

## Vayeishev: Amos 2:6-3:8



At the peak of the expansion, wealth, power, and ease of the Kingdoms of Judah in the south and Israel in the north, God sent a bevy of prophets to turn His people from sin. These prophets identified the failings of the kingdoms' leadership and people, chastised them, and recounted visions of destruction; they also encouraged them with powerful visions of hope for the future. A contemporary of Hosea in Israel and Isaiah in Judah, Amos prophesied in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of the wicked Jeroboam II. Amos primarily lambasted its mistreatment of society's weakest, also touching on its idolatry and other sins.

At the beginning of his book, Amos turns his prophetic voice against six of Israel's neighbors as well as Judah. He uses the same phrase each time ("For three transgressions, but not four...") to introduce one or two of each nation's respective cruelties or failures that God will punish. The Haftarah is the climax of this address, with Amos turning the formula against his primary target, Israel. In seven ways, the powerful and wealthy kingdom has gone "above and beyond" in mistreating its poor and vulnerable, and in its sexual brazenness. As Joseph's brothers did in the Parashah, they have sold righteous men for cash. Instead of being grateful for God's protection throughout history, Israel has defiled the sanctity of prophets and nazirites God sent to return them to Him. God will therefore punish Israel which, weighed down by these sins, will be unable to escape His wrath. Likely in response to his critics, Amos clarifies that God is punishing Israel more severely than its neighbors because of - not despite - His choosing them as His family from among all Earth's families. Since God repeatedly shows Amos Israel's coming violent destruction, he cannot but warn them, with hope they will return to God.

### Haftarah Breakdown

**Verses 2:6-8:** Although God forgives, He will not forgive the wealthy Northern Kingdom's sins against their poor, their brazen sexual depravity, or even their disrespect for their idolatrous temple.

Amos 2:6	עמוס ב:ו
Thus says the Lord: "For three of Israel's transgressions [I will not punish] but for the fourth I will not turn away [from punishing]: for their selling a righteous person for silver, and a poor person for a pair of sandals."	כֹּה אָמַר ה' עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל-אַרְבַּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֵנּוּ עַל-מִקְרָם בְּכֶסֶף צְדִיק וְאֶבְיוֹן בְּעֵבֶר נְעָלִים:

**Verses 2:9-12:** God destroyed the powerful Emorites, redeemed His people from Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, gave them the land of Canaan, and even sent them prophets and nazirites- yet the Northern Kingdom intentionally defiled them and rejected God.

Amos 2:12	עמוס ב:י"ב
[But] you gave the nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, "Prophesy not!"	וַתִּשְׁקוּ אֶת-הַנְּזִירִים יַיִן וְעַל-הַנְּבִיאִים צִוִּיתָם לֵאמֹר לֹא תִנְבְּאוּ:

**Verses 2:13-16:** "Weighed down" by their sins, even the mightiest in the Northern Kingdom will be unable to escape God's coming day of punishment.

Amos 2:16	עמוס ב:ט"ז
"[Even] the [most] strong-hearted among the mighty shall flee away naked on that day," says the Lord.	וְאֶמְיִן לְבֹו בְּגֹבְרִים עָרוֹם יָנוֹס בְּיוֹם-הַהוּא נְאֻם-ה':

Verses 3:1-2: God chose Israel from among all other nations and redeemed it from Egypt. The resulting intimate relationship means that God is more - not less, as some of his listeners thought - exacting regarding Israel's sins.

Amos 3:2	עמוס ג:ב
You alone have I known from among all Earth's families. Therefore, I will visit upon you [punish] all your iniquities.	רַק אֶתְכֶם יָדַעְתִּי מִכָּל מְשֻׁפְחוֹת הָאָדָמָה עַל-כֵּן אֶפְקֹד עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם:

Verses 3:3-8: Since God is showing the prophet clear signs of His imminent punishment of the people, he is compelled to warn them of their grim future if they do not return to God.

Amos 3:8	עמוס ג:ח
The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?	אֲרִיֵּה שָׁאָג מִי לֹא יִירָא אֲדוֹנָי ה' דִּבֶּר מִי לֹא יִנְבֵּא:

### Connections

The Talmud uses Amos's words to highlight **a similarity between personal and communal forgiveness** by God.

Yoma 86b	יומא פ"ו ב
R. Yosai bar Yehuda says: "When a person commits a transgression the first time, he is forgiven; a second time, he is forgiven; a third time, he is forgiven; but the fourth time, he is not forgiven, as it is stated: 'Thus says the Lord: "For three of Israel's transgressions [I will not punish] but for the fourth I will not turn away [from punishing]."' (Amos 2:6)' It is also stated, 'Behold, all these God does twice or three times with a man.' (Job 33:29)" Why [did R. Yosai cite an] additional verse [when the first suffices]? Lest you say that [Amos's] words apply to the community but not to an individual, come and hear [that] "Behold, all these things God does twice or three times with a man," [implying the same rule applies even to an individual.]	רבי יוסי בר יהודה אומר: אדם עובר עבירה פעם ראשונה — מוחלין לו, שנייה — מוחלין לו, שלישית — מוחלין לו, רביעית — אין מוחלין לו, שנאמר: "כה אמר ה' על שלשה פשעי ישראל ועל ארבעה לא אשיבנו", ונאמר: "הו כל אלה יפעל אל פעמים שלש עם גבר." מאי "ואומר"? וכי תימא: הני מילי בצייבור, אבל ביחיד — לא, תא שמע: "הו כל אלה יפעל אל פעמים שלש עם גבר"

Verse 3:6 refers to the fear inspired by a shofar blast in a city. This is a source for the **custom of blowing the shofar throughout the month of Elul**.

Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 128:2	קיצור שלחן ערוך קכ"ח:ב
It is customary to blow the shofar during this month [Elul]...The reason for the blowings during this month is to awaken the people to repent, for the shofar [blow]'s nature is to awaken and to inspire fear, as the verse says, "If a shofar is sounded in a city, will the people not tremble?" (Amos 3:6)	נוהגין לתקוע שופר בחודש זה...וטעם התקיעות בחודש זה כדי לעורר את העם לתשובה, כי כן הוא הטבע של השופר לעורר ולהקריד, כמו שאמר הכתוב, אם יתקע שופר בעיר ועם לא יחרדו.

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