

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter,

- I.** God, by the prophet, proceeds in a like controversy with Moab as before with other nations (v. 1-3).
- II.** He shows what quarrel he had with Judah (v. 4, 5).
- III.** He at length begins his charge against Israel, to which all that goes before is but an introduction. Observe,
 - 1.** The sins they are charged with — injustice, oppression, whoredom (v. 6-8).
 - 2.** The aggravations of those sins — the temporal and spiritual mercies God had bestowed upon them, for which they had made him such ungrateful returns (v. 9-12).
 - 3.** God's complaint of them for their sins (v. 13) and his threatenings of their ruin, and their utter inability to prevent it (v. 14-16).

AMOS 2:1-8

JUDGMENT OF MOAB AND OF JUDAH

Here is,

I. The judgment of Moab, another of the nations that bordered upon Israel. They are reckoned with and shall be punished *for three transgressions and for four*, as those before. Now,

1. Moab's fourth transgression, as theirs who were before set to the bar, was cruelty. The instance given refers not to the people of God, but to a heathen like themselves: The king of Moab *burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime*. We find there was war between the Edomites and the Moabites, in which the king of Moab, in distress and rage, offered his own son for a burnt-offering, to appease his deity, ~~III~~2 Kings 3:26, 27. And it should seem that afterwards he, or some of his successors, in revenge upon the Edomites for bringing him to that extremity, having an advantage against the *king of Edom*, seized him alive and burnt him to ashes, or slew

him and burnt his body, or dug up the bones of their dead king, of that particularly who had so straitened him, and, in token of his rage and fury, *burnt them to lime*. and perhaps made use of the powder of his bones for the white-washing of the walls and ceilings of his palace, that he might please himself with the sight of that monument of his revenge. *Est vindicta bonum vita jucundius ipsa — Revenge is sweeter than life itself*. It is barbarous to abuse human bodies, for we ourselves also are *in the body*; it is senseless to abuse dead bodies, nay, it is impious, for we believe and look for their resurrection; and to abuse the dead bodies of kings (whose persons and names ought to be in a particular manner respected and had in veneration) is an affront to majesty; it is an argument of a base spirit for those to trample upon a dead lion who, were he alive, would tremble before him.

2. Moab's doom for this transgression is,

(1.) A judgment of death. Those that deal cruelly shall be cruelly dealt with (v. 2): *Moab shall die*; the Moabites shall be cut off with the sword of war, which kills *with tumult, with shouting, and with sound of trumpet*, circumstances that make it so much the more terrible, as the lion's roaring aggravates his tearing. *Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise*, ²³⁹⁵Isaiah 9:5.

(2.) It is a judgment upon their judge, who had passed the sentence upon the bones of the king of Edom that they should be burnt to lime: *I will cut him off*, says God (v. 3); he shall know there is a judge that is higher than he. The king, the chief judge, and all the inferior judges and princes, shall be cut off together. If the people sometimes suffer for the sin of their princes, yet the princes themselves shall not escape, ²⁴⁸⁷Jeremiah 48:47. *Thus far is the judgment of Moab*.

II. Judah also is a near neighbour to Israel, and therefore, now that justice is riding the circuit, that shall not be passed by; that nation has made itself like the heathen and mingled with them, and therefore the indictment here runs against them in the same form in which it had run against all the rest: *For these transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof*; their sins are as many as the sins of other nations, and we find them huddled up with them in the same character, ²⁴⁹⁵Jeremiah 9:26, “As for *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom*, jumble them together; they are all alike;” the sentence here also is the same (v. 5): “*I will send a fire upon*

Judah, though it is the land where God is known, and it shall *devour the palaces of Jerusalem*, though it is the holy city, and God has formerly been *known in its palaces for a refuge*,” ^{<39B>}Psalm 48:3. But the sin here charged upon Judah is different from all the rest. The other nations were reckoned with for injuries done to men, but Judah is reckoned with for indignities done to God, v. 4.

1. They put contempt upon his statutes and persisted in disobedience to them: *They have despised the law of the Lord*, as if it were not worth taking notice of, nor had any thing in it valuable; and herein they despised the wisdom, justice, and goodness, as well as the authority and sovereignty, of the Lawmaker; this they did, in effect, when they *kept not his commandments*, made no conscience of them, took no care about them.

2. They put honour upon his rivals, their idols, here called *their lies* which caused *them to err*; for *an image is a teacher of lies*, ^{<39B>}Habakkuk 2:18. And those that are led away into the error of idolatry are by that led into a multitude of other errors, *Uno dato absurdo mille sequuntur — One absurdity draws after it a thousand*. God is an infinite eternal Spirit; but, when the *truth of God* is by idolatry *changed into a lie*, all his other truths are in danger of being so changed likewise; thus their idols caused them to err, and God justly gave them up to strong delusions; nor was it any excuse for their sin that they were *lies after which their father walked*, for they should rather have taken warning than taken pattern by those that perished with these *lies in their right hand*.

III. We now at length come to *the words which Amos saw concerning Israel*. The reproofs and threatenings having walked the round, here they centre, here they settle. He begins with them as with the rest: *For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof*; it all these nations must be punished for their iniquities, shall Israel go unpunished? Observe here what their sins were, for which God would reckon with them.

1. Perverting justice. This was the sin of those who were entrusted with the administration of justice, the judges and magistrates, and all parties concerned. They made nothing of selling a righteous man, and his righteous cause when it came to be tried before them, for a piece of silver; sentence was passed, not according to the merits of the cause, but the bribe always turned the scale, and judgment was set to sale by auction to the

highest bidder. They would sell the life and livelihood of a *poor man for a pair of shoes*, for the least advantage to themselves that could be proposed to them; give them but a *pair of shoes*, and the cause of a poor man, who could not give them as much as that, should be betrayed, and left at the mercy of those that will have no mercy. They will rather play at small game that sit out. *For a piece of bread such a man will transgress*. Note, Those who will wrong their consciences for any thing will come at length to do it for next to nothing; those who begin to sell justice for silver will in time be so sordid as to see it *for a pair of shoes*, for a pair of old shoes.

2. Oppressing the poor, and seeking to benefit themselves by doing them a mischief: *They pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor*; they swallow up the poor with the utmost greediness, and make a prey of those that are in sorrow with dust on their heads, poor orphans that are in mourning for their parents; they catch at them to get their estates into their hands; they never rest till they have got the heads of the poor in the dust, to be trodden on. Or, *They pant after the dust of the earth*, that is, silver and gold, white and yellow dust; they covet it earnestly, and levy it *upon the head of the poor* by their unjust exactions. Note, Men's seeking to enrich themselves by the impoverishing of others is a transgression which God will not long *turn away the punishment of*. This is *turning aside the way of the meek*, contriving to do injury to those who, they know, are mild and patient and will bear injury. They invade their rights, break their measures, and obstruct the course of justice in favour of them, not suffering them to go on with their righteous cause; this is *turning aside their way*. Note, The more patiently men bear injuries that are done them the greater is the sin of those that injure them, and the more occasion they have to expect that God will give them redress, and take vengeance for them. I, *as a deaf man, heard not*, and then *thou wilt hear*.

3. Abominable uncleanness, even incest itself, such as it not named among the Gentiles, that *a man should have his father's wife* (~~4th~~ 1 Corinthians 5:1), his father's concubine: *A man and his father will go in unto the same young woman*, as black an instance as any other of an unbounded promiscuous lust; and yet where the former iniquities of oppression and extortion are this also is found; for laws of modesty seldom hold those that have broken the bands of justice and *cast away its cords* from them. This wickedness is such a scandal to religion, and the profession of it, that those who are guilty of it are looked upon as designing thereby to *profane God's holy name*, and to render it odious among the heathen, as if he

countenanced the villainies which those who pretend relation to him allow themselves in, and were altogether such a one as they.

4. Regaling themselves and yet pretending to honour their God with that which they had got by oppression and extortion, v. 8. They add idolatry to their injustice, and then think to atone for their injustice with their idolatry.

(1.) They make merry with that which they have unjustly squeezed from the poor. They *lay themselves down* at ease, and in state, and stretch themselves upon *clothes laid to pledge*, which they ought to have restored the same night, according to the law, ~~<1018>~~ Deuteronomy 24:12, 13. And they *drink the wine of the condemned*, of such as they have fined and laid heavy mulcts upon, spending that in sensuality which they have got by injustice.

(2.) They think to make atonement for this by feasting on the gains of oppression *before their altars*, and *drinking this wine in the house of their God*, in the temples where they worshipped their calves, as if they would make God a *partner in their crimes* by making him a *partner of the profits* of them — service good enough for false gods; but the true God will not thus be mocked; he has declared that he *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*, and cannot be served acceptably but with that which is got honestly.

~~<1018>~~ AMOS 2:9-16

GOD'S REMONSTRANCE WITH ISRAEL

Here,

I. God puts his people Israel in mind of the great things he has done for them, in putting them into possession of the land of Canaan, the greatest part of which these ten tribes now enjoyed, v. 9, 10. Note, We need often to be reminded of the mercies we have received, which are the heaviest aggravations of the sins we have committed. God gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our meanness and unworthiness, and the disproportion between his gifts and our merits; but he justly upbraids us with our ingratitude, and ill requital of his favours, and tells us what he has done for us, to shame us for not rendering again according to the benefit done to us. “*Son, remember; Israel, remember,*

1. That God brought thee out of a house of bondage, rescued thee out of the *land of Egypt*, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished in slavery.”

2. That he *led thee forty years* through a desert land, and fed thee in a *wilderness*, where thou wouldst otherwise have perished with hunger. Mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us, for, if they had been cut off, we should not have been.

3. That he made room for them in Canaan, by extirpating the natives by a series of wonders little inferior to those by which they were redeemed out of Egypt: *I destroyed the Amorite before them*, here put for all the devoted nations. Observe the magnificence of the enemies that stood in their way, which is taken notice of, that God may be the more magnified in the subduing of them. They were of great stature (*whose height was like the height of the cedars*) and the people of Israel were as shrubs to them; and they were also of great strength, not only tall, but well-set: *He was strong as the oaks*. Their kingdom was eminent among the nations, and overtopped all its neighbours. The supports and defences of it seemed impregnable; it was as fine as the stately cedar; it was as firm as the sturdy oak; yet, when God had a vine to plant there (¹³⁰⁸Psalm 80:8, 9), this Amorite was not only cut down, but plucked up: *I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath*, so that the Amorites were no more a nation, nor ever read of any more. Thus highly did God value Israel. He gave men *for them and people for their life*, ²³⁹⁴Isaiah 43:4. How ungrateful then were those who put such contempt upon him! 4. That he made them *possess the land of the Amorite*, not only put it into their hands, so that they became masters of it *jure belli* — *by right of conquest*, but gave them a better title to it, so that it became theirs by promise.

II. He likewise upbraids them with the spiritual privileges and advantages they enjoyed as a holy nation, v. 11. They had helps for their souls, which taught them how to make good use of their temporal enjoyments and were therefore more valuable. It is true the *ten tribes* had not God's temple, altar, and priesthood, and it was their own fault that they deserted them, and for that they might justly have been left in utter darkness; but God *left not himself without witness*, nor them without guides to show them the way.

1. They had prophets that were powerful instructors in piety, divinely inspired, and commissioned to make known the mind of God to them, to show them what is pleasing to God and what displeasing, to reprove them for their faults and warn them of their dangers, to direct them in their difficulties and comfort them in their troubles. God raised them up prophets, animated them for that work and employed them in it. He *raised them up of their sons*, from among themselves, as Moses and Christ were raised up *from among their brethren*, ^{GEN}Deuteronomy 18:15. It was an honour put upon their nation, and upon their families, that they had children of their own to be God's messengers to them, of their own language, not strangers sent from another country, whom they might suspect to be prejudiced against them and their land, but those who, they knew, wished well to them. Note, Faithful ministers are great blessings to any people, and it is God that raises them up to be so, that they may justly be reckoned an honour to the families they are of.

2. They had Nazarites that were bright examples of piety: *I raised up of your young men for Nazarites*, men that bound themselves by a vow to God and his service, and, in pursuance of that, denied themselves many of the lawful delights of sense, as drinking wine and eating grapes. There were some of their young men that were in their prime for the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life and yet voluntarily abridged themselves of them; these God raised up by the power of his grace, to be *monuments of his grace*, to his glory, and to be his witnesses against the impieties of that degenerate age. Note, It is as great a blessing to any place to have eminent good Christians in it as to have eminent good ministers in it; for so they have examples to their rules. We must acknowledge that it bodes well to any people when God raises up numbers of hopeful young people among them, when he makes their young men Nazarites, devout, and conscientious, and mortified to the pleasures of sense; and those that are such Nazarites are *purser than snow, whiter than milk*; they are indeed the polite young men, for their *polishing is of sapphires*, ^{2COR}Lamentations 4:7. Those that have such men, such young men, among them, have therein such an advantage, both for direction and encouragement, to be religious, as they will be called to an account for another day if they do not improve. Israel is here reckoned with, not only for the prophets, but for the Nazarites, raised up among them. Concerning the truth of this, he appeals to themselves: *“Is it not even thus, O you children of Israel? Can you deny it? Have not you yourselves been sensible of the advantage you had*

by the prophets and Nazarites raised up among you?” Note, Sinners' own consciences will be witnesses for God that he has not been wanting to them in the means of grace, so that, if they perish, it is because they have been wanting to themselves in not improving those means. The men of Judah shall themselves *judge between God and his vineyard*, whether he could have done more for it, ^{<38B>}Isaiah 5:3, 4.

III. He charges them with the abuse of the means of grace they enjoyed, and the opposition they gave to God's designs in affording them those means, v. 12. They were so far from walking in the light that they rebelled against it, and did what they could to extinguish it, that it might not shine in their faces, to their conviction.

1. They did what they could to debauch good people, to draw them off from their seriousness in devotion and their strictness in conversation: *You gave the Nazarites wine to drink*, contrary to their vow, that, having broken it in that instance, they might not pretend to keep it in any other. Some they surprised, or allured into it, and *with their much fair speech caused them to yield*; others they forced and frightened into it, reproached and threatened them if they were more precise than their neighbours; and, by drawing them in to drink wine, they spoiled them for Nazarites. Note, Satan and his agents are very busy to corrupt the minds of young people that look heavenward; and many that we thought would have been Nazarites they have overcome by giving them wine to drink, by drawing them in to the love of mirth and pleasure, and drinking company. Multitudes of young men that bade fair for eminent professors of religion have *erred through wine*, and been undone for ever. And how do the factors for hell triumph in the debauching of a Nazarite!

2. They did what they could to silence good ministers, and to stop their mouths: “*You commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not*, and threatened them if they did prophesy (^{<38C>}Amos 7:12), as if God's messengers were bound to observe your orders, and might not deliver their errand unless you gave them leave, and so you not only *received the grace of God*, in raising up those prophets, *in vain*, but put the highest affront imaginable upon that God in whose name the prophets spoke.” Note, Those have a great deal to answer for that cannot bear faithful preaching, and those much more that suppress it.

IV. He complains of the wrong they did him by their sins (v. 13): “*I am pressed under you, I am straitened by you, and can no longer bear it, and therefore I will ease myself of my adversaries,*” ⁽²¹²⁾Isaiah 1:24. *I am pressed under you* and the load of your sins *as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves*, is loaded with corn, in the midst of the *joy of harvest*, as long as any will lie on.” Note, The great God complains of sin, especially the sins of his professing people, as a burden to him. He is *grieved with this generation* (⁽¹⁹⁵⁾Psalm 95:10), *is broken with their whorish heart* (⁽²⁰⁹⁾Ezekiel 6:9), a consideration which, if it make not the sinner's repentance very deep, will make his ruin very great. The great God that upholds the world, and never complains that his is pressed under the weight of it (he *fainteth not, neither is weary*), yet complains of the sins of Israel, yea, and of their hypocritical services too, that he is *weary of bearing them*, ⁽²¹⁴⁾Isaiah 1:14. No wonder the *creature groans being burdened* (⁽⁴⁸²⁾Romans 8:22), when the Creator says, *I am pressed under them*.

V. He threatens them with unavoidable ruin. And so some read, v. 13, “*Behold I will press, or straiten, your place, as a cart full of sheaves presses; they shall be loaded with judgments till they shall sink under them, and shall make a noise, as a cart overloaded does.*” Those that will not submit to the convictions of the word, that will neither be won by that nor by the conversation of those about them, shall be made to sink under the weight of God's judgments. If God load us daily with his benefits, and we, notwithstanding that, load him with our sins, how can we expect any other than that he should load us with his judgments? And it is here threatened in the last three verses that, when God comes forth to contend with this provoking people, they shall not be able to stand before him, to flee from him, nor to make their part good with him; for when God judges he will overcome. Though his patience be tired out, his power is not, and so the sinner shall find, to his cost. When the Assyrian army comes to lay the country waste by sword and captivity none shall escape, but every one shall have his share in the common desolation.

1. It will be in vain to think of fleeing from the enemy that comes armed with a commission to make all desolate: *The flight shall perish from the swift*; those that have been famed for happy escapes and happy retreats shall now find their arts fail them; they shall have no time to flee, or shall find no way to take, or they shall have no strength or spirit to attempt it;

they shall be at their wits' end, and then they are soon at their flight's end. Are they, as Asahel, as *swift of foot as a wild roe*? (~~1028~~2 Samuel 2:18), yet, like him, they shall run the faster upon their own destruction: *He that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself*, v. 15. Or do they say (as those, ~~2306~~Isaiah 30:16), *We will flee upon horses, and we will ride upon the swift*? Yet they shall be overtaken: *Neither shall he that rides the horse deliver himself* from his pursuers. *A horse is a vain thing for safety*.

2. It will be in vain to think of fighting it out. God is at war with them; and *are they stronger than he*? Is there any military force that can pretend to be a match for Omnipotence? No: *The strong shall not strengthen his force*. He that has a habit of strength shall not be able to exert it when he has occasion for it. And *the mighty*, whose should protect and deliver others, shall not be able to *deliver himself*, to deliver *his soul* (so the word is), shall not save his life. Let not the *strong man* then *glory in his strength*, nor trust in it, but *strengthen himself in the Lord his God*, for in him is *everlasting strength*. And, as the bodily strength shall fail, so shall the weapons of war. The armour as well as the arm shall become insufficient: *Neither shall he stand that handles the bow*, though he stand at a distance, but shall betake himself to flight, and not trust to his own bow to save him. Though the arm be ever so strong, and the armour ever so well fixed, neither will avail when the spirit fails (v. 16): *He that is courageous among the mighty*, that used to look danger in the face, and not be dismayed at it, shall *flee away naked in that day*, not only disarmed, having thrown away his weapons both offensive and defensive, but plundered of his treasure, which he thought to carry away with him, and he shall think it as much as he could expect that he has *his life for a prey*. Thus when God pleases *he takes away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth*, and causes those who used to boast of their courage, and their daring enterprises in the field, to *wander and sneak in a wilderness where there is no way*, ~~824~~Job 12:24.