



Listen to God

God's judgment awaits all who ignore Him and His truth.

AMOS 2:4-16

Automobiles have all kinds of warning lights built into the dash. Though the lights are helpful, the driver must still pay attention to the warnings. Noticing the maintenance light does not automatically change the oil. The warnings are calls to action. The minor prophets acted as “dashboard lights” for the people of Israel and Judah. They signaled warnings of impending judgment, but it was up to the people to listen to God.

**What are some reasons drivers ignore their dashboard warnings?
What are some reasons Christians ignore God's warnings?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

AMOS 1:1–2:16

Amos was from the small village of Tekoa, eleven miles south of Jerusalem and eighteen miles west of the Dead Sea. The land there is barren and useful only for herding sheep and desert vegetation. It is not surprising that before God called Amos to preach, the prophet was a shepherd (Amos 1:1). The name *Amos* means “a load or a burden,” which aptly describes the burden he carried for the people of God.

Though Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, God would call him to go preach to Israel in the north. He began his prophecy with warning signs of judgment against Israel’s neighbors. He chastised Damascus for attacking the people of Gilead (1:3-5). He announced the sins of Gaza, who handed over a community of God’s people to Edom (1:6-8). Amos spoke against Tyre for the same crime as Gaza but also indicated they had broken a treaty with the people of God (1:9-10). Edom also received a warning because they had conducted border raids on Judah and exterminated its citizens (1:11-12). Like Damascus, the Ammonites had attacked the people of God in Gilead, and their attack was especially violent (1:13-15). Amos also gave a warning to Moab because they had desecrated the dead (2:1-3). With these prophecies, Amos completely surrounded the nations of Judah and Israel geographically.

Amos prophesied in a time of economic prosperity, and many of the people in Israel’s capital, Samaria, had become very wealthy. Furthermore, it was a time of military superiority for the Northern Kingdom, since Jeroboam was able to lead his troops to victory over their neighboring enemies and expand their borders. Their victories brought an economic boom which led many to believe the prosperity to be a sign of God’s good pleasure. However, they were mistaken. Instead, God had taken pity on them despite their wickedness (2 Kings 14:23-27).

What resulted was a great deal of religious activity in Israel. They replaced sincere devotion to God with insincere religiosity. They failed to see their sin and need to repent. They thought they were right with God when they were far from Him. They had become as wicked as the pagan nations surrounding them (Amos 1:3–2:3).

As you read Amos 2:4-16, list observations concerning God's indictments of His people. How does hearing God's Word bring responsibility?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

WRONGS REVIEWED (AMOS 2:4-8)

⁴ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Judah for three crimes, even four, because they have rejected the instruction of the LORD and have not kept his statutes. The lies that their ancestors followed have led them astray. ⁵ Therefore, I will send fire against Judah, and it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem. ⁶ The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they sell a righteous person for silver and a needy person for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and obstruct the path of the needy. A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning my holy name. ⁸ They stretch out beside every altar on garments taken as collateral, and in the house of their God they drink wine obtained through fines.

VERSES 4-5

After listing the sins of the other nations, the prophet turned his attention to his own people in the Southern Kingdom of *Judah*. Using the familiar formula, *for three crimes, even four*, Amos began to list the indictments against Judah. All these indictments, unlike the previous ones made against other nations, were judged against the fact that Judah had received direction from God and chose to disobey. The other nations were judged by their crimes against humanity, but Judah received judgment for unfaithfulness to the covenant of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Israelites, like Christians today, were held to a higher moral standard of conduct because they had heard and received *the instruction of the LORD*.

The lies that their ancestors followed indicted the people for returning to their old way of life prior to their knowledge of God. They were living like the pagan nations around them. For that reason, God promised to bring judgment on Judah by sending *fire* and

consuming the *citadels of Jerusalem*, the capital city of Judah. By virtue of their relationship with God, Judah was expected to live a life of obedience that reflected His character.

Why should the people of God live to a higher moral standard than others?

VERSES 6-8

Israel had heard the sins of the surrounding nations, now it was time for Amos to address their own sins. As God would judge Judah, He would also judge Israel. The first wrong listed was the sale of the innocent and needy into slavery. The *righteous* incurred no debt that led them to slavery, yet the Israelites enslaved innocent people. The *needy* were sold into slavery for the price of *a pair of sandals*. Slavery, though widely practiced in that day, was obviously a means Israel used to oppress people while at the same time increasing their own wealth. It was an offense to God.

The second wrong of Israel was the oppression of the poor. A true measure of a person is how they treat the weaker or less powerful, and Israel failed that test. The picture is of those who were not poor pushing *the heads of the poor* into the dirt. They were also obstructing *the path of the needy*. In God's law, the needy had a pathway for their most basic needs to be met (Deut. 15:7-11). Disregarding the Word of God, the Israelites refused to help those who were in need and callously blocked their road to freedom.

The third wrong Amos listed was the abuse of the young *girl*. This is likely a reference to a cultic prostitute. Cultic prostitution was clearly prohibited by the Word of God (Deut. 23:17), as was sexual relations with the same woman by a father and son (Deut. 22:30). The religious and moral behavior of Israel did not match what they knew as members of the covenant people of God.

Verse 8 refers to the practice of a debtor leaving his cloak with a lender as collateral for a loan (Ex. 22:26-27), but even the law demanded that the cloak be returned by evening when the cool weather returned. Instead, the rich oppressed the poor by keeping their cloaks and then using fines to purchase wine for their false worship rituals. The exploitation of debtors was offensive to God.

The Israelites were taking advantage of the poor, and sadly they knew better. Amos sounded the warning alarm to Israel; these wrongs would not go unpunished.

What are the dangers of allowing culture to decide what is right and wrong?

BIBLE SKILL: *Review cross reference verses to gain insight.*

Memorize Amos 1:2 in your preferred Bible translation. Then review the following verses that communicate a similar message: Isaiah 42:13; Jeremiah 25:30; Hosea 11:10; and Joel 3:16. Note the similar words and phrases. How does each passage give us a different view of God's impending judgment? How would you summarize the teaching of these passages in one sentence?

HISTORY RELIVED (AMOS 2:9-11)

⁹ Yet I destroyed the Amorite as Israel advanced; his height was like the cedars, and he was as sturdy as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. ¹⁰ And I brought you from the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness in order to possess the land of the Amorite. ¹¹ I raised up some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazirites. Is this not the case, Israelites? This is the LORD's declaration.

VERSE 9

Although Israel had ignored the commands of God, they needed only to look to the past to remember He was a God of grace who would help in time of need. One such evidence of His grace was

giving them the promised land during the time of the patriarchs. God worked through patriarchs like Abraham to drive out the *Amorite* people. They were the people who inhabited the land prior to the conquest and the enslavement in Egypt. The passage describes the fear of the Israelites as they approached the promised land, stating that they saw the enemy's height *like the cedars* and its fortification as *sturdy as the oaks*. This resembled the report of the spies from Kadesh when Moses sent scouts into the land of Canaan (Num. 13:32-33). The spies, all except Joshua and Caleb, saw the Canaanites' physical size and entrenched army as reason to retreat rather than to go forward. As a result of their unbelief, the children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness before the conquest of the land. But when the conquest began, God had given them the victory. God was full of grace even though the Israelites had lacked faith, and He gave them the promised land. Their past history should have encouraged Israel to turn to God's grace.

VERSES 10-11

Israel's unfaithfulness to God was in stark contrast to God's actions toward them. Though Israel was unfaithful to God, He didn't just write them off. Instead, He gave messages to be delivered through His prophets. In the eighth century BC, God raised up Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Amos, to bring prophetic messages to His people. He also raised up some of the young men as *Nazirites*. This special class of young men demonstrated their dedication to God by taking a vow to refrain from alcohol, never to cut their hair, and not to defile themselves by touching the dead (Num. 6:1-8). Samson was the best known of the Nazirites prior to the time of Amos (Judg. 13:4). Rather than leave the Israelites to their enemies, God raised up deliverers who would preserve their nation.

Seeing God's grace should not make one want to sin more but less.

A quick look at the history of Israel revealed that God was full of grace and awaited Israel's repentance to receive the grace they needed to avoid further judgment for their sins. Even though they were committing many of the same sins as the nations around them, they should have known better than others how God would respond to them with His grace. Likewise, Christians should

recount God's gracious activity in their lives and respond with obedience rather than disobedience. Seeing God's grace should not make one want to sin more but less.

How does God's providing messengers and examples in history point to His grace?

JUDGMENT RECKONED (AMOS 2:12-16)

¹² But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets, "Do not prophesy." ¹³ Look, I am about to crush you in your place as a wagon crushes when full of grain. ¹⁴ Escape will fail the swift, the strong one will not maintain his strength, and the warrior will not save his life. ¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground, the one who is swift of foot will not save himself, and the one riding a horse will not save his life. ¹⁶ Even the most courageous of the warriors will flee naked on that day — this is the LORD's declaration.

VERSE 12

The Israelites' disregard of God was evident in two ways. First, they *made the Nazirites drink wine*. The Nazirites had become symbolic, burdensome nags to a people who were determined to ignore God. Consequently, Israel sought to eliminate the nuisance of the Nazirites by coercing them to drink wine, thus breaking their vow to God. Then the Israelites would no longer have to face the accusations of devoted lives in their midst.

In addition, the people *commanded the prophets, "Do not prophesy."* Ignoring a traffic light will not make the oncoming traffic go away but will put the driver in impending peril. On numerous occasions in Israel's history, the Israelites attempted to silence God's messengers. Even Amos would encounter this kind of opposition when Amaziah the priest insisted he leave Israel and return to his home in Judah (7:12-13). The Israelites had no desire to hear God's message.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scripture*

The Bible reveals the principles by which God judges us.
(See Deuteronomy 17:19; Hebrews 4:12.)

VERSES 13-16

Amos presented seven images indicating God's judgment would be complete and applied to all. First, God's judgment would be like a *wagon* that *crushes when full of grain*. As a full wagon presses down into the earth, so God was about to press Israel down. Ironically, Israel had pressed down the poor (Amos 2:7), and now God would return the action toward them.

Second, Israel would try to flee like those who were *swift*, but they would not be able to escape the judgment of God. Amos stated this truth again in verse 15, emphasizing the folly of trying to run.

The third image was a *strong* person who was unable to maintain his *strength*. These images describe a people seized by horror in their confrontation with God. This horror was especially evident in the fourth description, a *warrior* unable to *save his life*. Those who ignored the warnings of God would not be able to withstand His judgment.

The final three images continue to portray the inability to escape judgment from God. As a coward, *the archer* would flee the impending judgment. Even as fast as a *horse* could run, the soldier could not outrun the judgment of God. Finally, even the *most courageous of the warriors will flee naked on that day*. Those arrayed for full battle would flee naked before the presence of the Lord.

God had warned His people by His prophets. This should have caused them to realize God is full of grace and desires to make people right with Himself. However, they ignored His message and instead began to store up God's judgment that would eventually be poured out upon them when the Assyrians overtook Samaria in 722 BC, about thirty years after the prophet Amos preached.

What things do people trust in today to avoid God's judgment?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God expects His people to live a life of obedience that reflects His character.
- Believers should recount God's grace in their lives, responding with obedience.
- Only through God's grace will a person escape His complete judgment.

Discuss as a group the role the group plays in helping each other listen to God and His truth. What actions might help the group support each other to a greater degree when it comes to heeding God's Word?

If Amos had been addressing to you, what wrongs would be listed and what history recounted of God acting on your behalf? How do each of the things identified serve as motivation to follow Him and His truth? What actions do you need to take considering what you identified?

PRAYER NEEDS
