760BC", others are not so sure. To quote a modern saying in Israel, "How do you know? I asked Rabbi Google". What I do want you to notice is that Amos didn't write down what God told him about until at least two years after it happened. That's why Amos could say "I got all of this two years before that big earthquake".
 - b) The next thing to notice is we get another "time stamp". Amos names the current kings of both the Northern and Southern Kingdom at that time. The Jeroboam mentioned here is sometimes called "Jeroboam II" because there was more than one king with that name. If you study these kings in 2nd Kings or Chronicles, just know that they reigned in the 700's BC. That's why scholars state that Amos wrote this book around 750 BC give or take some decades. The big question is how do we know Amos is a prophet of God?
 - i) My best answer is life came true as Amos predicted. He stated what happened to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms both decades and centuries after this book was written. I'm saying the reason Amos was accepted as a prophet of God was because what he wrote here, became true just as he wrote it.
 - c) OK John, we get and accept the idea that Amos was a prophet and he corrected predicted what happened to Israel and some surrounding nations millenniums ago. Why should I care about all this ancient history? Glad you asked! The first answer is "patterns". We do learn a lot about the way God works in our lives based on patterns. How God judged the nations around Israel and Israel themselves is a pattern of how we can and will be judged based on how we live. To beat home a key point, "judgment" is not just the eternal kind. It can also mean suffering or blessing in this lifetime based on what we've done with the information we've been given about Jesus and what we've done with it. I'm not saying all of us have to become professional pastors. I am saying that God holds us accountable for what information we have about Him and whether or not we've used the gifts He's given us to make a difference for Him. That's what living the Christian life is all about!
 - d) Now that we've beaten to death the "who, when and why's of Amos" onto his message:
8. Verse 2: He said: "The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers."
- a) My very loose translation: The God of the Israelites who happens to also be the God who created the world in the first place has something to say to you, so listen up!"
 - b) I admit I'm fascinated by the fact that a "lion's roar" is used a lot to describe how God will be working. It's like saying what will happen will be so obvious, you'll know it is true as easily and as powerfully as one can recognize a lion's roar. Like that roar, it's also like if someone said, "Don't mess with me, you have no idea what you're dealing with!"

- c) Notice the verse mentions both Jerusalem and Mount Carmel. The point being that the City of Jerusalem is part of the Southern Kingdom and Mount Carmel was located in the Northern Kingdom. My point is even though the Northern Kingdom had predominately walked away from God at this point in history, Amos wants all the Israelites to know that God is still the God of all the Israelites whether they like it or not!
 - d) One can sense the disaster coming even here in Verse 2. Amos thinks like a shepherd as he describes the soil as being "dried up" from a lack of rain. He describes the top of this mountain (actually a big hill) in Northern Israel as being a "waste land" and not what God called that place. The word "Carmel" means "fruitful vine". I always remembered that, as my last name literally means "Son of Carmel". (In Croatian, an "ich" at the end of a name means "son of" the same way "ski" or "sky" means that in Russian.) Enough of my family background, the point is God's saying "Judgment is coming and those living in Israel will recognize it when it occurs as the land will become a wasteland!" Again the reason we're studying this ancient history, isn't to learn history, it's to show how God works in patterns and those patterns continue to this day.
9. Verse 3: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, ⁴ I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. ⁵ I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir," says the LORD.
- a) I beat the point home in my introduction that Amos speaks in "three's and four's" poetry in the first two chapters of this book and I meant it. We get the first of these predictions here in Verses 3 and 4.
 - b) One of the things one learns from studying the bible is sometimes it uses the "specific as to describe the general" and sometimes it does the opposite. If I gave a bunch of predictions about what will occur in Washington DC, or Paris, or Berlin, you'd pretty quickly realize I was talking about predictions about a whole country and not just a capital city. That's the type of style we'll see Amos use.
 - c) My point is this prediction is about the nation of Syria. Damascus was the capital. Again, we have to realize that the poetic use of "three and four" is God's way of saying that group is guilty of "this", but it's even worse than that, as they're also guilty of "that". It's also like saying, "These sins fill up the pot and those sins make it overflow!"
 - d) OK then, back to the history lesson. Syria is just north of Israel. They're around today as they were millenniums ago. So you know, they were destroyed by the Assyrian invasion about 700BC. They were not an independent country until modern times. The difference between Syria then and the Israelites is that they were not scattered and came back again as the Israelites were. Most Syrians today are predominantly not the descendants of that nation way back then. God allowed that Syrian nation to be judged and destroyed. That modern Syrian nation got their name from that land, but they aren't the same people.
 - i) Anyway, the king of Damascus at the time of Amos was a man named Hazel. He's guilty of destroying a city in Israel called Gilead. Apparently he destroyed it in a way that was so complete, it'd be like driving a bulldozer over that city.
 - ii) So here's God saying, "You mess with My people, I'm going to mess with you!" In fact, we get the specifics of how Syria gets destroyed to prove Amos was a prophet of God. The short version is the city gates will be torn down, the residents were to be taken into captivity. We even get told where they deported to in Verse 5.
 - e) Notice God doesn't say to Syria, "You should have known your bible better, now you are doomed". The point here is the Israelites were God's chosen people and Syria messed with them, and now they must suffer the consequences. Realize that the issue here is not about each person being judged individually, but "group judgment" based on how they or we've treated God's chosen people! That's the lesson for us to learn from all of this!

- f) Of course I could dazzle you with more historical facts about Syria and Damascus or even talk about the modern nation and its civil war. However, I never want bible lessons to be a history lesson other than to explain the context of the situation. Therefore, the important thing to learn here isn't about the destruction of ancient Syria, which happened just as the bible said it did, but to realize that God works in patterns and how people treat those who are called by Him can and will suffer "Group judgment" based on that treatment.
 - g) Let me ask one final question here before I move on. If this was so horrid, why didn't God stop that destruction of His people before it occurred? Why does God allow such horrible things to begin with? The answer is He allows free will, and the consequences of that free will to play out. Still God does at times interfere in world affairs and in our lives if for no other reason than to prove that He is God and there are consequences for our actions.
 - h) OK then, time for another judgment!
10. Verse 6: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom,⁷ I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza that will consume her fortresses. ⁸ I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines is dead," says the Sovereign LORD.
- a) The next set of judgments is on what is called the "Gaza strip" today. That piece of land is just as much a controversy today as it was thousands of years ago. It's a hillside section of land in Southern Israel. Back then it was controlled by a group called the Philistines, who was a traditional enemy of Israel for centuries. For example about 300 years before Amos, King David fought the Philistines, but he never completely destroyed that group.
 - b) A little more history about them may help to describe these verses. There were five major cities that make up the Philistine area. None of those five cities were always the dominate over the others, but they all had power. Four of those cities are named here. (Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod and Askelon). Scholars believe the fifth city was conquered at that time, which is why it is not mentioned. Anyway, there they are, now let's discuss the sin itself:
 - i) The Philistines captured communities of Israelites and sold them as slaves to the Edomites. Edom was a nation just east of Israel. Bottom line is God wiped out the nation of the Philistines for the sin of selling His chosen people into slavery.
 - ii) A century later, the Babylonians destroyed the Philistines. They stopped existing as a nation by that point in history, about 600 BC. An interesting fact to realize is the Greek word for "Philistine" is "Palestine". When the Romans destroyed Israel in 70AD, they renamed the area "Palestine" as an insult to the Jewish people as if to say, "We hate you so much, we're going to rename your land after your ancient enemy just so show that Israel will never exist again!" It's amazing to consider that Israel is alive today while the Romans (let alone the Philistines) are long gone!
 - c) Anyway, the short version is this ancient nation of the Philistines were wiped out just as Amos predicted and came true when the Babylonians completely destroyed those cities.
11. Verse 9: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because she sold whole communities of captives to Edom, disregarding a treaty of brotherhood, ¹⁰ I will send fire upon the walls of Tyre that will consume her fortresses."
- a) By now, you get the idea that Amos probably went around preaching a few verses about the nations surrounding Israel. Yes of course, all of them were punished. However I can just see the Israelites starting to think at this point, "What's the punch line? Yes they're all bad people, but we Israelites know that! We'll get to the "punch line" in about ten verses as that's when Amos starts picking on the Israelites themselves. In the meantime, I'm sure Amos is holding people's attention as he describes, "How they are going to get theirs!"
 - b) Speaking of "them", let's move on to the next ancient nation that was near Israel when this was written. That was a city north of Syria called Tyre. It is the home of the Phoenicians, and among other things they are famous for having the oldest known alphabet.

- c) One thing to realize was that Tyre was a rich city. The Babylonians tried to conquer them and failed. The Persians conquered them, but their prize was "empty" as those who lived in Tyre moved to an island off the coast. Later, it was Alexander the Great who famously used the ruins of Tyre to build a bridge to that island and completely conquer that city.
 - d) I give you that background as now you know who God used to punish that city. Now let me describe their sin. They captured communities within Israel with the sole purpose of selling them as slaves. The buyers were the Edomites that lived east of Israel. My point is simply, "You mess with God's people, and God will mess with you and will do permanent damage to your nation's existence" if you mess with His people. Like I said a few lessons back, I think of that T-shirt sold in Israel with all the nations crossed off that tried to mess with Israel and what was the long term status of those nations. The point being that God proves who He is and in His own way and on His own timing protects His people, which, yes includes us Christians.
 - e) One last thing before I move on. The text mentions they "broke the treaty of brotherhood". What most scholars argue that is, is a few hundred years before Amos came on the scene, King Solomon made a treaty with that nation. From God's perspective, Tyre broke it when they attacked Israel several centuries later. Anyway, that's the treaty that was broken.
12. Verse 11: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked,¹² I will send fire upon Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah."
- a) As you can tell by now, I'm not spending oodles of space describing each of these nations and why they are guilty. What is important is that each of them "messed with" Israel who still is God's chosen people despite their sins and what are the consequences.
 - i) If you were with me while I taught Hosea not too long ago, you'd recall the North Israel kingdom wasn't exactly God fearing people at that time. My point is in spite of that problem, God still needed to prove to the surrounding world that Israel still is His chosen people and they're not to be messed with. When I think about that, I shudder for all those people who want Israel destroyed today! They have no idea who they are messing with!
 - b) With that statement out of my system, time for the next nation on Amos list: Edom.
 - i) The Edomites are sort of "cousins" of the Israelites. Abraham's grandson was the father of the 12 Israelite tribes. That grandson had a brother named Edom. He is the father of the Edomites. . When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they were not allowed to conquer them, as they were "cousins".
 - ii) However, God had "had enough" of how they treated Israel despite the fact Israel did not conquer them. The short version is Edom and Israel fought for centuries and now punishment is coming. The actual punishment didn't come for over 100 years until the Babylonians came on the scene. Let's just say they completely did destroy this nation. The Babylonians relocated who they didn't kill and that land today (part of Jordan) is not the direct descendants of the Edomites.
13. Verse 13: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Ammon, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders,¹⁴ I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah that will consume her fortresses amid war cries on the day of battle, amid violent winds on a stormy day.¹⁵ Her king will go into exile, he and his officials together," says the LORD.
- a) We've only got two more foreign nations to get through, so bear with me while I continue my ancient history lesson. By now, you get the main point: They messed with Israel so it means that country no longer exists today. Consider the following: If any of these nations successfully wiped out Israel, God couldn't bring the Messiah into the world as planned. It would also mean that Jesus can't rule from there, so Israel's existence is a necessity!

- b) Do I believe one has to believe in Jesus in order to be part of God's kingdom? Of course. I also believe babies and children who die will be there, as well as and the naïve who acted well based on what they did know about God. I always considered the church a "subset" of who will be in heaven, but we'll find out one day when we get there. I can only control what I can control, which is about being a good witness for Jesus. I'll also convinced that Israel is still God's chosen people and history has proven that to be true. In the meantime, let's get through the last two groups. This one is Ammon.
 - c) This group also lived east of the Jordan, (north of the Moabites and south of the Edomites if you care). They were also one of the main groups that the Israelites destroyed when the land of Israel was conquered. One of the sins they were guilty of was wiping out cities in Israel in order to expand their territory. If you only think that happens in ancient history, realize the Germans (in WWII) wiped towns out in order to expand the land for Germany! Anyway, this group also messed with God's chosen people, and despite Israel's sins, God still wants to prove that the God of the Israelites is "The" God and not to be messed with.
 - i) If memory is correct this nation was also wiped out by the Babylonian invasion. A reference to this group existed as late as the 2nd Century AD. It appeared at that time the Romans absorbed them and "that was that". The key point is just as the verses tell us is that the main cities of this country were destroyed.
 - ii) OK, one more foreign group to get through, we're almost there, before we get to the really good stuff in these chapters!
14. Chapter 2, Verse 1: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom's king, ² I will send fire upon Moab that will consume the fortresses of Kerioth. Moab will go down in great tumult amid war cries and the blast of the trumpet. ³ I will destroy her ruler and kill all her officials with him," says the LORD.
- a) As I read this section a few times, I kept thinking, "What's so bad about burning the bones of an enemy?" I understand that all the punishments so far had to do with harming God's chosen people, but here God says it's a sin that the Moabites should have been aware of as they destroyed the king of their neighbor.
 - b) Time for another quick history lesson. The Moabites along with the Ammonites as well as the Edomites all lived east of the Jordan River. In fact the hills east of the Jordan River are still called the hills of Edom and the hills of Moab. All this territory is part of the country of Jordan today (since World War 1).
 - c) So back to the question, why was their sin so bad that God said it is necessary to wipe out that nation? Yes, they were a "thorn in the side of Israel for centuries", but the crime here is a war with another nation. What is implied from the text is that the Moabites defeated and hated the Edomites so badly, when they defeated the enemy, they burned the body of their leader to ashes. So is the sin a lack of a proper burial or going to far in a war victory?
 - i) Realize each of these two nations had their own land east of Israel. I'm sure each of those nations had struggles with each other as each wanted more power. I suspect what's behind this "body burning" is a hatred of outsiders and a desire to rule over others. While the events of that war are lost in history, what is apparent from this reference is a true hatred of others who are e not a part of one's nation. It's kind of like God saying, "Here is your land, be happy with what you've got and don't try to form an empire by wiping out others!"
 - ii) The event was bad enough where God is saying to them, "I'm the one who let you have the land southeast of Israel. I didn't call for Israel or anyone to wipe you out. Because that wasn't enough for you, I'm angry because you killed others that were not a part of what I gave you." While God did not expect the Moabites to know the Ten Commandments, He did expect them to know enough about their history as to realize their accountability for what was theirs and what was not theirs!

- d) Yes one can read commentaries with theories behind this section, but the truth is, the facts behind this condemnation are again lost in history. What we do know from history is the nation of Moab was destroyed by the Babylonian invasion. The people who lived there in modern times were not the direct descendants of the Moabites. All I'm saying is God did judge that nation. The prediction Amos made about their destruction came literally true.
 - e) All this leads to the important part. I can picture Israelites listening to Amos give a lecture about what will happen to these nations surrounding Israel and they'd be thinking, "Good for God, about time He wiped out those nations, they have all been a pain in our sides for a long time". The "punch line" comes next, as Amos hits closer to home as he's now going to focus on Israel itself.
 - i) Let me put it this way: The way to tell what's really on someone's mind is to look at how much time is spent on each group. Each of these nations so far only got at the most a handful of verses. Even the next section, about the Southern Israelite Kingdom only gets a few verses. When Amos starts talking about the Northern Kingdom, we get a lot more verses. It's like saying, "You think I'm mad at those guys, wait until you hear what God's got to say about you"
15. Verse 4: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed,⁵ I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."
- a) Keep in mind that Amos is preaching to the Northern Israelite Kingdom. Amos only has two verses for the Southern Kingdom and he's got 10 coming up for the North. Also keep in mind that the Northern Kingdom thought of themselves as prosperous at that time. In the Southern Kingdom, they were thought of as the "religious ones" more loyal to God as the Temple was located there. The Northern Israelites must have thought, "While we are not as devout as those in the South, we must be doing something right as we're blessed at this time!"
 - b) The reason I'm stating all of that is Amos correctly predicts that the Southern Kingdom is going to be destroyed. Yet that didn't happen for well over 100 years after Amos said it. What I'm pondering, is why give this judgment here and now? If nothing else it shows us that God is "outside of time" as we know it and knows all things including the future. I'm also pondering if the Southern Kingdom was "religious" at that time and kept God's laws, why be so tough on them here and now? Like any society, I'm sure there were some who were very religious and some who were not. For the most part, "South" had a reputation for being the "good son".
 - c) What I'm getting at here, is why is God so tough on them? Why is God comparing those in the "South" to the people who lived in Israel before conquering it? The text effectively is saying, "You in the South are acting no better than the people who lived here before all of the conquering of that land began". Yes, it's an accurate prediction of how the "South" did eventually fall away from God, but again, why be so tough on them here and now?
 - i) One possibility is at that moment a lot of people in the "South" did turn away from God and maybe God held off because they repented. Within a short time after this was written, the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom. Maybe the "South" saw this and thought, "Maybe it's time for us to take this God stuff seriously so we don't end up like our neighbors up north". We know that Isaiah preached around the same time and to the Southern Kingdom.
 - ii) All I'm saying is I think those in the Southern Kingdom somehow got the message that it was time to repent. If they didn't hear Amos preaching, they were aware of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and I suspect that "woke them up".
 - d) The point for us is God expects obedience to Him not to earn our salvation, but to show a sense of gratitude for what He's done for us. To ignore Him has bad consequences.

- e) All of that leads to the main topic of Chapter 2: What's going on right around us. It's as if Amos was saying, "Here's what's going to happen to everyone around you over the next few hundred years. Now that you know what is the fate of your enemies, based on what they knew of God or should have known, let's get down to my main business to tell all of you I'm preaching to of what God's got in store for you for ignoring Him for so long!"
 - f) In other words, this is the time to be nervous and pay attention, God's talking to us about our own fates whether we like it or not. (Yes, I'm talking about you and me, and not just about those who lived in Northern Israel millenniums ago.)
16. Verse 6: This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.
- a) Ok besides Amos' usual "three and four" poetic style, that most of us recognize by now if we've been reading the text, the first thing to catch is the standards are higher:
 - i) So far the crimes against other nations have pretty much been for killing Israelites as those nations are being condemned for not realizing Israel is "God's chosen".
 - ii) The exception was the Moabites, whose sin was not being content with what God has given them (their land) and they wiped out their neighbors.
 - iii) Then we got a few lines about the Southern Kingdom as if to say, they too have or will turn away from God and they're going to "get theirs" for messing with what it is God requires of us.
 - b) Now notice the tougher standard and greater details Amos gives us about telling us about the Northern Kingdom is doing wrong. Verse 6 says that the "righteous" were essentially sold as slaves for money and the poor are sold for a pair of sandals. Let me explain:
 - i) The point here is the poor people living in the "North" were being disposed of as if they didn't matter. Yes the Northern Israelite Kingdom was doing well when, but as Jesus stated "the poor will be with you always". (Matthew 26:11 is one of those references). Instead of helping the poor, they were sold as slaves for whatever the price could be gotten for them.
 - ii) Notice the reference to "righteous". It could refer to those living there who still did seek God, but I suspect it's more general than that based on the context. It's more like God saying, "Everyone living there at that time are part of my Chosen People, so what are you doing selling them as slaves or getting rid of them as if they're all a bunch of trash?"
 - c) Now it's time to "modernize" these verses. Does that mean God wants us to give away all that we own to the first poor person that comes along? If we did, then we'd be part of the poor as well. The way to look at verses like this is to realize that if we're called by God to be one of His chosen people, then we're to live as a witness for Him. That means we're to care about those less fortunate than us and not "brush them off as dirt"! There has to be a balance between giving away all we have versus not caring at all. To say this another way it's a matter of doing something. A great lessons to learn in life is when we're suffering, it is a great time to do some good for someone else. That gets our minds off our problems if we're helping someone else. At the same time, if we're doing financially well now, help a person in need. That's the underlying principal behind this verse.
 - d) OK enough guilt for this verse, let's try the next one:
17. Verse 7: They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.
- a) Even as we just get into the first two verses of Amos' message to his target audience, we can already sense how Amos is holding them to a higher standard than foreign people! In the last chapter, the main point was harming God's chosen people and this chapter started with not being happy with what God gave you. Then Amos picked on the "South" as they were ignoring God. Here we're starting to see sins that one may not even realize is a sin if one didn't know the basic commandments of the Old Testament:

- b) Let me state this another way: The average Israelites living up in the "North" at that time, may not know their bible well, but they must have known it was wrong to deny justice for someone who is poor. They would also know it would be wrong for both a father and his son to sexually desire the same girl. Whether that refers to a prostitute or just a woman, it is still a sin if one is familiar with the 10 Commandments.
 - c) The basic idea of God's laws is to love God as much as possible and care about others just as much as we care about ourselves. If we cared about the poor as much as we cared for our own lives, we'd help who we can when we can. We wouldn't deny justice to the poor just because they are poor. We'd also have enough respect for our father or son to not desire the same woman. Men have an animal instinct to want to have sex with whoever appeals to them, but God expects man to not give into their instincts and by His power overcome that urge and be loyal to one woman through marriage. That's what's behind those laws and that's why Amos is getting so tough on the Israelites.
 - d) Suppose only some people were guilty of this, why condemn the whole nation? The issue is not individual salvation but group judgment. As I've beaten to death as I've taught the Minor Prophets, there is "group accountability" and "individual accountability". To give my classic example, if a nation or a church group failed to live as God desires, He can and does take away that group's witness for Him. It's another example of my lesson title that God holds us accountable for what we do know about Him!
18. Verse 8: They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines.
- a) Time for a little more history to explain this verse. At this time in the North's history, they were guilty of worshipping a false god called Baal. Most of the Israelites at that time, gave Baal credit for their financial success as Baal was a weather god. They'd have sex with the prostitutes who worked at those temples as a way to "turn on" Baal. The Israelites would give their garments as a pledge for that service. They were "fined" by drinking wine as a payment for their sins and the leaders would drink that wine taken as fines!
 - b) The point is most of the Israelites living up North had turned away from God and gotten to a point where they're doing what "felt good" as opposed to seeking the true and living God. It's as if God is saying, "You know better than that, or should know better than that and now it's suffering time for ignoring Me".
 - c) I can just hear many of you saying, "That's not me, I go to church every week and I believe Jesus is God". Again the issue isn't salvation, it's our witness for Him. We are accountable for what we do know about God and what we've done with that knowledge. This is not a lecture to "do more", but a lecture to keep in mind that God's called us to be a witness for Him at all times! That's the price of knowing our bible!
19. Verse 9: "I destroyed the Amorite before them, though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below.
- a) Verses 9-11 are God reminding the Israelites what He's done for them. It's as if the North could ask, "Why should we bother worshipping God in the first place? After all, we're all being financially blessed right now, so why should we change our lifestyle?" We get His response to that question in these three verses. Let me explain:
 - i) When the Israelites first conquered the land of Israel, the predominate nation there at that time was the Amorites. Without getting into the archeological evidence of how the Amorites lived back there then, I'll just say if you knew what they did, it'd be a shock that God waited as long as He did to judge them and use the Israelites as His instrument of judgment. As a clue, they'd sacrifice their own children to the gods they worshipped and let's just say they had sex with "whatever moved".
 - ii) All I'm saying is if you want to understand why God wiped out the people living in Israel before they got there, spend a little time on Google or in a book studying what the people living in Israel were like before that judgment.

- b) The point being for the Israelites that they wouldn't be where they were in the first place if it were not for God wiping out that nation so the Israelites could live there. With all that in mind, now let's look at Verse 10:
20. Verse 10: "I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites.
- a) It's a reminder that God was leading the Israelites the whole time they got from Egypt to the time they conquered the land of Israel. While some Amorites lived in what is today Jordan, many of the Amorites did live in Israel and they were the main nation Israel did defeat to take over that land.
- b) Here Amos is citing history. Why? Because the "North" Israelites did turn from following God and here is Amos reminding them, "Hey, how do you think you got here in the first place?" There's a reminder for us when we start thinking I haven't accomplished much or we're not worthy of God's love. That's when God can remind us, "Who do you think got you to this moment in history? With that positive reminder stated, Verse 11:
21. Verse 11: I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?" declares the LORD. ¹² "But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.
- a) Let me paraphrase Amos here: It's because of God that some Israelites were prophets. It's because God put the desire in specific people a few of you became Nazirites. (It is a vow made when one dedicates their lives or part of their lives to serving God.) God then states what is probably another historical fact that the Israelites told the prophets to shut up and encouraged the Nazirites to drink wine, an act that's forbidden by that service.
- b) The point is God's saying through Amos, what more could I have done to encourage all of you to live as I desire. The last thing I (God) want to do is punish you severely. However all of you leave me no choice as you refuse to live as I desire and you turn your collective backs from those I've called to preach to you.
- c) I can just hear a lot of you thinking, "OK, what about all those people I know who live out a good life and pretty much ignore God? Why aren't they punished?" Two reasons:
- i) The first is this is the only joy they'll get for eternity. See the story of Lazarus and the rich man that Jesus told (Luke 16) as a comparison to this punishment!
- ii) The second issue is God's speaking to those He's called to be a witness for Him. (I am speaking to my fellow Christians here!) Again we're back to the issue that the danger of knowing our bible is we're now accountable for it! That's the point.
22. Verse 13: "Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.
- a) From Verses 13-16 is the bad news. Like Hosea, Amos is going to explain how the nation of Northern Israel is about to be wiped out. Again it's as if God is saying, "I tried sending you prophets. I performed all sorts of miracles for your ancestors. Yet in spite of all that evidence, you've (collective "you") have turned your back from Me and now it's time for all of you to "Pay the Fiddler!"
- b) Picture being run over by a bulldozer. That's sort of the image Verse 13 is trying to show.
23. Verse 14: The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life. ¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. ¹⁶ Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day," declares the LORD.
- a) To explain how these verses came literally true, let me talk a little about the Assyrians.
- i) The way they'd conquer a city is they'd surround it with a large army.
- ii) They'd literally starve the residents into submission.
- iii) The survivors were sold into slavery and split up never to see their family again.
- iv) History has recorded towns committing suicide rather than being taken captive by them. The short version is their invasion is not good news!
- b) With that tough thought in mind, now let's look at the last three verses of this chapter:

- i) Verse 14 says the fast won't escape. The strong won't overpower them.
 - ii) Verse 15 says the bow and arrow shooter won't hold their ground. The soldiers will not win in victory, nor will horses help them.
 - iii) Verse 16 says even the bravest warriors will flee naked.
 - iv) Bottom line, this is all really bad news.
24. The good news is this isn't the end of the book. It is just the end of Amos's two chapter poetic tale of what will become of the "Middle East" over the next two centuries and why! Israel's enemies will suffer because they refused to believe the God of the whole world is the God of the Israelites.
- a) The Israelites themselves will suffer because God holds them to a higher standard as they should know more about Him. Both the Northern and Southern Israelite Kingdoms were destroyed albeit about 100 years apart. Both for the same reason: Refusing to live as God desires we live.
 - b) So does this mean we serve a cruel God who we must obey or die? Those of us who have lived their lives for Jesus will tell you it's the best way to live. It also brings a life that will never be boring. What purpose can one live for that has more meaning than living to use our lives to make a difference for the God who created us? I've lived a good while now. I have seen a lot of things and been to a lot of places. I can tell you from experience, there is no greater joy than to use one's life to make a difference for God, period.
 - c) The cruelty of this punishment is effectively a last resort by God. He's effectively saying I have tried lighter measures to get your attention, but they didn't work. I've got to do hard things as nothing else has worked!
 - d) Finally, let me discuss "specific's": What should we do? Ask yourself what do you enjoy doing? What are you good at? How can you use the gifts God's given you to make some sort of difference for Him? Being a good witness for God does not mean we each will lead multitudes of people to Him. Sometimes God just calls on us to be a faithful spouse or the same to our children. Sometimes it's just volunteering for something at church. What I'm getting at is time is the most valuable thing we own. Yes we have to earn a living and yes the "laundry has to get done", but pray about how we can honor God with our lives as we use some of our time for His glory. I'm not saying life will be "trouble free" if we live like that. I'm saying that despite whatever problems we face, God will give us reasons to live that can be far greater than any other reason one can have for living.
 - e) On that positive note, it's time to close in prayer.
25. Let's pray: Father, help us to remember that our lives and our time is in your hands. Help us not to waste the most valuable thing we own our time, and use it for Your glory. Make it obvious to us how it is You want us to live as a witness for You and help us to rely upon the power You've given us to make that difference for You. Yes we realize You hold us accountable for what we do know about You. Help us to not see that as something to fear, but as a benefit of knowing what is the way You desire we live as a witness for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.