

A Study of the Minor Prophets
The Book of Amos ~ Chapter 2-3
Lesson 2

I.1:3–2:16 **“For three crimes, even four.”** The prophets frequently proclaim judgment against the nations as a means to encourage the people of Israel. Amos’s prophetic ministry was addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel, so his pronouncements of judgment against six surrounding foreign nations, along with the southern kingdom of Judah, must have been met with hopeful expectation (see 5:14, 18). However, the prophet used their sense of assurance to trap them in their own deception. Utilizing a kind of “rhetoric of entrapment,” Amos masterfully drew Israel into thinking that God was pronouncing judgment upon their enemies for their own benefit, only to turn the tables on them and pronounce his most damning judgments in an unexpected eighth oracle against his own people, Israel.

II.**The eight-part series** of escalating oracles employs a numerical pattern, suggesting a heightened degree of guilt; in essence, with three sins God’s cup of wrath is filled, with the fourth it has overflowed. However, interestingly, each installment of the numerical formula is followed not by a list of four crimes, but just one. Each indictment against the nations comprised a sin so egregious that any sane person would agree that such a crime must be avenged; but nevertheless, only one crime is highlighted.

III.**Oracle against Israel.** Although the oracle is introduced with the same numerical formula as the others, the listed crimes expand beyond a single distinct transgression. Israel’s judgment is warranted because she has waged war against her own people, and each of the listed crimes indicts Israel for various aspects of social injustice. Israel has 1 aggressively pursued the debtor; 2 oppressed the slave, even sexually; 3 broken the law that protected the debtor; and, 4 encouraged sin among the consecrated, while suppressing the word of God through the prophets. Amos’s rhetoric of entrapment has come to serve its purpose; even when compared to the ghastly crimes committed by the nations, even when compared to Judah’s rebellion against the Law and the Prophets, Israel’s guilt rises above the rest.

IV.Beginning with chapter 3, **The guilt of Israel.** Yahweh has spoken his word “against” (repeated twice for emphasis) Israel, a people established under a unique relationship with God. The practical expectation of this relationship was obedience, and based on that obedience, Israel could expect protection and blessing. Yet instead of obedience God received rebellion, and, to their great dismay, Israel would now receive judgment. Contrary to the expectation of the people, their elect position would not bring unequivocal blessing. Their unique position as God’s chosen obligated them to obedience, and now that same position obligated God to judgment. The pattern throughout this section is self-evident cause-and-effect relationship. The questions in verses three through five are each answerable with a resounding “of course not!” In this section Amos ties two things together -- the relationship between prophecy and judgement. If a prophet is prophesying, then it is the Lord who has spoken; if the Lord has indeed spoken then the people need to be afraid. The Lord has spoken so Amos must prophesy.