

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14k_Prophecy in the Prophets_Amos_Part 3 of 5)

Oracles Against the Nations (1:3-2:16)

Israel and Judah were bound in a covenant relationship with Yahweh that was expressed through conditions of the Mosaic Law. This conditional (or bilateral) covenant was secured by the unilateral covenant in effect at that time, i.e. God's covenant with Abraham and its further elaboration in the Land and Davidic covenants. (The New Covenant of Jeremiah had not yet been given at the time of the events found in Amos). Later, we will see that God's denunciation of Israel (and Judah) through the prophet Amos will be due to her flagrant violations of her responsibilities under the bilateral Mosaic Covenant.

Other nations will experience God's judgment also. Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab are mentioned in chapters 1 and 2. However, the basis for their judgment is not the bilateral covenant (the Mosaic Law) that God made with Israel. Rather, the basis for their judgment is God's covenant with all of mankind expressed through the Noahic Covenant found in Genesis 8:20-9:17. The specific provision of that covenant that was at issue in Amos' day as he wrote about these other nations that surrounded Israel is found in Genesis 9:5-7.

Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. (Gen 9:5-7a)

The judgment of the Flood was the last direct judgment by God using water upon the inhabitants of the earth as a whole. The judgment of the Flood was necessitated in part by the fact that until the Flood, man had not been given the prerogative to thwart the spread of violence and even murder through the execution of capital punishment. God's protection of Cain after his murder of Abel is an illustration of this fact.

And the Lord said to him [Cain], "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him." (Gen 4:15)

The pattern of violence among mankind had been set and would be repeated many times before the judgment of the Flood. Lamech's flagrant disregard of God's pattern of one man and one woman (Ge 4:19 cf. 2:24; Matt 19:4-6) plus his arrogant boasting in regard to the murder of a man (Ge 4:23) reflected a evil pattern of behavior that was becoming more prevalent in society. The earth became filled with violence and corruption (Ge 6:11, 13) and man's thinking was only evil continually (Ge 6:5). The human race had even become contaminated through copulation between fallen angelic beings and the "daughters of men" (Ge 6:1-2; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). In contrast to God's command to "fill the earth" (Ge 28), Satan inspired man to remain congregated in one area in an obvious attempt to spread apostasy faster. Satan provided a symbol of unity for the human race and a common project that would unite their efforts at "making a name for themselves" (i.e. the Tower of Babel). The Satanic inspiration for this effort is obvious – they desired to not be scattered (Ge 11:4). This was Satan's first effort at a one-world religion and as is characteristic of all false religions, man is deified (Ge 3:5, 22 cf. 11:4). The leader of this effort was apparently Nimrod whose name is related to the Hebrew word for "rebel." The threat that this trend in the human race posed reflects the effectiveness of Satan in his strategy of deception of the mind of the inferior creature – man. Prior to the Flood, ultimate justice in the form of the death of the perpetrator would only have been the prerogative of God. However, after the Flood,

man was given the responsibility of preserving justice via capital punishment. That permission is embedded in the Noahic Covenant, specifically Genesis 9:5-7.

God uses Amos to express His case against the people groups or nations that had committed atrocities against His own in Amos 1:3-2:3. As Amos details God's case against these nations, he does not mention the "law" – a reference to the Mosaic Law. The "law" is the basis of God's case against Israel and Judah – His own. Rather, the basis for God's case against these other nations is rooted in the Noahic covenant.

Case against Damascus (1:3-5) – Damascus was the capital of Syria and was also known as Aram. Damascus and Gaza (or Philistia) were Israel's longtime enemies. Their condemnation by Amos would have found receptive ears among the Israelites. However, as the focus began to shift with denunciations and cases made against Israel's sometimes allies and even relative nations, Amos' hearers would have grown even more uncomfortable as we shall see.

The use of a number followed by a higher number is frequent in the Old Testament (see Job 5:19; Psa 62:11-12; Prov 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31). Usually, the higher number item is explained in detail and given special emphasis. In Amos' presentation of the case against these other nations, he only cites the last of the infractions which effectively was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.¹ Some have theorized that the "for three sins, even for four" pattern found here in Amos is a poetic way of expressing the number seven which symbolizes completeness in the Bible.²

The culminating sin or transgression of Damascus was that they had "threshed" Gilead with extreme cruelty and inhumanity in warfare, i.e. acts of barbarism. The "implements" of iron referred to in Amos 1:3 is a reference to the manner in which grain was separated from the husks by pulling a threshing sledge with iron teeth over the grain. The threshing sledge was a pair of boards that were bent upward at the front and studded with iron prongs or knives.³ Gilead was located on the northeastern side of the Jordan River. In His judgment upon Damascus, God is pictured as a suzerain warrior-king who has brought His armies to punish a vassal city for its revolt. In each case, a fire is used to picture the judgment that would result in a destruction of the walls or fortresses of the city (see vv. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2).

The house of Hazael is a reference to the king of Damascus who was a part of a dynasty that began in 843 B.C. The palaces of Ben-Hadad (v. 4) is a reference to either Hazael's successor and son (2 Ki 13:3, 24) or an earlier king (1 Ki 20). The "Valley of Aven" could be translated "Valley of Wickedness" and is an epithet for Damascus.⁴ The phrase "Valley of Eden" is an epithet for "house of pleasure." The people of Syria (v. 5) is a reference to the Arameans who occupied all of upper Syria and northwest Mesopotamia.⁵ "Kir" is a reference to the location to which Tiglath-Pileser III exiled the inhabitants of Syria and Damascus in 732 B.C. Amos later referred to Kir as the place from which the Arameans (the inhabitants of Syria) had originally come (9:7).

¹ BKC, 1428.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 1429. See also www.bible.org.

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987), 204-205.

