

Judgment at home

- Amos 2:4-16
- It's hard to take much encouragement from the text today, as God turns His attention to His own house; they are His people, but they are not acting like it. I am reminded about the man who put himself through veterinarian school by doing taxidermy, you know, stuffing dead animals so people could mount them on the wall. When he finished vet school he decided to open a business that would do both: a combination vet hospital and taxidermy shop. The sign outside said, "Either way, you get your dog back!" Well, maybe we can take courage in the fact that either way, God will bring cleansing to His people. It may just not be in the way we would prefer it.
- Peter wrote, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17) Amos could have written the same thing, when he got to God's judgments on Judah and Israel, but you will notice a stark difference between the judgments. Judah is judged because they have rejected the law of the Lord. They have become religious hypocrites. Israel's mug shot looks just like the one for Tyre, or Philistia, or any of the other pagan nations we talked about last week. God judged them because of their atrocities and immoralities, and He does the same with Israel. The only difference is that the pagan nations made no attempt to cover their sins with a religious cloak. Israel does. They commit vile sins at the same time they are "beside every altar," or when they are "in the house of God." Let's look at them in turn, first the judgment on Judah, then the judgment on Israel. We will close with a call to action for ourselves.
- **Judah**
- First, they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes. This has nothing to do with legalism, but much more to do with instruction. This is not about rules, but about relationship. The people of God have willfully chosen to disobey God. They have willfully chosen to go their own way, which is what all sin is: "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one, to his own way." (Is 53:6) God calls us into intimate relationship with Himself; He created us for that and invites us into it, which should blow our minds all by itself. He invites us to know Him by walking according to His commandments. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (Jn14:21) God gives us instruction, His Word, His commands, for our benefit and blessing. When we obey the Lord and walk with Him in fellowship, we cannot even contain the blessings. That doesn't mean the absence of trials and suffering, but the grace God pours out is unabated as we go through those trials. In fact, we draw closer to the Lord (more intimacy!) when we are serving Him as we go through a trial. The opposite is also true, as Judah is going to learn: to reject the Word of the Lord and go your own way brings judgment and pain and loss.
- Second, they have willfully walked in the same lies as their ancestors. Their lies have led them astray, but they are not victims: they walked in them, just as their fathers did. Saints, part of sanctification for each of us is learning to hear from the Lord and cast off the lies we have believed from our past. That our fathers or grandfathers or mothers or grandmothers believed. These lies WILL lead you astray. Maybe they already have. I met a man from Vietnam recently at the Y and got into a discussion with him about faith. He said that he had always believed that every person is moving towards God, no matter what you call the road you are on. His road happens to be Buddhism, which I assume he was taught as a child. That lie will lead you astray. NO one moves toward the Father, but thanks be to God, He moved toward us in the person of Jesus Christ. Some of you grew up under harsh religious instruction that has as its foundation the belief that you cannot ever appear to be struggling with sin, much less engaged in it. And so much of your teen years and maybe many of your adult years have been spent trying to put on the

mask, hide your doubts and fears and failures, and “look like a good Christian.” That lie will lead you astray, and has pushed countless people away from the faith.

- God’s judgment of Judah is short in words, but painful. These are the people who have a covenant relationship with God, and who are supposed to be the example to those who don’t, a picture of what it looks like to be a follower of the only true God. But they have rejected His instruction.
- **Israel**
- Israel was a ‘foreign nation’ in 760BC, because of their rejection of God. I thought about this week that you can find a watch list online of nations that America has said are religious persecutors. There’s another watch list of nations that commit human rights violations. Guess what? God has a watch list of nations and people groups and tribes that violate His Word. Israel was at the top of *that* list in 760BC, and most of Amos’ judgments come against this nation. All of the judgments we see in this chapter have to do with social injustice, but unlike the 6 pagan nations, Israel was not committing these violations against other people groups, but against its own. It was on God’s watch list for human rights violations against its own people. Here are four charges.
- **First, they sold the righteous for money, the needy for sandals.** Corruption in the courts led to trumped-up charges and rigged court cases against the poor. When the poor were found guilty and could not pay the fine, they were sold into slavery. As we saw last week, when we treat people made in the image of God as things, we are already under judgment.
- **Second, they trampled the poor, and refused to help the hurting.** Those who had money and power and privilege used it to roll over those who didn’t. And who could stop them? Well, God.
- **Third, they committed unspeakable sins of the flesh.** A man and his father went to the same girl. Listen, where God and His Word are rejected, sexual perversion will be rampant. We can catalogue the ways in which we see that happening all around the world, and here at home as well. The so-called sexual revolution of the 60’s was downhill from the rejection of biblical truth in our nation. That’s where it started. Here we are 50 years later, and every month, it seems, we are shocked, again, at how depraved our culture has become.
- **Fourth, so-called ‘religion’ provided a cloak for abuse.** (vs 8) Garments taken in pledge? There was a law in the OT that you could take someone’s garment as a pledge that they were going to pay you back. That day. Never past sundown (Deut. 24:12-13). Fines? Fines were always levied always for the purpose of restitution, not a way to enrich the powerful so they could throw a party and get drunk. That’s the kind of thing the pagans did, not the people of God.
- **Fifth, they forbade prophecy and they made the Nazirites break their vow.** (vs. 12) They persecuted their own, especially those who had zeal for God.
- God says, then, “This is what you are doing against Me.” Next, God builds His case against Israel by providing a testimony of what He has done for them.
- **1- He destroyed the Amorites.** These were the Canaanites, who inhabited the Promised Land. They were mighty foes, but God destroyed them to make room for Israel. Now, God is going to conquer Israel.
- **2- He delivered them and led them!**
- **3-He raised up prophets (spokesmen) and Nazirites** (men and women who would be wholly consecrated to God) to build their faith.
- In other words, God says, my grace has been poured out on you! Some have said that the only thing worse than never receiving God’s grace is receiving it in vain. We can do that as we sit in a godly church for years and never grow ourselves. We can do that as we sit in family devotions and yawn through it. We can do that as we think that we’re ok because our parents believe.
- Finally, God brings judgment: they will be utterly defeated. He paints a picture of what is to come.
- They will be bogged down in place, verse 13. Frozen in fear, as they see their enemy approaching.
- Their fast runners can’t move, and their mighty men can’t fight., verse 14. There is no help, even from your best.

- Their archers can't shoot, their swift can't escape, and their riders cannot either, verse 15. There is no plan or strategy that will save you.
- Confusion and chaos will prevail, their mightiest soldiers will flee away, stripped of their armor and weapons. All hope is lost.
- Judgment comes because of disobedience to the Lord. Let me tell you a different story, one more contemporary, where persecution comes because of obedience to the Lord. There's suffering here, too, but it's redemptive and it glorifies God and edifies us. When Nik Ripken met with pastors and church leaders in Russia in 1998, he heard dozens of testimonies of how the Communists persecuted followers of Jesus. "Pastors and church leaders were arrested and imprisoned. Their wives were pressured to divorce them; children were discouraged from writing to their imprisoned fathers. The sons and daughters of known believers would be kept after school to be questioned and badgered by a panel of teachers who denigrated the family's faith. Children were called up in front of school-wide assemblies and publicly ridiculed by both school officials and classmates, for their family's 'backward, traitorous and anti-communist beliefs.' Unless they denounced their parents' religion, most young people from believing homes were not admitted to the university and were allowed to pursue only the most menial jobs or careers. The strategy of the government was clear: **it would do anything to keep faith from continuing beyond the current generation.**" Meanwhile, pastors and church leaders were in prison, where they were issued the most rudimentary tools (broken shovels and sharpened sticks) and assigned the task of digging a trench in the frozen ground. They would be punished each day if they did not make adequate progress. Of course, the daily goal was impossible to achieve. When the pastors were escorted back to the barracks at night, they were stripped to their underwear, doused with ice water, fed stale crusts of bread and water for supper, and then herded back into freezing cells to sleep for the night. No formal torture. No beatings. But more than 200 pastors died within three months because of disease and 'natural causes.' All of this because they refused to deny their faith.
- Those pastors who did deny it were left alone, or moved to another church where the government had imprisoned the pastor. When the new communist-appointed pastor arrived for the first Sunday morning worship service, church members (often the older women) would show their disdain by linking arms and blocking his way to the pulpit. Then, when he got through them and he stood up to preach his government-approved sermon, these same women would silently stand and turn their backs on him, until he finished the sermon. (I thought when I read this that if that happened in every church in America where the pastor refused to preach the Word, things would change quickly in the pulpit, and in the pews, and in the streets!)
- One godly pastor prepared his family for what would likely happen. He told them he loved Jesus and because of that, he would be arrested. "They will put me in prison and tell me to stop preaching about Jesus," he said. "I cannot stop...I must obey God. I will miss you very much, but I will trust God to watch over you while I'm gone." Then he said, "All around this part of the country, the authorities are rounding up followers of Jesus and demanding that they deny their faith. Sometimes, when they refuse, the authorities will line up whole families and hang them by the neck until they are dead. I don't want that to happen...and I am praying that once they put me in prison, they will leave you and your mother alone. However, if I hear that my wife and my children have been hung to death rather than deny Jesus, I will be the most proud man in that prison!"
- What about us? Do we need to count the cost? Awaken from slumber? Examine ourselves to make sure we are in the faith? Obey the Lord no matter the cost? YES!