

Comments on Amos 2

¹ Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: ² But I will send a fire upon Moab, and it shall devour the palaces of Kirioth: and Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet: ³ And I will cut off the judge from the midst thereof, and will slay all the princes thereof with him, saith the LORD.

v1-3 The Lord will strike the Moabite leaders for the atrocities committed by them in their invasion of Edom (v. 1, cf. possibly 2 Kings 3:27). He will strike their palaces (v. 2), and kill their leaders and royalty (v. 3).

⁴ Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: ⁵ But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

v4-5 The Lord will strike Judah because they have not lived the Law of Moses (v. 4). The Lord will strike them and destroy their palaces/citadels (v. 5).

⁶ Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; ⁷ That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name: ⁸ And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

v6-8 The Lord will strike Israel, because they exploit the poor (v. 6-7) and worship idols (v. 8).

The Lord's attention turns away from Israel's neighbors to Israel herself, with the attention running for ch. 3-9.

Note that while the opening address to Israel starts the same way with "for three...and for four" as with the preceding six nations, here the opening address to Israel does not end with the standard "But I will send a fire...", instead launching into a much more detailed explanation of what is going to happen to them and why. We will see the fire theme return in 5:6 and 7:4.

v7 "That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor", their greed is so great they even covet the dirt the poor cast on themselves as a mourning ritual (cf. 2 Sam. 1:2, Job 2:12). Their callousness is so great they will not even grant those whom they exploit the right or ability to mourn their own terrible fate.

"a man and his father will go in unto the same maid", likely a reference to ritual cult prostitution associated with Asherah worship, given the context of v. 8.

v8 "clothes laid to pledge", it is a violation of the Law of Moses to take a poor person's clothing as pledge, cf. Exod. 22:26, Deut. 24:12-14.

"by every altar...the house of their god", references to idolatrous practices.

"they drink the wine of the condemned", they steal or confiscate the wine of men who have been fined. Or, in other words, they use the legal system to their advantage to personally benefit.

⁹ Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.

¹⁰ Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.

¹¹ And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD. ¹² But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.

¹³ Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves. ¹⁴ Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: ¹⁵ Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself.

¹⁶ And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

v9-16 The Lord cleared out the wicked inhabitants of the Promised land (v. 9), and brough Israel up out of Egypt, leading them through the wilderness for forty years to bring them to the Promised Land (v. 10).

The Lord raised up Nazirites and prophets among Israel (v. 11), and Israel made the Nazirites drink wine and told the prophets to shut up (v. 12).

The Lord will take away all of Israel's strength and speed in the day of punishment (v. 13-16).

v9 "the Amorite", while it can have reference to a specific group of people, it is also a generic name used rhetorically for any inhabitant of Canaan occupying the land promised to Abraham, cf. Gen. 15:16, Gen. 48:22.

v11-12 The Lord tried to have holy men among Israel to keep them in the right way, but Israel deliberately subverted and silenced them.

v13 "I am pressed under you", the Hebrew of this verse is obscure. The verse can alternately be translated:

Ah, I will slow your movements
As a wagon is slowed
When it is full of cut grain. (JPS)

I favor this reading, as it fits with the subsequent statements in v. 14-16 where everyone's strength is sapped so they cannot flee or defend themselves. Yes, the Lord is burdened by a disobedient Israel, but the subject here is the Lord's preventing them from escaping the Divine Judgement to come.

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