
Judgment for the Nations

Amos 1:1-2:3

Social justice – the last few years there has been a growing cry for “social justice.” You hear and see it everywhere. Many prominent Christian leaders are now calling for the church to take a stand for... well, you know, Christian social justice. There are books now by religious writers like *Woke Church* by Dr. Eric Mason. David Platt has preached and written to lament over his own and the church’s failures in social justice. Many other well-known Christian leaders, associations and organizations have outright affirmed social justice ideas while others have endorsed the books but not yet publicly taken a stand. Sadly, most of what is being done is simply taking the woke racial and sexual perversion issues, mixed them together, set them on a Marxist foundation (often cleverly hidden as to history and rationale), baptized them with some, mostly misused texts, and then made this the mission of the church.

Has the local church sometimes failed to be a place for all people groups, all languages, all tribes, all cultures, all ethnicities? Yes, sadly so. Everywhere I go there are false divisions in the churches I minister in. There are Romanian/Gypsy divides. There are tribal divides. There are cultural and ethnic divides. There are music divides. I have on a couple of occasions been the barely tolerated minority. While these things exist, they should never divide Christians. Yet, not only do these “in the world realities” divided us, but now, whether you are “woke” or not divides us.

Where does the Bible address the subject? Where is “social justice” in the Bible? You don’t find it much if at all in the New Testament. Yes, Christians in the church, are to treat all Christians as Christians. Their ethnic background, geographical location, social or financial status, master or slave, Jew or Greek, even barbarian and Scythian were to be treated equally as Christians. We are all supposed to get that and yet too often in the church we don’t... with dreadful consequences.

I wanted to pick up the book of Amos in our present context. It is an interesting and yet at some levels, a tiresome book. How can a book aimed at national Israel in a time of great wickedness internally and externally really be of much help to us now? I am moved to do so because:

The book is often misused to justify the importation of the whole fabric of Social Justice errors. It is often quoted with Platt, Keller and Mason the prime culprits. This fact compels me to take up the whole book and work through it Biblically.

Much of the supportive writing for Christian (sic.) Social Justice (hereafter referred to as CSJ) imports social justice ideas back into the Bible or, more outrageously, simply rejects the Bible as inerrant and insufficient for our day. After all, not once are Christian masters told to free their slaves, not even their Christian ones. How can the Bible have anything to say about race and the injustice of slavery to this age?

Preaching Amos requires a Biblical hermeneutic to get it right. We will talk more about how we handle Old Testament texts in a few minutes. If you read the church directly back into Amos or drag the whole book straight across to the church, you fall prey to the abuse often seen in CSJ circles.

Properly handled, the Book of Amos does have much to say to the church about wickedness in the world (judgment is coming) and wickedness among God's people (recognize, repent, reconcile and restore). There is God's justice for the wickedness in the world and Biblical mercy and grace to resolve sin between and among God's people.

I fully expect that our taking this stand will bring attacks against us. So be it. As elders, we are reviewing the Dallas Statement on Social Justice and, with some tweaks, aim to affirm it. On this subject and to go along with the series, please purchase *Fault Lines* by Voddie Baucham. His book is the clearest expose of the Christian Social Justice movement in print. There are other good books that focus on areas - social justice vs God's justice, race vs ethnicity, history as identity, and so on. You will appreciate his life story, his wit, his clarity, his profundity and his love for and focus on the Word.

The Book of Amos, like the Book of Hosea, represents God's message of warning to the northern kingdom of Israel during the latter part of the eighth century B.C. Under Jeroboam II's reign, Israel had grown powerful and wealthy; but it had also become corrupt. The rich trampled the poor, social injustice was rife, and God's final judgment was swiftly approaching. God sent Amos to call the nation back from its suicidal course of rebellion.

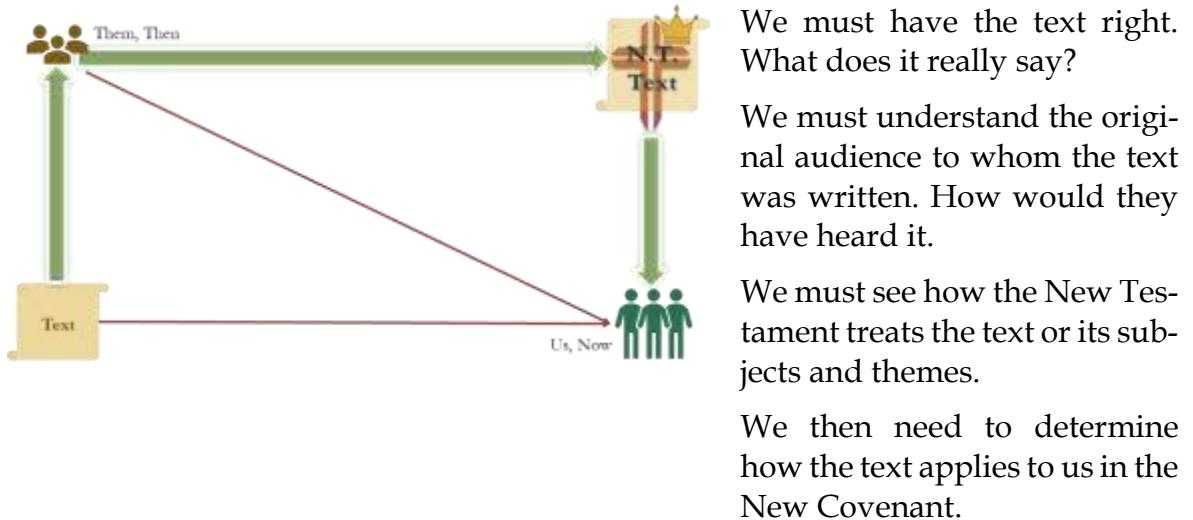
The book is a masterpiece of rhetorical skill; and it is carefully and effectively structured. One of the book's most striking structural features is the prolific use of sevenfold structuring.

Handling the Old Testament

Briefly here is how we handle Old Testament texts. This provides a general framework that then has different tools for different types of literature. Amos is prophetic literature. However, it is largely preaching.

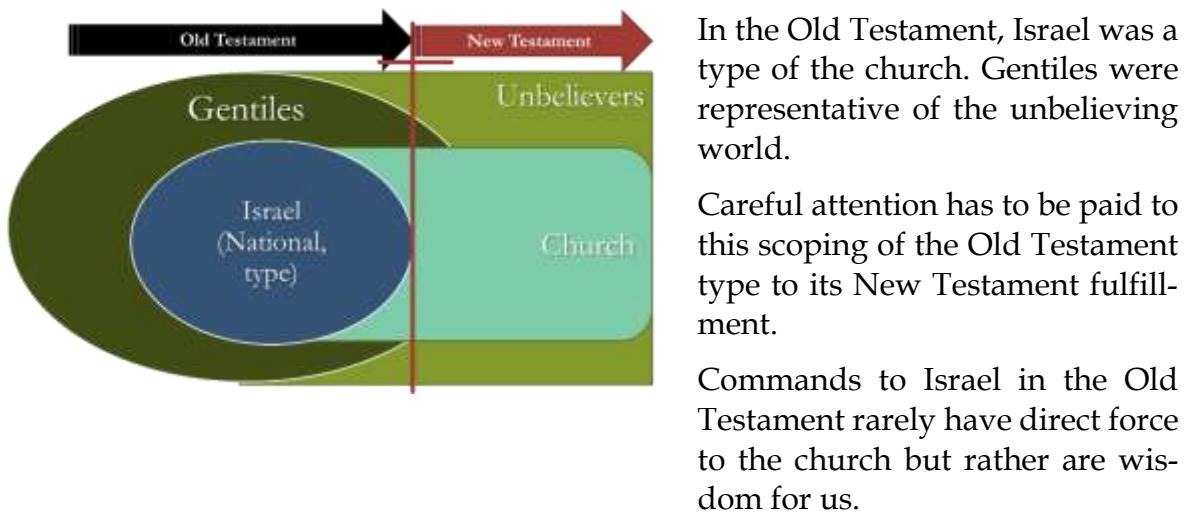
The Long Way Around

In any Old Testament text, we must take the long way around as is represented in this illustration. We do not want to bring Old Testament texts directly across from either the text itself or the Old Testament audience. So many of the “proof texts” for Christian Social Justice are simply violations of this hermeneutical principle.



Identifying the Types

Not correctly identifying the types in the Old Testament prophetic preaching will almost certainly end up confusing the application and making application to the church that we should not.



Amos has sections that preach against the sins and evils of Gentile nations around Israel. In no sense is Israel told to go and remedy of the evils of the Gentile world around them. The evils are described and denounced. But God simply pronounces judgment on them. Romans 1 follows this pattern in preaching. The unbelieving world is full of evil and

sin. God condemns all that evil. But what is preached is the wrath of God against unrighteousness and the hope is the gospel.

As in much of the Old Testament, Israel is viewed as the people of God with a believing remnant among them. The church fulfills what Israel was a type of. The true church are believers in local gatherings who are visible manifestations of the body of Christ. The church is called live in love in such a way that we are a holy people. The evils of the world around us should not be practiced by God's people. The book of Amos can profit us, not because it establishes criteria for the church to change the world, but for the church to be poised to recognize, repent and reconcile when the world's evils come into the church.

So, with all that long introduction, let us take up the book itself.

The Opening (1:1-2)

The book opens by introducing us to the preacher and the tone of the message to God's people.

The Preacher and His Times (v.1)

1 The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

2 And he said:

"The Lord roars from Zion
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds mourn,
and the top of Carmel withers."

~ Amos was a herdsman and a cultivator of sycamore trees (Amos 1:1; 7:14). His name means "burden bearer. He lived in the village of Tekoa, about eleven miles from Jerusalem, during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah (790-740 B.C.) and Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (793-753). Amos was a "layman," a humble farmer and shepherd who was not an official member of the Jewish religious leadership or political establishment. The Lord called him to be a prophet. The Lord sent him to preach to Israel.

At that time, both Judah and Israel were enjoying prosperity and security. Luxury abounded (3:10-15; 5:1-6), and "religion" was popular. Israel flocked to the royal chapel at Bethel (4:4-5), and Judah celebrated the feasts enthusiastically (5:21-22), but the sins of both nations were eroding the religious and moral fiber of the people. Making money was more important than worshiping God (8:5); the rich exploited the poor, the judicial system was corrupt, and injustice flourished (5:11-15, 24; 8:4-6). ~ (adapted from Wiersbe, p.10)

The Lord and His Voice (v.2)

Amos opens his preaching with the tone of the Lord's voice.

²This is what he saw and heard:
“The Lord’s voice will roar from Zion
and thunder from Jerusalem!
The lush pastures of the shepherds will dry up;
the grass on Mount Carmel will wither and die.”

Its Sound

Amos is a true preacher. He is not preaching his own ideas, his own words, serving his own agenda. He speaks of what he has truly experienced. He speaks what he has seen and heard. What he is saying is what God is saying.

God's voice has the sound of roaring and thunder. It is the sound of a distant but approaching storm. The sound of God's voice is rushing down from Zion, from Jerusalem. There is a beautiful and frightening aspect. But it is meant to cause trembling in the world. This is the voice often heard in the book of Revelation. This is the voice of Jesus that will come in judgment. Jesus will roar and thunder from heaven, racing down the mountains of space and time into the clouds bursting into a rebellious and wicked world with doom, bright and dreadful.

Its Result

This is a reversal of creation. The Lord's voice will deconstruct, de-create, destroy. This roaring and thunder is not of rain, but the roaring of a dust storm. What was created fertile, green, growing now lies barren and waste. The voice of the Lord that spoke all things into being now scythes through the wicked as a sword from His mouth.

Judgments against Cities (1:1-10)

Amos opens by pronouncing judgment against several cities. This is what the Lord is roaring and thundering. There is something of a formula that is repeated. "For three transgressions, and for four, I will revoke the judgment planned..." It was Jewish idiom that meant "an indefinite number that has finally come to an end."

This is a tour of Gentile cities full of wickedness. Please refer to the map to get a sense of where those cities were in relation to Israel and Judah. Israel and Judah would have rejoiced to hear these words of condemnation of the Gentile nations.



Against Damascus (1:1-5)

Amos begins with a denunciation of Damascus.

³ Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Damascus,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they have threshed Gilead
with threshing sledges of iron.

⁴ So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.

⁵ I will break the gate-bar of Damascus,
and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven,
and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden;
and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir,"
says the Lord.

Damascus was a city to the northeast of Israel. It was the capital city in Syria. Damascus was how one referred to the nation. What Damascus did Syria was spoken of as doing. Syria had been a long and persistent enemy of Israel.

What did they do? They treated Israel with utter disdain. They threshed the region of Gilead with iron sickles. They had cut the people down. They had been sent by God to punish Israel. But Syria had gone too far. They had exceeded their warrant. They

had torn the people apart like the sharp teeth on a scythe tear the heads of grain from their stalks.

When God sends fire, it is His judgment that is falling. God will destroy Damascus with all its commerce, its cities, palaces, and pleasant places visited by their king for recreation. They will be scattered and will flee to Kir, a place we do not know of today. They were defeated by King Josiah three times and finally the Assyrians conquered them and sent them away into captivity.

Against Gaza (1:6-8)

Amos then announces God's judgment against Gaza.

⁶Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Gaza,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they carried into exile a whole people
to deliver them up to Edom.

⁷ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza,
and it shall devour her strongholds.

⁸ I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod,
and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon;
I will turn my hand against Ekron,
and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,"
says the Lord God.

Gaza was the chief city of the five cities of Philistia. Philistia was on the southwest border of Judah between Judah and the Mediterranean Sea. Gaza was in the southern part and is famous even today for what is known as the Gaza strip.

What did they do? They had raided into Israel, taking people captives. They carried them back into their cities and then sold them as slaves to Edom. Edom was the land settled by the descendants of Esau.

God promised to destroy the cities of Philistia and to bring the people to an end. That judgment fell during the reign of King Uzziah. The Assyrian armies led by Sargon and the Babylonians led by Nebuchadnezzar, captured and enslaved these slave traders.

Against Tyre (1:9-10)

Tyre is next for Amos announcement of God's judgment.

⁹Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Tyre,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they delivered up a whole people to Edom,
and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.

¹⁰ So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre,
and it shall devour her strongholds."

Tyre was the major city in ancient Phenicia. She was northwest of Israel, a coastal city located on the Mediterranean Sea. Phoenicia was just west of the Jewish region of Galilee. Historically, Israel had a friendly relationship with the cities of Tyre in the south and Sidon in the north. This relationship often was economic and commercial as it gave northern Israel access to the sea.

Tyre broke the peace treaty (covenant) and trust relationship with Israel, raiding into northern Israel and taking Jewish captives. They also sold them into slavery to Edom.

God promised to utterly destroy Tyre. This happened in 332 B.C. when Alexander the Great conquered the whole region. The major cities were leveled to the ground and salted so as to make them inhabitable. Tyre was left as a place to dry fishing nets. The British poet Rudyard Kipling warned the England of his day with two lines in *Recessional*:

Lo, all our pomp of yesterday—
Are one with Nineveh and Tyre!¹

Judgments against People Groups (1:12-2:3)

Amos now turns from cities to people groups or nations. He denounces them using the same formula he used against the cities.

Against Edomites (1:11-12)

Amos announces God's judgment against the Edomites.

¹¹ Thus says the Lord:

“For three transgressions of Edom,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because he pursued his brother with the sword
and cast off all pity,
and his anger tore perpetually,
and he kept his wrath forever.

¹² So I will send a fire upon Teman,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.”

The Edomites were a long-standing enemy of Israel. They were the descendants of Esau. They lived in the land along the southern border of Judah. They often caused great grief and trouble for Israel. Their main fortress cities were hewn into the clefts of the mountains and were thought to be impregnable.

They were a wicked, slave holding culture. Most of the nations around Israel including Israel, had slaves. But Edom was in a class all on her own. She purchased slaves from Syria and from Phoenicia. But the wrath of God was poured out on the Edomites because they nursed their hatred of the Jews and were relentless in harassing and attacking her southern border. In 70 AD, Rome destroyed Edom to such a degree that they no longer exist as a nation or a people group. When Israel ceased as a nation in 70 AD, so did Edom.

Against the Ammonites (1:13-15)

Amos denounces two more nations beginning with the Ammonites. Now I know that we do not feel the point of this. However, for the Jews, this was welcome news. This was something to savor and to look forward to. God was circling around the evil Gentiles and pronouncing His judgment on them. For Israel, so much of the evil around them had been perpetrated against the Jews themselves.

¹³ Thus says the Lord:

“For three transgressions of the Ammonites,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead,
that they might enlarge their border.

¹⁴ So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah,
and it shall devour her strongholds,
with shouting on the day of battle,
with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind;

¹⁵ and their king shall go into exile,
he and his princes together,”
says the Lord.

The Ammonites and the Moabites were the descendants of the incestuous fornication of Lot with his two daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). The Ammonites lived in the region on the eastern border of Israel along the district of Gilead.

The Ammonites were a ruthless, warlike people. They made war for the sheer pleasure of fighting. They had raided into Israel on numerous occasions. They committed wholesale slaughter of men, women, and children. They went as far as to cut unborn children from their mother's wombs.

Amos denounced them and prophesied their coming judgment. Because of their wickedness, God would devour them in fire and destroy them in battle. In 734 B.C., the Assyrians destroyed all the cities of Ammon and wiped out their armies. The remnants of the people, their god Molech, and their king were carried into exile. The Assyrians, as they did with all their captives, forced them to intermarry with other people groups and within 3 generations, their identity as a people groups was lost.

Against the Moabites (2:1-3)

Finally, Amos turns the roar and thunder of God's coming judgments on the Moabites.

2 Thus says the Lord:

“For three transgressions of Moab,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because he burned to lime
the bones of the king of Edom.

² So I will send a fire upon Moab,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Kerioth,

and Moab shall die amid uproar,
amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet;
³ I will cut off the ruler from its midst,
and will kill all its princes with him,”
says the Lord.

The Moabites were also the descendants of Lot’s incestuous sin with his daughters. They occupied the territory just off the southeast border of Judah along the south and southeast banks of the Dead Sea.

What did they do? The Moabites are the first to be condemned, not for what they did to the Jews, but for what they did to another Gentile nation. We tend to treat dead bodies with a certain respect. The ancient peoples of the world, because of their idolatry and superstitions, were very, very careful in the treatment of the dead. Egyptian embalming and mummies would be an example of care taken. The Moabites took the bones of an Edomite king and burned them with lye.

Amos declared that the king of Moab and all his leaders were guilty of this evil. They were all subject to the judgment of God. They would be destroyed, along with their cities. Moab was conquered by the Assyrians. The nation of Moab no longer exists. Eventually numerous nomadic tribes roamed the now desolate land.

Reflect and Respond

This text was very important to Israel. It was so important that God drafted a shepherd and farmer to stand up and preach this series of denunciations. But we are here almost three thousand years later. Why is this important for us today? After all, only Syria is a modern nation. Some of the cities exist but not in any way that shapes current events. Why do we care at all about the sins of nations long buried in the dust of God’s judgments?

That God judges wicked people and wicked nations is exactly the point. Amos 1 and Romans 1 tie these together for us. God will judge wicked people and wicked nations. Brothers and sisters, this means that no nation is exempt from the judgment of God. All peoples, all nations are unrighteous, ungodly. Yes, some have more moral and ethical standards than others. But in the end, all will fall to the wrath and judgment of God.

Amos teaches us that the wickedness in the Gentiles brings judgment. Romans teaches us that wickedness in unbelievers brings judgment. Israel in the Old Testament is warned against and is to reject the evil and injustice in Gentiles. The church in the New Testament is warned against and is to reject the evil and injustice among unbelievers. The evil and injustice of the Gentiles is met with judgment of God just as it is in the New Testament. What evil and injustice comes into the church is to be dealt with in the church by the means the Apostles gave. The church’s mission is about the gospel. The church offers unbelievers salvation through the gospel. Never do any of the Apostles give the church the obligation to right the social evils of the world.

Just as Amos did, and Jesus as the New Testament Apostles did, we are to preach against the sins in and of our culture. But we are doing so in order to keep them out of the church. Whatever restraining effect they have is the grace of God.

The evils of the nations around Israel were varied and many. Amos focused on one or two. Every nation that Amos denounced were idol worshippers, corrupt, debauched, and debased. But he did not, in this first sermon, go there. The idiom God uses seems to imply that these listed sins were the last in a long list that brought forth the wrath of God on their heads.

It is clear, from the Word of God, that sin, evil, injustice, wickedness of all kinds practiced by unbelievers all around us will be judged. It is our responsibility to preach the gospel. It is our responsibility to see God's transforming grace change people through all the means that God has established in the church.

We cannot save the world. We cannot save our culture. We cannot save our nation. But we can see God save people. Regardless of what you think about Critical Race Theory, Social Justice, BLM, Intersectionality... my response is simply this:

Romans 1:16–18

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Romans 10:9–15

⁹ Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

¹¹ Cited by Wiersbe, Warren W, p. 14-15.