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C0903 – January 21, 2009 – Amos 1:3-5 – Judgment On Damascus

Alright, last week we were introduced to Amos. Amos was a rancher type who bred and cared for sheep. The word *noqed* indicates that he bred and cared for a special species of dwarfed sheep that was famous for its wool, still known among the Arabs today as the *nakad*. From Amos' background we're reminded that God in speaking to the human race used a diversity of backgrounds. He does not use only scholars. He uses scholars but he also speaks through peasants, philosophers, fishermen, statesmen, poets, physicians, kings and farmers. God uses people from all walks of life because the Bible is a real book written for real people living in real history and Amos was a real rancher who bred and cared for sheep as well as nipped figs west of the Dead Sea. Out of that vocation he was called by God to prophesy to the nation Israel. And we studied the interesting strategy Amos used to get their attention.

We unearthed that technique in chapters 1-2, tonight we want to start with 2 Sam 12. We want to show that this strategy we call entrapment, where the prophet draws his listeners in, is used elsewhere by the prophets. The background of 2 Sam 2 is the story of David and Bathsheba in chapter 11. David was the king and it was the time of year for kings to go to battle but David stayed in the royal palace. So right off we have a problem. He shouldn't even be there. He's in the wrong place at the wrong time. And he goes up on the roof of the palace and looks down and sees this woman bathing. If you've been to Jerusalem you've seen the old city of David south of the Temple Mount. To the east you have the Kidron Valley, to the west the Tyropoen Valley or the Valley of the Cheesemakers and these two valleys extend south until they join up and go west to the Dead Sea. Right between them is the City of David. The king's palace was up here on the high ground, the Temple wasn't there at the time, but David's palace was up here and the city sloped

down to the south as you can see. So here's the situation, David is up here, he's got a birds eye view of the city. So he's looking down and he sees her on the rooftop. He gazed down on her and David was a man that had a problem controlling his sex drive so he called her in and had sex with her. And he enjoyed it so much the first time that, to top it all off he had her husband, Uriah, placed on the front lines of the battle so he'd get killed and that way he could have Bathsheba all to himself. That's what chapter 11 is all about, David satisfying his sex drive by taking this married woman. A glowing testimony. Now watch in chapter 12 the strategy of the prophet Nathan. Ask yourself what is Nathan doing by coming to the king in this way? Verse 1, the Lord sends Nathan to David and says, "There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. ²"The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. ³"But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb Which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, And was like a daughter to him. ⁴"Now a traveler came to the rich man, And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. ⁶"He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." ⁷Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!" Do you see how Nathan used the strategy of entrapment? Very cleverly he piques the interest of David, in this instance it's a case of injustice, and then, very cleverly and quite by surprise shows David to be unjust. You David are the man, you David took the only thing this man had and used her for your own benefit. And if you read on David admits to the charges. But the point to see is other prophets used this strategy of entrapment and it's a very effective methodology. And this is a technique; if you're wise enough as a parent you can use this with your children, you use this when you're having a hard time getting through to someone and you really want to drive the point home.

Now Amos is using this entrapment methodology with the northern kingdom. He wants to get a hearing with the northern kingdom but he's from the southern kingdom. He's from enemy territory and therefore to get a hearing with a hostile crowd what do you do? You draw them in, you pique their interest, you make them think you're on their side and then suddenly,

without warning you turn the tables, at which point they're like deer caught in the headlights. So he's doing the same thing Nathan did to David. He's catching them red handed. To do this he does something unique, you won't find this in any other OT prophet. They all start their prophecies discussing Judah or Israel. Amos starts his prophecy with foreign nations and ends with Judah and Israel. And this of course was part of the trap in this instance. So we want to get into the judgments pronounced on Israel's foreign enemies.

Let's get our geographical bearings, in v 3 it's Damascus which is to the NE of Israel, Damascus was the capital of the kingdom of Aram, a long time enemy of Israel, today modern day Syria. Then in v 6 he moves to Gaza which is the capital of Philistia to the SW, another constant thorn in Israel's side, God's going to take them out. In v 9 another enemy, this one to the NW, it's Tyre, modern day Lebanon. Those first three are a group because they're not blood relatives of Israel, but they are all long time enemies of Israel. The next three are also a group because they are all blood relatives of Israel; distant relatives but relatives nonetheless. In v 11 we have Edom, Edom is another name for who? Esau. Who was Esau's twin brother? Jacob. Jacob and Esau. Esau was re-named Edom and so they are related to Israel. V 13, we have Ammon and chapter 2, v 1 we see Moab. Ammon and Moab are sons of Lot. Lot was Abraham's nephew. Maybe you remember the story in Genesis where Lot is virtually dragged out of Sodom kicking and screaming because he wanted to go back but the place was going to be exterminated. Well he goes up in the mountains with his two daughters, there's no men around, his daughters get him drunk and sleep with him, they both get pregnant, great family story here, another terrific family story, everybody just having a grand time, and yet Peter tells us in the NT that Lot was a believer, this guys going to be in heaven despite the fact his life was a wreck, and the two boys that came out of those incestuous acts were Ammon and Moab. So they're related. They grew into nations and caused problems for Israel. They were located on the other side of the Jordan to the SE. Now all these nations are noted for their oppression of Israel. Then finally in 2:4 you have Judah and Judah's unique because they were the sister kingdom of Israel. Before 931BC they had been one kingdom, after 931 they were a divided kingdom, so they were a divided family, another beaming testimony, over time the animosity grew and now they were enemies of Israel. They were due S. Just looking at the map can you see how strategic this list is? How would you describe Israel in relation to all these other nations? Right smack dab in the middle. Which

means they're surrounded by enemies, they're hemmed in. How do you feel when you get hemmed in? How do you feel when you get cornered? A little threatened. A little afraid. So, psychologically there was a fear that her sovereignty could be taken away, she could be defeated. So as Amos announces the defeat of all the surrounding enemies and you're hearing this psychologically that alleviates fear and replaces it with security, "I've got stability coming in life, security from all the surrounding chaos." And that's the sense we gather they were feeling as Amos pronounced judgment on one after another of their enemies till he reaches nation seven which is Judah. At that point they must have thought Amos was concluding his discourse, So when he adds the eighth "four three transgressions and for four" but this time against Israel, that was a shock to say the least, they did not see that one coming from the shepherd of Tekoa. And it must have been devastating psychologically because now the power was shifting to a trans-regional power, another nation not even mentioned here is on the rise which was going to come in and militarily crush this region but the very fact they are placed at the end of the sequence signals that they were the worst of all, that they were going to get the brunt of the destruction and God was not happy about this. Someone said last week they read through the Book of Amos and they said, "That's a lot of judgment. God was ticked off." And God was ticked off.

So we want to go back and start working with the nations that are judged, starting in 1:3, remember, we broke these down last week and we said there's a three-fold structure to each one of these; each one begins with an Indictment, "Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of city X and for four, I will not revoke its punishment," that's the Indictment of the city. A judgment has been determined. Second we have the Charges, why were they coming under judgment? There's always a reason given and it always begins, "Because..." you did something, it's not an arbitrary judgment, God's justice is never arbitrary, God's standard had been violated and in God's universe there are consequences for violating His standards. And third you have the Judgment, what exactly the punishment will be, it's signaled by the words, "So I will..." do so and so, the judgment is revealed. The judgment is God's revelation of the future of these nations. So you have this three-fold structure, the Indictment, the Charges, the Charges are highlighting some historic event in that nation, there's a history here that God is responding too. It's a history that God has known about from eternity past because He's

omniscient, but just because God knows everything does not mean He's like a Greek statue, totally unconcerned about what's happening, and not personally involved. No, God is personal and He responds to history in a personal way. History is not a cold, impersonal process as the evolutionist argues; history is personal and here we see God responding to history and declaring that "In light of what you have done in history here's what I'm going to do in the future." So the Judgments all describe the future of these nations. And Amos is His mouthpiece. So it's a powerful argument for the sovereignty of God over all the nations. And we want to look at the first nation in verses 3-5, Let's read to get the flow

³Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its *punishment*, Because they threshed Gilead with *implements* of sharp iron. ⁴"So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad. ⁵"I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden; So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir," Says the LORD.

Now let's look at the details, Thus says the LORD, that expression, we say it glibly, "the Lord said to me," we need to be very careful with that kind of terminology. When the Bible uses this, and it uses it 3,808 times in the OT, it means that in Amos's vision this is what the Lord said just as plain as I'm speaking to you. If you had a device that could measure the sound waves then you could have recorded the sound waves of God's voice. So, I just warn you, Christians are prone to talk this way, "the Lord told me to do this," "the Lord is saying to me..." and that's not what this is. We have hunches, we have thoughts pop into our head but that's not what happened here. The Lord verbally spoke to Amos and said, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four..." the three transgressions and for four is what sticks out to most people when they read the first two chapters. It's a common formula used in the OT, although it's not always three...and four used. Sometimes it's "six...and seven" or "one...and two" so to put these in a formula we call it the $x/x+1$ formula, in this case Amos uses $3/3+1$ or 4. What does this mean? People have pointed out you can add those up and you get seven and seven is the number of finality or completion. These people had filled up their sins. Okay, maybe that holds some water. Other people say three sins fills the cup of iniquity and the fourth one makes it spill over and all these nations have

overfilled their cup with iniquity and they're ripe for judgment. Okay, I can see the point. Other people say we ought to look for three or four sins here and so you can go through and count the sins. But if you do this, Aram and Moab have one sin, Philistia, Tyre, Ammon have two, Judah has three, Edom has four, and Israel has ten. So that pattern doesn't fit. I think the point of the formula is simply to say a fullness of iniquity has been reached by all of these nations. But I also think the significance of Israel having ten is to show that Israel surpassed them all. Israel stands out among all her neighbors as the ultimate transgressor. The one nation who has abused the grace of God more than any other nation and therefore because she has rejected God's grace over and over and over her judgment will be greater than all the rest. The principle of course falls out of our doctrinal principle of Grace before Judgment. All these nations have been shown grace. God is a gracious Person and therefore God never just lowers the boom. He gives time to repent. At the Flood he gave 120 years of grace before judgment, and they heard the preaching of Noah and they rejected, rejected, rejected. Then the day of grace came to a close. Grace does not go on forever and ever and ever. That strikes many of us as odd. But think what happens if grace is open ended? Think what happens if God doesn't finally blow the whistle and say, "Alright, game over." If that never happens then evil never gets resolved. How do you get rid of evil if you don't have a judgment? And if you don't have a judgment you end up with an eternal mixture of good and evil. People can complain about God judging but what's the alternative? Eternal evil, eternal suffering, great, that's some answer you have there So, just remember, grace is limited and when time runs out, that's it, the game is over and judgment falls. We ought to be grateful that He's put it off so long. If it were up to me I'd have already judged this place. I mean, this world is a mess, life is a mess, I get tired of facing it day after day, week after week, the world's a wreck. My goodness, you've got to give it to the guy, He's patient, He's longsuffering, a lot more than we'll ever be. And when you work through the Scriptures and look out on the world you gotta conclude that He gives everyone more than adequate time to respond to His grace. But there comes a day when that's it. And each of these nations we're looking at tonight have come to that point. They'd had every opportunity under the sun and they'd blown it.

In verse 3 we have the city of Damascus, our map has that to the NE of Israel. Damascus here is the capital of the Aramaic Kingdom. You've heard of the Aramaic language, Jesus could speak it, that language came from this

kingdom. It's a Semitic dialect close to Hebrew. Certain chapters in Daniel are originally written in Aramaic, it's the third original language of the Bible you hear little about. Well the people of Aram spoke that. The nation of Aram goes back to the Table of Nations in Gen 10. After the Flood you have Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. One of the sons of Shem was Aram, after the Tower of Babel incident when God divided the languages they settled over in Mesopotamia in the city of Kir. Then later they migrated up the Euphrates River valley and into modern day Syria and they developed that area. So they are sons of Shem that had made their way NW of the Mesopotamian flood plain. Damascus was their capital city and is being used here as metonymy for the whole nation. What we mean by metonymy is that you substitute one word for another. For example in the Navy they say "All hands on deck." We all recognize that as a figure of speech. They don't literally mean they just want your hands on deck. They want the whole sailor on deck. The hands stand for the sailors and here Damascus stands for the nation of Aram, of which Damascus is the capital. Today it's in Syria about 140 miles NE of Jerusalem. Most of us know it in connection with Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, he was converted about two miles outside the city. This city is one of the longest inhabited cities in the world so it must have been built not long after the Flood, probably just after the Tower of Babel incident. It's one of the most amazing cities in that it still retains some of the structure it had in ancient times. One of the structures is the "street called Straight" which is the main street in town and which Saul went blind down this street and was taken in until Ananias came and healed him. That street is still there today, it's about a mile long, it's the main thoroughfare of the city. Today the city is a Muslim city. The Muslims have a little saying about it. "If there is a garden of Eden on earth, it is Damascus; and if in Heaven, Damascus is like it on earth."ⁱ It is a garden city because it's well-watered by two rivers that make it very fruitful in vegetation. And at the time Amos wrote this it was the capital of the kingdom of Aram.

For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its *punishment*, which means God's not going to reverse the judgment. They've done something that God is going to judge. Their iniquity was full. And there was no way God was going to change His mind. When Jonah went to Ninevah they were given 40 days to repent. There's nothing in here about that. The day of grace was over, the day of judgment had come. Why? What had they done? they had threshed Gilead with *implements* of sharp iron. These are the

charges against Damascus. This is describing inhumane military treatment that the kingdom of Aram had done to the people of Gilead. So let's get our bearings, Gilead was to the south of Aram in the Trans-Jordanian region that basically stretches from the southern edge of the Lake of Galilee down to the northern edge of the Dead Sea, all this region is Gilead. Today this makes up the northern region of Jordan. At the time of Amos the people who lived in Gilead were the northern tribes of Gad, Reuben and part of Manasseh (Numb 32). So you basically had two and a half tribes living over here. If you remember two of these tribes came to Moses before they went across the Jordan and requested that Gilead be their inheritance because it was such a good land for livestock and these tribes had a lot of livestock. Moses instructed Joshua to let this be their inheritance as long as they would send their men across the Jordan to aid in the conquest of the land for the other tribes. And they did go and fight and after that they settled over here in the land of Gilead. The famous OT prophet, Elijah, was from Gilead. The region of Gilead is characterized by the meaning of Gilead which is "rugged." It's very rugged and mountainous terrain, very well-watered with thick forests. The forests were so thick this became a favorite place of refuge for criminals who could easily hide in their. The flat plains were very suitable for growing grape vines, grain and olive groves so it was a very productive area. The King's Highway, one of the ancient trade routes between Africa and Mesopotamia passed through this region and was controlled by it so there was a lot of trade goods in this region. So it was a very desirable area and that's the background for why the kingdom of Aram under Hazael and Ben-Hadad attacked this region.

It says they threshed Gilead. I take this literally. Threshing was an agricultural technique of separating the kernel of grain from its stalk. For small amounts of grain a farmer would beat the grain out on a hard surface. For larger amounts animals such as donkeys or oxen would pull a weighted threshing sledge over a large flat area of rock, sharp rocks or metal would be attached to the underside of the sledge to beat out the grain. The animals would pull the sledge over and over and over the grain until all the kernels were beaten out. And the charge is that the Damascene's had used a sharp iron sledge to destroy the Israelites of Gilead. What they apparently did was after they defeated them, they took the dead bodies, threw them on a stone pavement, hooked up the oxen to a sharp iron sledge and run over them and over them and over them till their bodies were torn and mangled to pieces.

Now that was absolutely unnecessary, that was absolutely immoral and it shows you the depravity of these people, they had no respect for the human body made in God's image.

Now, do we have any record of this event? Turn to 2 Kings 10:32-33. Two passages come to mind. The first is 2 Kings 10. In verse 32 we read, "In those days the LORD began to cut off *portions* from Israel; and Hazael," Hazael was the founding king of the reigning dynasty in Aram, "and Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: ³³from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites and the Reubenites and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the valley of the Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan." So we have this account of Hazael's military incursions into Gilead and Bashan from the north. Turn over to chapter 13 for another incursion. Verse 3, this in the reign of Jehoahaz who followed in the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat who instituted the Egyptian style of worship. "So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Aram, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael. ⁴Then Jehoahaz entreated the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them." Now that's a heavy hand being leveled against Israel. What's the Biblical principle when you see someone rubbing Israel the wrong way? What curse is invoked when a nation does this? The curse of Gen 12:3, "he who curses you will be cursed." Verse 5, The LORD gave Israel a deliverer, so that they escaped from under the hand of the Arameans; and the sons of Israel lived in their tents as formerly." You have this back and forth, they'll be oppressed then they pray and God delivers them, then they come under oppression again and so forth. Verse 6, "Nevertheless they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel sin, but walked in them; and the Asherah also remained standing in Samaria. ⁷For he left to Jehoahaz of the army not more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and 10,000 footmen, *for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.*" Look at what the king of Aram did to the soldiers bodies, he had them shredded them into pieces under these iron sledges. This was inhuman treatment, it was an attack against the Lord's people, and therefore they invoked the Lord's judgment. So that's the history of the charges against Aram in Amos, now we want to turn to the Judgment in verse 4..

Amos 1:4, **So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad. ⁵“I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden;**

“So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir,” Says the LORD. That’s military defeat followed by exile. These people had invoked the curse of Gen 12:3 and now they’re going to get it. The sending of fire which is in every one of these subsections except the last one, invokes the idea of military defeat. Some foreign nation is going to make a military incursion into Aram as they made military incursions into Gilead. And the house, or dynasty of Hazael, he’s the founder of the reigning dynasty, his dynast will be destroyed and the citadels of Ben-Hadad this is his son, there are a whole series of sons and grandsons with this name in the OT, all of whom came from Hazael and the fortresses he built are going to be consumed.ⁱⁱ

Verse 5 continues, “I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus, the gate bar was the “gate” made of bronze or iron bars, ancient cities were built like fortresses and during the day the gate was open and guarded so people could go in and out of the city and carry out business, at night or when the city was under siege they would close the gate to protect the city. These were key entry sites for armies and this describes the breaking of their city gate so the soldiers enter the city to take the people captive and reap destruction I will...cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, these are the people who live in this valley, valley of Aven means “valley of vanity” and the vanity that was there were idols. This was where the shrine of Baal was located. I will cut off...him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden; the one who holds the scepter is the ruler of Aram, we don’t know where Beth-eden is but it means “house of pleasure,” so the ruler may have had a summer home there. So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir,” Says the Lord. Did this happen? Was this prophecy fulfilled. Of course the liberals who reject the supernatural, who say God can’t tell the future because man is autonomous, so they have to say Amos was writing history not prophecy.ⁱⁱⁱ The heart at enmity with God cannot stand prophecy because we want to control history and if the future is determined by God then we don’t control history and that means we’re subject to a higher authority. But the pagan heart doesn’t want to be subject to a higher authority, it wants to be the authority. So they turn prophecy into history. But is there a passage recording fulfillment of this prophecy.

Back to 2 Kings, this time chapter 16. Here's the situation this time, it's about 732BC, if Amos wrote this in 762 then it's been 30 years and it just shows you, even though Aram's judgment was determined God still gave them thirty more years of grace. Marvellous is the grace of God and how He extends the opportunity long after judgment is due. Well, the king of Judah at the time is Ahaz. Ahaz was one of the idiot kings of Judah who would never trust the Lord. By this time Assyria had become a world power. So the king of Aram and the king of Israel tried to get Ahaz to enter an alliance and the three of them together were going to go to war against Assyria to dispose of the threat. But Ahaz refused, and that really ticked off the king of Aram and Israel so they join hands, they're going to dispose of Ahaz and set up a puppet king who will do whatever they want, that way they can get more soldiers. So they prepare to go to war against Ahaz and the Lord revealed to Ahaz through Isaiah that there was no way these two kings were going to conquer him because he was the house of David. This is all Isa 7. But Ahaz was an idiot king, like we said, and he didn't trust the Lord, he trusted in military alliances. So in verse 7 we can see he'd already allied with the BIG boy Assyria. "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." Now I want you to look at that terminology "I am your servant and your son." What have we been over and over in the framework about ancient near eastern treaties? When they entered into a treaty they had a special name for that? What did we call them? Suzerainty-vassal treaties. The great king was the suzerain, the lesser king was the vassal. And these treaties defined a relationship between the two nations. We still have this today, one weaker nation allies itself with a stronger nation. In the ancient world, look how personal these treaties were in verse 7. "I am your servant and your son." It's expressed as a Father-son relationship these two have. So Assyria and Judah have entered into one of these treaties. Does that strike you as a little problematic? I thought Judah was in a Suzerainty-vassal treaty with YHWH? I thought they had a Father-son relationship with the God who created the universe in six, twenty-four hour days? Now you're claiming to be the son of Assyria. Did Assyria deliver you from Egypt? I don't think so. See how they'd abandoned God. Verse 8, "Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria." This is the payoff, we want you to fight a proxy war for us against Aram and Israel. So after he

bought off the king of Assyria “the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried *the people of it* away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death.” Rezin was the king at the time who lived in Beth-eden, they executed him. They broke down the gate of Damascus, captured the people and sent them into exile. Where were they taken to exile? Kir. What did we say about Kir earlier? Kir is down in the Mesopotamian flood plain. This is where they were from. God was sending them back where they came from and destroying all they had built up. Hundreds of years of Aramaic civilization was wiped out in this judgment.

So what have we seen? Turn back to Amos. We’ve seen the Aramean Kingdom Indicted, Charged and Judged. Their history was a poor one. They’d had grace, grace, grace, hundreds of years of grace and they rejected, rejected, rejected to the point they became so hardened and depraved that they literally took human bodies and mangled them with farm equipment. That’s the quality of these people. What are you going to do with a society collectively that has become that morally depraved? And so God judged them through the Assyrian armies of Tiglath-Pileser. You say, “Oh, God’s so cruel to send war that will kill men, women and innocent children, why the God of the Bible is immoral?” Why do you have this in the Bible? Because those people were a malignant cancer on society. The children of that society were not going to respond to the grace of God. God knows the heart of every man. He’s omniscient see. He’s in the open box, Creator-creature distinction. He’s not a creature like one of us who has to wait for the data to come in. He’s already got all the data. He even has all the data about what would have happened if things happened another way. All the quote “what-if’s” of history. He knows what would have happened if he hadn’t eliminated these people from the planet. They would have infected everyone else. And the more people infected with this the quicker the end of the world comes. So to extend grace and delay judgment God often shaves off part of the human race just to extend His grace. God goes to great lengths to get people to respond to Him positively. No ones ever going to be able to make the argument, “Well God, if you’d just given me 20 more years I’d have responded.” No you wouldn’t have. And God knows that. God knows when a person’s heart is set in concrete. And the vast majority of the Aramean’s were dead set in their heart against the things of God. You could give them the gospel a hundred different ways it wouldn’t make a bit of difference. But I want you to notice something at the end of verse 5. Was every Aramean exterminated? No, some of the people

went into exile. Now why did God do that? He doesn't do that with Gaza in verse 8, that whole nation of Philistines is destroyed, every last one of them down to the last person. What's different about this remnant of Arameans? There must be some families, some people who were responding to God's grace and they were spared. What do we always say when God judges and saves, he does so with what? Perfect discrimination. That's a perfect line of discrimination. God knows all these people's hearts and when he sent the Assyrian's under the command of General Pileser these people were spared. Now was that because General Pileser went up to each one of them and asked them, "Are you a Christian? Are you positive to the word of God?" No, it means God knew who the believers were in that culture, He knew who would go positive to the word of God were and He singled them out as the one's sent into exile. Just think of the control you have to have to be able to do this. That's the kind of control God has over the nations. He's not just sovereign over the nation Israel. The nation of Israel is His chosen nation but the nations of the earth are in His hand to do what He pleases with them. And if He wants Tiglath-Pileser III to go up and destroy the certain Aramean factions He can do that without a problem at all. So grace, grace, grace but then there's judgment. "...let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."¹

ⁱ Charles L Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 88.

ⁱⁱ Commentators argue whether there was three or four men with this name. This is a dynastic name, there were probably four men who ruled in this dynasty before it came to an end.

ⁱⁱⁱ D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962), 290.

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¹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Am 1:5.