

AMOS 2:6 – 2:16

God is like a roaring lion has circled Israel's neighbors and spoken against them. In most war oracles they may now expect news of salvation... Yet, if they have agreed with him about all that has been said, they are now left with no words or excuses.

The Lord roars in Israel

2:6 Thus says the Lord:

3 "For three transgressions of Israel,

4 and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
Lit. "to return", "to turn back",
"to restore", "to relent"

The sins are against the needy and vulnerable in the community:

- the innocent and needy
- the poor and afflicted
- the female

because they sell the righteous for silver,
or "innocent" (Ex. 23:7-8, Lev. 25:39)

Parallelism: Mercilessness against the needy

and the needy for a pair of sandals—

7 those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth
(cont. 1 Sam 2:8, Ps 113:7) or "dishonored" those treated in contempt

and turn aside the way of the afflicted
(see Job 24:4 for a similar phrase = violent oppression, bullying and humiliating)
or "humbled" those treated lowly

Parallelism: Violence against the needy

a man and his father go in to the same girl,
(Lev. 18:8, 18, Duet. 22:30, Ex. 21:7-11)

so that my holy name is profaned
(Lev. 20:3, 21:6, 22:2, Ps 74:7) <-- This acts as a summary of the result of the sin and connects the 5 before with the 2 afterwards! (5+2)

The sins take place in religious environments: altars and temple. They sin in the very presence of God – the one who cares for the poor and needy!

8 they lay themselves down beside every altar

on garments taken in pledge,
(Ex. 22:26-27, Deut. 24:12-13)

and in the house of their God they drink

Parallelism: Profane worship

the wine of those who have been fined.

The 7 sins echo the 7 nations addressed before Israel and show the completeness of Israel's sin!

They look like the nations in their violence against the needy and their mercilessness. However, they are doing it against their own people!

Is it not indeed so?

9 Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them,
Lit. to exterminate, annihilate
(Num. 21:23-24, Joshua 10:12, 24:8)

whose height was like the height of the cedars
(Num. 13:22-33)

and who was as strong as the oaks;

Parallelism:
They were tall as cedar trees and as strong (or wide) as oaks. They were an undefeatable foe – if it had not been for God.

I destroyed his fruit above

and his roots beneath.

Merism:
He destroyed everything from
fruit to roots – i.e. everything!

The message begins
becoming personal:
"you"

10 Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt

and led you forty years in the wilderness,

to possess the land of the Amorite.

11 And I raised up some of your sons for prophets,
or "set up" "established" (Deut. 18:18 - 20)

and some of your young men for Nazirites.
(Numbers 6:1-21)

Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?"

declares the Lord.

12 "But you made the Nazirites drink wine,

and commanded the prophets,

saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'

Chiasm:
a. Prophets
b. Nazirites
c. Is it not so?
b'. Nazirites
a'. Prophets

There is a literary connection between the people's
current sin in the temples and their rejection of God's
kindness among them in history and their shutting of
their ears to his words!

In that
day

13 Behold! I will press you down in your place,

as a cart full of sheaves presses down.

14 Flight shall perish from the swift,

and the strong shall not retain his strength,

nor shall the mighty save his life;

15 he who handles the bow shall not stand,

Just as the Amorites were strong and yet
destroyed by God, so now the Israelites who
are acting like the nations will be destroyed.

God's kindness to Israel in history:
* he brought them out of Egyptian
slavery, he led them through
danger
* he gave them the land – though
it was possessed by Amorites who
were strong.
Together these three things are
what has given them an identity!
(see Duet. 8)

his kindness continued
* he spoke to them – calling out
prophets and Nazirites

In contrast to how Israel treated
the poor, vulnerable and oppressed
– God did not take advantage of
them but showed them kindness!

They have ignored him and sought
to shut him up – despite his great
kindness to them.

No sending fire and devouring
strongholds! Rather very more
personal – a crushing and
splitting open.

and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself,
nor shall he who rides the horse save his life.
¹⁶ and he who is stout of heart among the mighty
shall flee away naked in that day,
declares the Lord.

The punishment is against seven groups
– covering the entire Israel military:
* 3 one-word Hebrew descriptions in
first parallel:
the swift, the strong, the warrior

* 3 two-word Hebrew descriptions in
second parallel:
the bow handler, the swift foot, the
horse rider,

* and 1 three-word Hebrew description:
the strong hearted warrior.

None will escape God's punishment –
their very strength and what they
trust in is removed and will not save!

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NOTES:

2:6 – 8

For background on the “**For three transgressions, and for four**” structure, as well as the historical and theological pattern of judgment introduced in Amos, see the notes on Amos 1:3–2:5.

“**Selling the righteous for silver**” likely refers to the practice of debt-slavery. In times of financial hardship, farmers or the poor might take out high-interest loans. If they failed to repay, the penalty could be enslavement (Lev 25:39, 47).

“**A man and his father go in to the same girl**” most likely refers to the abuse of a female household servant or slave. While the Torah included legal protections for servants in such situations (Ex 21:2–11), this practice disregards those protections entirely. The act is both sexually immoral and a violation of basic human dignity (cf. Lev 18:8; Deut. 27:20).

“**Garments taken in pledge**” were used as collateral for loans. However, God's law required that such garments be returned by nightfall so the poor would not sleep exposed (Ex 22:26–27; Deut. 24:12–13). Retaining the garment overnight—especially while reclining on it at a place of worship—reveals hypocrisy and cruelty. God promises in the verses associated with this law that he will care for and hear the cries of the poor and will have compassion.

2:9 – 12

The **Amorites** were a prominent Canaanite people, scattered throughout the hill country on both sides of the Jordan River. Their territory originally included key cities such as Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. They were known for their physical stature and strength, and their name became synonymous with Canaanite resistance to Israel's inheritance of the land. Even before Israel entered Canaan proper, God gave them victory over two Amorite kings—Sihon and Og—who ruled much of the Transjordan (see Numbers 21:21–35; Joshua 12:1–6). These early victories were understood as a decisive turning point in Israel's history and a sign of God's power (cf. Psalm 135:11; 136:19–20). Over time, “Amorites” became a representative term for the peoples of Canaan more generally (see Genesis 48:22; Joshua 24:11–15).

“**His fruit above and his roots beneath**” is an example of a merism, a literary technique in which two extremes are mentioned to represent the whole. In this case, “fruit above” and “roots beneath” poetically describe the entire tree—from top to bottom—symbolizing total destruction. This emphasizes that God's defeat of the Amorites was complete and thorough.

The **Nazarites** were Israelites who made a special vow of separation to God for a defined period of time (Numbers 6:1–21). The Hebrew root likely comes from a term meaning “to separate” or “to consecrate.” Their vow included three primary restrictions: abstaining from wine and anything from the grapevine, refraining from cutting their hair, and avoiding contact with the dead. These practices marked them as visibly distinct within the community and symbolized purity and dedication to God. Unlike priestly holiness (which was inherited), Nazarite holiness was voluntary and personal. There is no equivalent practice in surrounding Ancient Near Eastern cultures—Israel’s Nazarite vow was unique in emphasizing voluntary self-denial for the sake of consecration to Yahweh. The vow created a clear contrast with the religious and ritual practices of the surrounding nations.

2:13 – 16

Verses 13–16 announce the total collapse of Israel’s military strength through a tightly structured poetic sequence. The punishment is directed against seven categories of warriors—a sevenfold description that represents the whole army of Israel. The Hebrew structure unfolds in three increasing parallels: first, three one-word descriptions—the swift, the strong, and the warrior. Then three two-word phrases—the bow-handler, the fleet of foot, and the horse rider. Finally, it culminates in a single three-word phrase—the strong-hearted warrior. This deliberate pattern reinforces the completeness of the coming judgment.

COMMENTARY:

¶1: THE LORD ROARS IN ISRAEL (2:6 – 8)

God has spoken against the nations surrounding Israel. In a typical prophetic sequence, we might expect the next movement to be salvation for God’s people. The enemy is judged; now the covenant people are spared. But Amos upends this expectation. Like a lion circling its prey, God has been drawing closer. Now He pounces—not on the nations, but on His true target: Israel itself. They will not be spared, because they are no better than the nations around them.

In form, this oracle begins just like those against the nations. The familiar refrain—“for three transgressions, and for four”—signals ongoing rebellion. As in previous oracles, God lists their sins and pronounces judgment. But here the list is longer, more detailed, and deeply personal. This is not about international aggression; it is about internal injustice. Israel has turned against its own. And unlike the nations, Israel has received God’s law and covenant. Their guilt is deeper; their accountability greater. Though they were called to be a kingdom of priests, they have profaned God’s name among the nations.

Verses 6–8 summarize Israel’s sins in seven transgressions, arranged in a 5+2 literary pattern—a structure Amos will use again. The number seven symbolizes completeness: their sin is total. And the form links them structurally to the seven nations addressed earlier. The implication is clear: though they were called to be holy and distinct, Israel has become just like the nations.

The first five sins focus on acts of injustice and cruelty, especially against the vulnerable. Amos names the victims: the innocent, the needy, the poor, the afflicted, the servant girl. These are not enemies or outsiders—they are fellow Israelites. Yet instead of showing compassion, the powerful have exploited and discarded them. The righteous are sold for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. These lines likely reflect debt-slavery and the trivialization of justice. Human lives are treated as disposable, valued less than the price of footwear. The poor are trampled, silenced, and obstructed from justice. This may point to legal barriers, economic systems, or outright oppression, designed to protect the powerful and suppress the weak. Israel’s social order has become distorted by greed and fear.

The abuse continues with a father and son violating the same woman, likely a household servant. What should have been protected by God’s law is instead treated with contempt. Sexual abuse is normalized and shared, exposing both moral degradation and spiritual blindness. These sins mirror the offenses of the nations—Gaza and Tyre’s slave trade, Edom’s hatred, Ammon’s cruelty. Israel has

become indistinguishable from the surrounding nations. But unlike them, they claim to bear God's name.

In verse 7, God declares: "they profane my holy name." Their injustice does more than harm others—it distorts who God is. Israel was meant to reflect God's compassion and holiness. Instead, they have made Him look cruel, indifferent, and partial to the powerful. Their failure is not just personal; it is theological. They misrepresent Yahweh to the world.

The final two transgressions take place in religious settings—at the altar, in the very spaces meant for worship. But instead of repentance, there is indulgence. Garments taken in pledge and wine extracted through exploitation become comforts enjoyed before God Himself. Their worship is tainted, their sacrifices hollow. Religious observance continues, but it is built on injustice. God is not honored; He is mocked.

These verses expose Israel's deep injustice—not only in society, but even in their places of worship. Their sin is not only moral but systemic, not only social but spiritual. They were called to bear God's name and reflect His character, especially toward the vulnerable. Instead, they have profaned His name. And yet, as the next verses will show, this is not only a rejection of God's law—it is a rejection of God Himself. Their injustice is the fruit of a deeper unfaithfulness.

¶2: IS IT NOT INDEED SO (2:9 – 12)

If this oracle followed the pattern of the previous ones, we would expect a list of punishments to follow the accusations. That judgment is indeed coming—but here, Amos introduces something different. Before announcing the consequences, he pauses to recall God's relationship with Israel. This is a deliberate and powerful shift. Unlike the other nations, Israel knows Yahweh personally. They have experienced His rescue, provision, and presence. Their sins, therefore, are not just crimes—they are betrayals.

When Israel was weak and oppressed, God showed them compassion. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt—not because they were strong, deserving, or ready, but simply because He chose to be gracious. He then led them through the wilderness, providing for them in every season of need. He did not exploit them in their vulnerability; He cared for them. This history stands in sharp contrast to Israel's current behavior. They now exploit the poor and vulnerable, the very people God once protected them as. The irony is devastating: the people who were once oppressed have become the oppressors.

God's salvation from Egypt should have shaped their identity. Over and over again in the Torah, God reminds Israel of His redemption and calls them to live in response to it: "You were slaves in Egypt, and I redeemed you—therefore live this way..." (cf. Deut. 24:17–22; Exod. 22:21–27). This story was meant to form their ethics, humility, and compassion. But clearly, they have forgotten.

Even more, God did not abandon them in the wilderness. For forty years He walked with them patiently—despite their grumbling, disobedience, and idolatry. And in the end, He brought them into a good land. The Amorites, strong and fearsome as giants, were driven out by God's hand. Israel inherited what they could never have earned—a land, a home, a future. But they no longer see it as a gift. Their current arrogance and injustice suggest that they believe they have earned it all themselves.

In addition to this history of mercy and provision, God also sent them prophets and Nazarites—people among them devoted to truth and holiness. The prophets spoke His Word, and the Nazarites lived visibly set-apart lives. Both served as living testimonies of what it meant to belong to God. These roles had no parallel in the surrounding cultures; they were a unique grace, a gift of revelation and reminder. But Israel rejected these gifts. They silenced the prophets and corrupted the Nazarites—forcing them to break their vows and abandon their consecration. Why? Because they didn't want to be challenged. They preferred comfort and compromise over conviction and repentance.

There is also a striking literary connection between this rejection and the earlier description of Israel's worship. The wine they drink at the altar—gained through exploitation—is mirrored in the wine they

force the Nazarites to consume. Both acts show contempt for God's holiness. One desecrates the house of God; the other desecrates a life set apart for Him. Their injustice and their spiritual resistance are deeply intertwined—revealing a people who reject both God's compassion in history and His truth in the present.

God confronts them with a piercing question: “Is this not so, O people of Israel?” The answer is obvious. If they say “no,” they accuse God of lying. But if they say “yes,” then they must acknowledge that their guilt is real—and that they have failed to respond to grace with obedience.

The tone here becomes deeply personal. This is no longer about foreign enemies or abstract injustice—it is about a people in covenant with God who have turned away. Their rejection of His Word and their corruption of His gifts are not only offensive—they are grotesque in light of all He has done. The sins of those who know God intimately carry a different weight. Israel has not just broken a law—they have broken relationship.

¶3: IN THAT DAY (2:13 – 16)

Unlike the oracles against the nations, this final section of Israel's indictment does not mention fire or strongholds. Instead, God uses a different image—one far more personal and visceral. He will press them down like a cart overloaded with grain. The metaphor would have been immediately understood by Amos's agricultural audience: a wooden cart so heavy with harvest that it groans, creaks, and threatens to split the earth beneath it. Some interpreters suggest this may even foreshadow the earthquake mentioned in 1:1. But more than just weight, the image conveys pressure, crushing force, and inescapable judgment. God's wrath is not distant—it presses close, as personal as their rebellion has been.

What follows is a poetic dismantling of Israel's confidence in its military might. Seven distinct groups are named, forming a deliberate structure: three one-word descriptions (the swift, the strong, the warrior), three two-word descriptions (the bow-handler, the fleet of foot, the horseman), and a final three-word description (the strong-hearted warrior). This sevenfold list echoes the seven sins earlier mentioned in verses 6–8, creating a literary symmetry that reinforces the completeness of Israel's guilt and the totality of their downfall. Amos is not describing part of the army—he is describing the whole. And the blow lands where it hurts most: at the very point of their strength.

Each group fails. The swift cannot escape. The strong lose their power. Even the bravest are overtaken by fear. Archers, riders, runners—those trained for battle and confident in their skills—are brought to nothing. Repeatedly, we are told they “shall not save his life.” What they trusted in will betray them. Their own strength, speed, weapons, and courage cannot deliver them from the hand of God. In the end, the only ones who survive are those who flee naked—stripped not only of protection but of dignity.

This is not mere military defeat; it is divine undoing. The very people who once crushed the weak will now be crushed. The oppressors will become the vulnerable. The judgment fits the crime. As God had destroyed the Amorites before Israel, so now He will treat Israel as He did their enemies. The mighty will fall, and the proud will be silenced.

The passage closes with a sobering cry: “Behold!” This is not a gradual unraveling but a sudden, total collapse. God's judgment does not arrive through battle—it bypasses it entirely. There is no resistance. No hope. Only terror. It is, as Leviticus 26:36–39 warned, the dreadful consequence of covenant unfaithfulness: a day when the people of God, who once stood secure in His promises, now flee before Him in fear.

SUMMARY OF AMOS 2:6 – 16

After addressing the surrounding nations, God turns His judgment toward His own people. At first glance, Israel's sins might not seem as horrific as the war crimes or slave trading condemned earlier. But God views them with equal severity. By placing Israel's injustices within the same prophetic framework—“for three transgressions, and for four”—He declares that their cruelty is just as grievous.

This is because Israel, unlike the nations, has known God personally. They were chosen, redeemed, and entrusted with His covenant. With greater revelation comes greater responsibility.

They have committed systemic injustice against the vulnerable: the poor, the needy, the afflicted, and the powerless. They have twisted their legal, economic, and religious systems into tools of exploitation. In doing so, they have done something even more grievous—they have profaned the holy name of the Lord. God had tied His name to Israel so that the nations might know His character through them. Instead, their cruelty and corruption have portrayed Him as unjust, indifferent, and partial to the powerful. Their sin is not only social—it is theological. They have misrepresented God Himself.

This oracle introduces something absent from the previous indictments: a recounting of God's relationship with Israel. He rescued them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and gave them the land they now call home. He did not take advantage of them in their weakness—He protected and provided. He gave them prophets to speak His Word and Nazarites to live as examples of devotion. But they have rejected these gifts—silencing the prophets and corrupting the Nazarites. The wine they exploit from the poor is the very wine they force the Nazarites to drink—a literary link that reveals the unity between their social oppression and spiritual resistance. In doing so, they reject both God's truth in the present and His compassion in the past. Their injustice is the fruit of a deeper forgetfulness—a refusal to let God's grace transform their identity.

We also see clearly where God stands: with the weak, the vulnerable, and the poor. Israel, once rescued in weakness, is now rich and abusive. But God has not changed. He still hears the cry of the afflicted. And so, the same God who once saved Israel from injustice will now bring justice against them—for the sake of those they have oppressed. He will not allow the strong to trample the weak unchecked, even when those strong ones are His own people.

The judgment is devastating. Israel expected the roar of the lion to mean victory—but it signals their own destruction. Their military might will fail. Their warriors will flee in shame. The very ones who once felt secure in God's favor now face His righteous fury. God's judgment is deeply personal. Unlike the fire and strongholds mentioned in the oracles against the nations, Israel is crushed like an overloaded cart. This is no abstract punishment—it is weighty, intimate, inescapable.

And it is not arbitrary—it is fitting. They, who once crushed others, will now be crushed. The reversal is complete. As God once destroyed the Amorites before Israel, so now He will treat Israel like the Amorites. The people who were saved are now the people who fall.

This is not just military defeat—it is divine undoing. Their covenant unfaithfulness has rendered them indistinguishable from the nations. God's judgment protects the integrity of His name. His people must reflect His character—or face His discipline.

The day of the Lord is coming—but it is not a day of joy. It is a day of reckoning. Israel's story, which began in deliverance, is veering toward ruin. Yet even here, God's justice serves a purpose. By judging Israel, God declares to the world that He does not condone injustice—not even among His own people. His name will not be profaned. His people must either reflect His holiness—or be refined by His justice.

APPLICATION – IDEAS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

God's judgment of Israel is not only a warning—it is an invitation to self-examination. Israel failed to respond to God's grace with faithfulness. Instead of being transformed by His kindness, they forgot their story and misrepresented His name. This passage challenges us to consider how we, too, might fall into the same patterns—forgetting grace, neglecting justice, and closing our ears to God's Word.

Israel's downfall began when they forgot their redemption. They no longer saw themselves as rescued, dependent people—and their hearts grew proud. We too are called to remember what God has done: His rescue, His leading, His provision. Recalling our story with Him keeps us grounded in humility and gratitude. God rescued us when we were helpless. He showed us mercy, led us patiently, and spoke

His Word to us. Like Israel, we are meant to live in response to this grace. But when we forget, pride takes root. We become self-reliant, indifferent, and unfaithful.

- How regularly do you pause to reflect on God's kindness and what He's done for you?
- In what ways is your life being shaped by gratitude and remembrance?
- Are there places where pride or self-reliance have crept in—where you've become numb to God's grace?

God's heart is always with the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. His people are called to reflect that same heart. Amos reminds us that true faithfulness includes justice—not as a political slogan, but as a personal and communal ethic of care, sacrifice, and compassion. It means choosing mercy over indifference, compassion over comfort, and laying aside our rights for the good of others. Like God, we are called to see the brokenness around us and respond—not with apathy or exploitation, but with kindness and costly love.

- In what ways are you caring for the vulnerable around you? Are you actively seeking to serve those in need?
- Are there habits, systems, or comforts in your life that benefit you at the expense of others?
- Where might self-interest be keeping you from showing compassion?
- What would it look like to embody God's mercy in your relationships and daily decisions?

God had given Israel prophets and Nazarites—but they resisted them. They silenced the voices that challenged their comfort. They didn't want to be confronted, even by truth. Yet God speaks—even hard words—because He loves us. He gives us His Word to shape us and draw us near. To be His people means keeping our hearts tender and our ears open. It means remaining teachable, humble, and ready to respond.

- Are you keeping your heart soft and open to God's voice?
- How do you respond to correction or challenge from God's Word?
- What practices help you cultivate a listening heart and a life of responsive obedience?