

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have,

- I. The general title of this prophecy (v. 1), with the general scope of it (v. 2).
- II. God's particular controversy with Syria (v. 3-5), with Palestine (v. 6-8), with Tyre (v. 9, 10), with Edom (v. 11, 12), and with Ammon (v. 13-15), for their cruelty to his people and the many injuries they had done them. This explains God's pleading with the nations, ^{300}Joel 3:2.

~~300~~ AMOS 1:1-2

THREATENINGS OF JUDGMENT

Here is,

I. The general character of this prophecy. It consists of *the words which the prophet saw*. Are words to be seen? Yes, God's words are; the apostles speak of the *word of life*, which they had not only *heard*, but *which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their hands had handled* (^{301}1 John 1:1), such a real substantial thing is the word of God. The prophet saw these words, that is,

1. They were revealed to him in a *vision*, as John is said to see *the voice* that spoke to him, ^{302}Revelation 1:12.
2. That which was foretold by them was to him as certain as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes. It intimates how strong he was in that faith which is *the evidence of things not seen*.

II. The person by whom this prophecy was sent — *Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa*, and was one of them. Some think he was a rich dealer in cattle; the word is used concerning the king of Moab (^{303}2 Kings 3:4, *He was a sheep-master*); it is probable that he got money by that business, and yet he must quit it, to follow God as a prophet. Others think he was a poor keeper of cattle, for we find (^{304}Amos 7:14, 15) that he was withal a *gatherer of wild figs*, a poor employment by which we may

suppose he could but just get his bread, and that God took him, as he did David, from following the flock, and Elisha from following the plough. Many were trained up for great employments, in the quiet, innocent, contemplative business of shepherds. When God would send a prophet to reprove and warn his people, he employed a shepherd, a herdsman, to do it; for they had made themselves *as the horse and mule that have no understanding*, nay, worse than the *ox that knows his owner*. God sometimes *chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*, ^{<317>}1 Corinthians 1:27. Note, Those whom God has endued with abilities for his service ought not to be despised nor laid aside for the meanness either of their origin or of their beginnings. Though Amos himself is not ashamed to own that he was a herdsman, yet others ought not to upbraid him with it nor think the worse of him for it.

III. The persons concerned in the prophecy of this book; it is *concerning Israel*, the *ten tribes*, who were now ripened in sin and ripening apace for ruin. God has raised them up prophets among themselves (^{<321>}Amos 2:11), but they regarded them not; therefore God sends them one from Tekoa, in the land of Judah, that, coming from another country, he might be the more valued, and perhaps he was the rather sent out of his own country because there he was despised for his having been a herdsman. See ^{<355>}Matthew 13:55-57.

IV. The time when these prophecies were delivered.

1. The book is dated, as laws used to be, by the reigns of the kings under whom the prophet prophesied. It was in the days of *Uzziah king of Judah*, when the affairs of that kingdom went very well, and of Jeroboam the second king of Israel, when the affairs of that kingdom went pretty well; yet then they must both be told both of the sins they were guilty of and of the judgments that were coming upon them for those sins, that they might not with the present gleam of prosperity flatter themselves either into an opinion of their innocence or a confidence of their perpetual security.

2. It is dated by a particular event to which its prophecy had a reference; it was *two years before the earthquake*, that earthquake which is mentioned to have been *in the days of Uzziah* (^{<345>}Zechariah 14:5), which put the nation into a dreadful fright, for it is there said, *They fled before it*. But how could they flee from it? Some conjecture that this earthquake was at the time of Isaiah's vision, when the *posts of the door were moved*,

^{<2864>}Isaiah 6:4. The tradition of the Jews is that it happened just at the time when Uzziah presumptuously invaded the priest's office and went in to burn incense, ^{<4836>}2 Chronicles 26:16. Josephus mentions this earthquake, *Antiq.* 9. 225, and says, "By it half of a mountain was removed and carried to a plain four furlongs off; and it spoiled the king's gardens." God by this prophet gave warning of it *two years* before, that God by it would shake down their houses, ^{<3085>}Amos 3:15.

V. The introduction to these prophecies, containing the general scope of them (v. 2): *The Lord will roar from Zion*. His threatenings by his prophets, and the executions of those threatenings in his providence, will be as terrible as the roaring of a lion is to the shepherds and their flocks. Amos here speaks the same language with his contemporaries, Hosea (^{<3810>}Hosea 11:10) and Joel, (^{<2986>}Joel 3:16). The lion roars before he tears; God gives warning before he strikes. Observe,

1. Whence this warning comes — *from Zion* and Jerusalem, from the oracles of God there delivered; for *by them is they servant warned*, ^{<991>}Psalms 19:11. Our God, whose special residence is there, will issue out warrants, *given at that court*, as it were, for the executing of judgments on the land. See ^{<2250>}Jeremiah 25:30. In Zion was the mercy-seat; thence the Lord roars, intimating that God's acts of justice are consistent with mercy, allayed and mitigated by mercy, nay, as they are warnings, they are really acts of mercy. We are chastened, that we may not be condemned.

2. What effect the warning has: *The habitations of the shepherds mourn*, either because they fear the roaring lion or because they feel what is signified by that comparison, the consequences of a *great drought* (^{<3047>}Amos 4:7), which made *the top of Carmel* (of the most fruitful fields) to *wither* and become a desert, ^{<2012>}Joel 1:12-17.

^{<3008>}AMOS 1:3-15

THREATENINGS OF JUDGMENT

What the Lord says here may be explained by what he says ^{<2424>}Jeremiah 12:14, *Thus said the Lord, against all my evil neighbours that touch the inheritance of my people Israel, Behold, I will pluck them out*. Damascus was a near neighbour to Israel on the north, Tyre and Gaza on the west,

Edom on the south, Ammon and (in the next chapter) Moab on the east; and all of them had been, one time, one way, or other, *pricking briers and grieving thorns* to Israel, evil neighbours to them; and, because God espouses his people's cause, he there calls them *his evil neighbours*, and here comes forth to reckon with them. The method is taken in dealing with each of them is, in part, the same, and therefore we put them together, and yet in each there is something peculiar.

I. Let us see what is repeated, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, concerning them all. The controversy God has with each of them is prefaced with, *Thus said the Lord*, Jehovah the God of Israel. Though those nations will not worship him as their God, yet they shall be made to know that they are accountable to him as their Judge. The God of Israel is *the God of the whole earth*, and has something to say to them that shall make them tremble. Against them the Lord *roars out of Zion*. And before God, by the prophet, threatens Israel and Judah, he denounces judgments against those nations whom he made use of as scourges to them for their being so, which might serve for a check to their pride and insolence and a relief to his people under their dejections; for hereby they might see that God had not quitted his interest in them, and therefore might hope they had not lost their interest in him. Now as to all these nations here arraigned,

1. The indictment drawn up against them all is thus far the same,

(1.) That they are charged in general with *three transgressions, and with four*, that is, with many transgressions (as by one or two we mean *a few*, so by three or four we mean many, as in Latin a man that is very happy is said to be *terque quarterque beatus* — *three and four times happy*); or *with three and four*, that is, with seven transgressions, a number of perfection, intimating that they have *filled up the measure of their iniquities*, and are ripe for ruin; or *with three* (that is, a variety of sins) *and with a fourth* especially, which is specified concerning each of them, though the other three are not, as ²⁰¹⁵Proverbs 30:15, 18, 21, 29, where we read of *three things, yea, four*, generally one seems to be more especially intended.

(2.) That the particular sin which is fastened upon as the fourth, and which alone is specified, is the sin of persecution: it is some mischief or other done to the people of God that is particularly charged upon every one of

them, for persecution is the measure-filling sin of any people, and it is this sin that will be particularly reckoned for — *I was hungry, and you gave me no meat; much more if it may be said, I was hungry, and you took my meat from me.*

2. The judgment given against them all is thus far the same,

(1.) That, their sin having risen to such a height, *God will not turn away the punishment thereof.* Though he has granted them a long reprieve, and has often *turned away their punishment,* yet now he will turn it away no longer, but justice shall take its course. “*I will not revoke it* (so some read it); *I will not recall the voice which has gone forth* from Zion to Jerusalem (v. 2), speaking death and terror to the sinful nations.” It is an irrevocable sentence. God has spoken it, and he will not *call it back.* Note, Though God bear long, he will not bear always, with those that provoke him; and, when the decree brings forth, it will bring up.

(2.) That God will *kindle a fire* among them; this is said concerning all these *evil neighbours*, v. 4, 7, 10, 12, 14. God will *send a fire* into their cities. When fires are kindled that lay cities, towns, and houses in ashes, whether designedly or casually, God must be acknowledged in it; they are of his sending. Sin stirs up the fire of his jealousy, and that kindles other fires.

II. Let us see what is mentioned, both by way of charge and by way of sentence, that is peculiar to each of them, that every one may take his portion.

1. Concerning Damascus, the head-city of Syria, a kingdom that was often vexatious to Israel.

(1.) The peculiar sin of Damascus was using the Gileadites barbarously: *They threshed Gilead with threshing-instruments of iron* (v. 3), which may be understood literally of their putting to the torture, or to cruel deaths, the inhabitants of Gilead whom they got into their hands, as David put the Ammonites under *saws and harrows* ^{<102>}2 Samuel 12:31. We read with what inhumanity Hazael king of Syria prosecuted his wars with Israel (^{<100>}2 Kings 8:12); he *dashed their children, and ripped up their women with child*; and see what desolations he made in their land, ^{<101>}2 Kings 10:32, 33. Or it may be taken figuratively, for his laying the country waste, and this very similitude is used in the history of it. ^{<103>}2 Kings 13:7, He

destroyed them, and made them like the dust by threshing. Note, Men often do that unjustly and wickedly, and shall be severely reckoned with for it, which yet God just permits them to do. The church is called *God's threshing, and the corn of his floor* (^{<2210>}Isaiah 21:10); but if men make it their threshing, and the chaff of their floor, they shall be sure to hear of it.

(2.) The peculiar punishment of Damascus is

[1.] That the fire which shall be sent shall fasten upon the court in the first place, not on the chief city, nor the country towns, but on *the house of Hazeel*, which he built; and *it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad*, the royal palaces inhabited by the kings of Syria, many of whom were of that name. Note, Even royal palaces are no defence against the judgments of God, though ever so richly furnished, though ever so strongly fortified.

[2.] That the enemy shall force his way into the city (v. 5): *I will break the bar of Damascus*, and then the gate flies open. Or it may be understood figuratively: all that which is depended upon as the strength and safety of that great city shall fail, and prove insufficient. When God's judgments come with commission it is in vain to think of *turning them out*.

[3.] That the people shall be destroyed with the sword: *I will cut off the inhabitant from the plain of Aven, the valley of idolatry*, for the gods of the Syrians were *gods of the valleys* (^{<1123>}1 Kings 20:23), were worshipped in valleys; as the idols of Israel were worshipped on *the hills*; *him also that holdeth the sceptre of power*, some petty king or other that used to boast of the sceptre he held from Beth-Eden, the *house of pleasure*. Both those that were given to idolatry and those that were given to sensuality should be cut off together.

[4.] That the body of the nation shall be carried off. The *people shall go into captivity unto Kir*, which was in the country of the Medes. We find this fulfilled (^{<1269>}2 Kings 16:9) about fifty years after this, when *the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin*, at the instigation of Ahaz king of Judah.

2. Concerning Gaza, a city of the Philistines, and now the metropolis of that country.

(1.) The peculiar sin of the Philistines was *carrying away captive the whole captivity*, either of Israel or Judah, which some think refers to that inroad made upon Jehoram when they took away *all the king's sons and all*

his substance (^{<4217>}2 Chronicles 21:17), or, perhaps, it refers to their seizing those that fled to them for shelter when Sennacherib invaded Judah, and *selling them to the Grecians* (^{<2934>}Joel 3:4-6), or (as here) to the Edomites, who were always sworn enemies to the people of God. They spared none, but carried off all they could lay their hands on, designing, if possible, to *cut off the name of Israel*, ^{<4834>}Psalms 83:4-7.

(2.) The peculiar punishment of the Philistines is that the fire which God will send shall devour the palaces of Gaza, and that the *inhabitants* of the other cities of the Philistines, Ashdod (or Azotus), Ashkelon, and Ekron, shall all be *cut off*, and God will make as thorough work with them in their ruin as they would have made with God's people when they carried away the whole captivity; for even the *remnant* of them *shall perish*, v. 8. Note, God will make a full end of those that think to make a full end of his church and people.

3. Concerning Tyre, that famous city of wealth and strength, that was itself a kingdom, v. 9.

(1.) The peculiar sin of Tyre is *delivering up the whole captivity to Edom*, that is, selling to the Edomites those of Israel that fled to them for shelter, or in any way fell into their hands; not caring what hardships they put upon them, so that they could but make gain of them to themselves. Herein they forgot the *brotherly covenant*, the league that was between Solomon and Hiram king of Tyre (^{<1052>}1 Kings 5:12), which was intimate that Hiram called Solomon his *brother*, ^{<1093>}1 Kings 9:13. Note, It is a great aggravation of enmity and malice when it is the violation of friendship and of a *brotherly covenant*.

(2.) Here is nothing peculiar in the punishment of Tyrus but that *the palaces thereof shall be devoured*, which was done when Nebuchadnezzar took it after thirteen years' siege. Their merchants were all princes, and their private houses were as palaces; but the fire shall make no more of them than of cottages.

4. Concerning Edom, the posterity of Esau.

(1.) Their peculiar sin was an unmerciful, unwearied, pursuit of the people of God, and their taking all advantages against them to do them a mischief, v. 11. He did *pursue his brother with the sword*, not only of old, when the king of Edom took up arms to oppose the children of Israel's

passage *through his border* (^{<0118>}Numbers 20:18), but ever since upon all occasions; they had not strength and courage enough to face them in the field of battle, but, whenever any other enemy had put Judah or Israel to flight, then the Edomites set in with the pursuers, fell upon the rear, slew those that were half dead already, and (as is usual with cowards when they have an enemy at an advantage) they did *cast off all pity*. Those that are least courageous are commonly most cruel. Edom was so; his malice *destroyed his compassion* (so the word is); he stripped himself of the tenderness of a man, and put on the fierceness of a beast of prey; and, as such a one, he did tear, his *anger did tear perpetually*. His cruelty was insatiable, and he never knew when he had sucked enough of the blood of Israel, but, like the horse-leech, still cried, *Give, give*. Nay, he *kept his wrath for ever*; when he wanted objects of his wrath, and opportunity to show it, yet he kept it in reserve (it *rested in his bosom*), he rolled it under his tongue as a sweet morsel, and had it ready to spit in the face of Israel upon the next occasion. Cursed be such cruel wrath, and anger so fierce, so outrageous, which makes men like the devil, who *continually seeks to devour*, and unlike to God, who *keeps not his anger for ever*. Edom's malice was unnatural, for thus he pursued his brother, whom he ought to have protected: it was hereditary, as if it had been entailed upon the family ever since Esau hated Jacob, and time itself could not wear it out, no, nor the brotherly conduct of Israel towards them (^{<0114>}Deuteronomy 2:4), and the express law given to Israel (^{<0527>}Deuteronomy 23:7), *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother*.

(2.) Here is nothing peculiar in their punishment; but (v. 12) a *fire* shall be *sent to devour their palaces*. Note, The fire of our anger against our brethren kindles the fire of God's anger against us.

5. Concerning the Ammonites, v. 13-15.

(1.) See how violently the fire of their anger turned against the people of God; they not only triumphed in their calamities (as we find, ^{<0321>}Ezekiel 25:2, 6), but they did themselves use them barbarously; they *ripped up the women with child of Gilead*, a piece of cruelty the very mention of which strikes a horror upon one's mind; one would think it is not possible that any of the human race should be so inhuman. Hazeal was guilty of it, ^{<0182>}2 Kings 8:12. It was done not only in a brutish rage, which falls without consideration upon all that comes before it, but with a devilish design to extirpate the race of Israel by killing not only all that were born, but all

that were to be born, worse than Egyptian cruelty. It was *that they might enlarge their border*, that they might make the land of Gilead their own, and there might be none to lay claim to it or given them any disturbance in the possession of it. We find (~~241~~ Jeremiah 49:1) that the Ammonites inherited *Gad* (that is, Gilead) under pretence that Israel had no sons, no heirs. We know how heavy the doom of those was, and how heinous their crime, who said, *This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours* by occupancy. See what cruelty covetousness is the cause of, and what horrid practices those are often put upon that are greedy to *enlarge their own border*.

(2.) See how violently the fire of God's anger burned against them; shall not God *visit for these things* done to any of mankind, especially when they are done to his own people? *Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?* No doubt, it shall. The fire shall be kindled *with shouting in the day of battle*, that is, war shall kindle the fire; it shall be a fire accompanied with the sword, or a roaring fire, which shall make a noise like that of soldiers ready to engage, and it shall be as a *tempest in the day of the whirlwind*, which comes swiftly, furiously, and bears down all before it. Or this tempest and whirlwind shall be as bellows to the fire, to make it burn the stronger, and spread the further. It is particularly threatened that *their king and his princes shall go together into captivity*, carried away by the king of Babylon, not long after Judah was. See what changes God's providence often makes with men, or rather their own sin; kings become captives, and princes prisoners. *Milchom shall go into captivity*; some understand it of the god of the Ammonites, whom they called *Moloch — a king. He, and his princes*, and his priests that attended him, shall to *into captivity*; their idol shall be so far from protecting them that it shall itself go into captivity with them. Note, Those who by violence and fraud seek to enlarge their own border will justly be expelled and excluded their own border; nor is it strange if those who make no conscience of invading the rights of others be able to make no resistance against those who invade theirs.