

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 20/10/2012



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Num 24	Amos 1-4	Lam 2	1 Cor 2-3
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Harlotry and Idolatry of the Israelites (Numbers 23:27-25:18)

Israel's journey is basically over. They stand at Acacia Grove in Moab (25:1), just across the Jordan River from the city of Jericho (26:63). But what happens? Chapter 25 describes one of the most horrible episodes in the book of Numbers. How Israel here plunged headlong into such idolatry and sinfulness is almost inexplicable without looking elsewhere in the Scriptures. But when we do look elsewhere, we find that Balaam advised Balak to set a trap of sin for the Israelites so that God would curse His people: "Balaam...taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Revelation 2:14). And just how was this accomplished? In Numbers 31, we will see more of the advice that Balaam gave to Balak: "Look, these [Midianite] women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord" (31:15-16).

Balaam's plan worked. The women of Moab and its Midianite allies sexually enticed many of the Israelites to join with them in their sexually immoral idolatrous practices. This was likely presented as an offer of national friendship and perhaps even a new way to worship God. Yet it was, in fact, flagrant rebellion against the true God. No doubt, temple prostitutes seduced Israelite men into sexual rites linked with their religious sacrifices to Baal or Chemosh, also known as Molech. Such worship often included human sacrifice—the word "cannibal" actually being derived from Cahna-Bal, meaning "the priest of Baal" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 1959, p. 232). Thus, when the Israelites ate of the Moabite sacrifices (25:2), they may have been participating in this ghastly practice. Psalm 106:28 says they ate "sacrifices offered to the dead," but the original King James is more literal in rendering this "sacrifices of the dead"—which, again, may imply human sacrifices. In any event, "this was not just another time of trouble, this was the most serious challenge yet. The people had been seduced into joining the worship of Baal. And it was Baal worship that they had been sent to Canaan to eliminate!"

(Nelson Study Bible, note on Numbers 25:4-5). God was infuriated, ordering Moses to execute every offender by hanging them in the sun till sunset (verse 4; Deuteronomy 21:23).

Zimri, an Israelite prince of Simeon, brazenly presented a princess of Midian, Cozbi, who was probably a temple prostitute, before Moses and the whole congregation. Although it is not entirely clear, it appears that they may have been performing their lewd rites in an open tent in full view of those at the door of the tabernacle of meeting! Aaron's grandson Phinehas, in impassioned zeal for God and righteous indignation, took a spear and drove it through the two. Shamefully, the idolatrous worship must have been rather widespread as the plague was stopped only after 24,000 people died. In terms of the death toll, this was an even worse disaster than the rebellion of Korah, wherein 14,700 died. God was pleased with the zealousness of Phinehas in executing judgment (Numbers 25:11; Psalm 106:30) and gave the line of the priesthood to his descendants as an everlasting covenant of peace (verses 12-13).

Following this terrible incident, God gives Moses instructions to “harass” the Midianites, that is, to engage them in battle as His vengeance on them. And this battle, which will be Moses' last, will be fought shortly—though it is not reported until chapter 31.

Amos

Introduction to Amos (Amos 1:1-2:3)

The prophet Amos came from Tekoa in Judah, 10 miles south of Jerusalem, and was a “sheepbreeder”—a term used elsewhere in Scripture only of King Mesha of Moab (2 Kings 3:4). Mesha's business was enormous—regularly paying 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams as tribute to Israel. In contrast, Amos' was obviously a small business. For, like David, he took care of the flocks (7:15), and he tended sycamore fig trees (verse 14). “The sycamore fig tree bears thousands of figs very much like the common fig, but smaller and not as good. Before this fruit could ripen properly, a small hole had to be pierced in the bottom of its skin. This piercing was done by hand and was a tedious and time-consuming task. Why was Amos obliged to tend the sycamore? Western Judah, the oasis of Jericho, and lower Galilee were the regions where sycamore figs grew most abundantly. The shepherds needed to bring their flocks to one of these regions in late summer, after the desert pastures had dried up. Since this was the time for piercing the sycamore fruit, landowners would exchange grazing rights for labor. A shepherd could watch his flock while sitting on the broad limbs of the sycamore, piercing its fruit. Thus Amos was not a wealthy man. Wealthy sheepbreeders hired shepherds to tend their flocks. Amos followed his flock himself (7:15), and when that meant piercing sycamore fruit, he pierced sycamore fruit” (Nelson Study Bible, introductory notes on Amos).

His preaching took place during a time of great prosperity in both Judah and Israel. Uzziah was on the throne in Judah and Jeroboam II ruled in Israel. The nations were going through a period of great optimism, business was booming and both countries were extending their borders. But

as is often the case in times of prosperity, the attitudes of people degenerated, greed and injustice became commonplace, and a careless attitude toward religious practice replaced true godly worship.

Amos's prophecy is dated to a time "two years before the earthquake" (1:1; referred to also in Zechariah 14:5). According to the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, this earthquake happened when Uzziah sinned in attempting to offer incense (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 9, chap. 10, sec. 4). Since this action was perpetrated 11 or so years before Uzziah's death, the earthquake would have occurred around 751 b.c., thus dating Amos' prophecy to around 753 b.c. The earthquake being used as dating, "along with Amos's dialogue with Amaziah, the priest of Jeroboam's temple at Bethel (7:10-17), reveals that the period of Amos's prophetic activity was very short, unlike many of the other prophets. Amos went to Bethel from Tekoa, delivered his prophetic oracles, and returned home. He probably stayed in Bethel only a few days" (introductory notes on Amos). Very soon after the prophet's appearance at Bethel, Jeroboam II died, beginning Israel's rapid decline.

Amos Preaches Against the Nations (Amos 1:1-2:3)

As the book begins, Amos appears before a throng of Israelites worshiping at Bethel. Prior to his oracle against Israel, he pronounces God's judgment against the surrounding nations, including Judah. Each of the first seven oracles follows the same format.

1. Damascus (verses 3-5) was the capital of Syria, one of Israel's long-term rivals. The Syrian king Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad (verse 4) were cruel in their treatment of Israel (see 2 Kings 8:12-13). Gilead (verse 3) was a rich forest area east of the Jordan River. "It had belonged to Israel since they had taken over the land, but Aram often had fought Israel for possession of northern Gilead, gaining control there in Israel's times of military weakness" (Nelson, note on Amos 1:3). It is likely that the threshing attack is the same incident referred to in 2 Kings 13:7. "The metaphor Amos used is that of a threshing sledge, an agricultural implement made of parallel boards fitted with sharp points of iron or stone.... The intensity of the metaphor, however, implies the most extreme decimation and may hint at especially cruel or inhuman treatment" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on Amos 1:3).

Concerning the Valley of Aven and Beth Eden, "Amos may have intended a play on words here. Aven means 'Sin' in Hebrew; Damascus was a verdant oasis city on the edge of the desert that could be compared to Eden. However, Amos may also have been referring to the Beth Eden region on the north bank of the Euphrates" (Nelson, note on verse 5). Or perhaps the reference to Aven (Awn in Hebrew) "may be rather to the valley between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, called El-Bekaa, where are the ruins of the Baalbek temple of the sun; so the LXX [i.e., Septuagint] renders it On, the same name as the city in Egypt bears, dedicated to the sun worship (Gen. 41:45; Margin, Ezek. 30:17, Heliopolis, 'the city of the sun'). It is termed by Amos

'the valley of Aven,' or 'vanity,' from the worship of idols in it" (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary, note on Amos 1:5). Kir, where Amos said the Syrians would be taken captive, was "a region subject to Assyria (Isa. 22:6) in Iberia, the same as that called now in Armenian Kur, lying by the river Cyrus which empties itself into the Caspian Sea. [Assyrian ruler] Tiglathpileser [III] fulfilled this prophecy when Ahaz [king of Judah] applied for help to him against Rezin king of Syria, and carried away its people captive to Kir" (same note). This occurred "in 732 b.c. Amos later referred to Kir as the place from which the Syrians had originally come (9:7)" (Nelson, note on verse 5).

It is also stated that God's punishment is to send "fire" to "devour." The JFB Commentary explains this as "flames of war (Ps. 78:63), [and notes that it] occurs also in vss. 7, 10, 12, 14, and 2:2, 5" (note on verse 4). However, the book later speaks of actual conflagration, such as destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (4:11). Fiery destruction is referred to as "it" in chapters 1 (verse 14) and 2 (verses 2, 5). The Anchor Bible Commentary states: "All eight oracles refer to the same 'it' which will not be retracted or reversed. There was a single decree covering them all... declaring judgment on the entire region as a unit.... This unity suggests one cosmic holocaust, not just several invasions that would pick these countries off one by one" (note on Amos 1). Thus, rather than the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of the region, this seems to point to a great end-time destruction, which is elsewhere pointed to in the book.

It is interesting to note that the inhabitants of Syria in our day have continually tried to take control of the northeastern territory of the modern state of Israel by force and remain some of Israel's most implacable enemies.

2. Philistia (Amos 1:6-8): The southern coastal plain of Palestine was occupied by the Philistines, who lived in five main cities (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza). Four of these are mentioned in this oracle. Indeed, among all the biblical prophecies of the Philistines hereafter, Gath is conspicuously left out. "It is noteworthy that Gath is not mentioned in these prophecies, from which it may be inferred that Gath ceased to be of any major significance after the time of Uzziah" ("Philistines," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1986, p. 843).

Of taking "captive the whole captivity," the JFB Commentary says, "i.e., they left none.... Under Jehoram already the Philistines had carried away all the substance of the king of Judah, and his wives and his sons, 'so that there was never a son left to him, save Jehoahaz'; and after Amos' time (if the reference includes the future, which to the prophet's eye is as if already done), under Ahaz (II Chron. 28:18), they seized on all the cities and villages of the low country and south of Judah" (note on 1:6). Then we learn that they "deliver them up to Edom" (verse 6). "Judah's bitterest foe; as slaves (vs. 9; cf. Joel 3:1, 3, 6). [Commentator] Grotius refers to the fact (Isa. 16:4) that on Sennacherib's invasion of Judah [yet future at this point], many fled for refuge to neighboring countries; the Philistines, instead of hospitably sheltering the refugees, sold them, as if captives in war, to their enemies, the Idumeans" (note on Amos 1:6).

God's punishment is to send "fire." Again, JFB says, "i.e., the flames of war (Num. 21:28; Isa. 26:11). Hezekiah fulfilled this prophecy, smiting the Philistines unto Gaza (II Kings 18:8). Foretold by Isaiah 14:29, 31" (note on Amos 1:7). It is, of course, possible that these statements refer dually or even solely to events that are yet future. A large part of the territory of ancient Philistia is today the Palestinian Gaza Strip.

3. Tyre (Amos 1:9-10) was a major Phoenician port city to the north of Israel and southwest of Damascus. God brings the same charge against the Tyrians as against the Philistines. However, the betrayal in this case is worse, considering "the covenant of brotherhood" between Israel and Tyre—perhaps the league of King Hiram of Tyre with David and Solomon. "The Phoenicians were master seafarers. Tyre and Israel had forged an alliance that was profitable for both. However, Tyre ignored the long-standing covenant of brotherhood, and sought commercial gain by selling Israelite slaves to Edom" (Nelson, note on 1:9). As punishment, God sends "fire" (verse 10). Tyre was beset by literal fire when "many parts of Tyre were burnt by fiery missiles of the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar" (JFB, note on verse 10). And old Tyre was eventually destroyed in 333 B.C. by Alexander the Great.

A similar scenario will occur in the last days. As Tyre was a major center of commerce in the ancient world, "Tyre" is also given as the name for the end-time global trading bloc in Ezekiel 27 (called Babylon in Revelation 18, it is dominated by a final revival of the Roman Empire centered in Europe). Here we also see Israel and Judah as trading partners in this alliance (Ezekiel 27:17). Yet this friendly relationship will come to an end. Modern Israelites and Jews will be conquered by this system, the survivors taken captive as POWs, then to be bought and sold as slaves (compare Ezekiel 6:8-9; Leviticus 26:33, 38-39; Jeremiah 30:3, 8; Revelation 18:9-13). Yet God will bring great fire and destruction on end-time "Tyre" at the return of Jesus Christ.

4. Edom (Amos 1:11-12), as noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Obadiah, lay to the southeast of the southern tip of the Dead Sea, in modern Jordan. Indeed, it is interesting that the ancient territories of the next three nations mentioned by Amos are all now embraced by the same country. In a prophecy of the last days in Daniel 11, "Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon" (verse 41) are grouped together still—apparently meaning the modern state of Jordan and perhaps, since most Jordanians are Palestinian, the Palestinians in general. (The Bible Reading Program comments on Obadiah explained that many of the Palestinians are evidently of Edomite descent.) The Edomites were descended from Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, so there was a close relationship between them and Israel, and God considered them as brothers (Numbers 20:14; Obadiah 1-12; Deut 23:7). But Edom was always set against Israel (Numbers 20:14-21; 1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Kings 8:20-22), an enmity beginning from the time Esau lost his blessing to Jacob (Genesis 27:41). In so many cases, "Edom chose the day of Israel's calamity for venting his grudge. This is the point of Edom's guilt dwelt on in Obadiah 10-13" (JFB, note on Amos 1:11). Indeed, when Judah was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, Edom, as a closely related nation, should have helped

Judah's refugees. But instead of offering sympathy and help, Edom handed Judeans over to the conquering Babylonians. The Edomites even murdered some of the refugees" (Nelson, introductory notes on Obadiah).

Temon (verse 12), named after the eldest grandson of Esau and Edom's first tribal chief (Genesis 36:10-16), is believed to have been one of the largest cities in Edom, and Bozrah was a major fortress. Both were overrun by the Nabataeans—although the punishment of verse 12 may refer to destruction that is still future (compare Isaiah 34). Today the Edomites may be found among the Palestinians and Turks and in other areas of the Middle East (see the Bible Reading Program comments on Obadiah).

Over the centuries, Edom has not been compassionate—suppressing even the natural feeling of pity for a brother in distress—and this is one of the reasons for God's judgment. How much more should we be compassionate today? (Psalm 86:15; Zechariah 7:9; Matthew 18:33; Mark 1:41; Luke 10:33; 1 Peter 3:8.)

5. Ammon (Amos 1:13-15) was further to the north in the area of modern day Amman in Jordan. The city of Amman now sits on the site of the ancient city of Rabbah (verse 14). The Ammonites (like the Moabites to the south) were descended from the incestuous incident of Lot's daughters with their father (Genesis 19:30-38). As Lot was Abraham's nephew, Ammon and Moab were related to Israel, though not as closely as Edom. Horribly, as Hazael of Syria had done (2 Kings 8:12), the "Ammonites killed pregnant women in order to prevent the increase of the Israelite population in Gilead, which they were trying to wrest from Israel's control" (Nelson, note on Amos 1:13). The Ammonites were later to rejoice at the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Chaldean-Babylonian Empire (Ezekiel 25:1-7). Indeed, they "joined the Chaldeans in their invasion of Judea for the sake of plunder" (JFB, note on Amos 1:13). But the Ammonites were to suffer the same downfall during Nebuchadnezzar's onslaught. At the end of this age, the Jordanians are prophesied to escape the initial invasion by the European "Babylon" (see Daniel 11:41). However, Zephaniah 2, Isaiah 15-16, and 34, Jeremiah 48-49 and Obadiah foretell the ultimate destruction of Ammon, Moab and Edom at the time of Christ's return.

6. Moab (2:1-3) lay between Ammon in the north and Edom in the south, again in modern-day Jordan. Moab, like Ammon, was a descendent of the incestuous incident of Lot's daughters. Both Ammon and Moab would have been blessed if they had behaved toward Israel as brothers, but their refusal to grant Israel passage through their territory at the time of the Exodus caused God to reject them (Deuteronomy 23:3-4). Later, the Moabites were to join forces with Ammon and Amalek against Israel for 18 years (Judges 3:13-14). One of Moab's crimes was the desecration of the remains of the king of Edom, "a heinous act in ancient times and a great dishonor to the person's memory" (Nelson, note on 2:1). This probably refers to the Edomite king who was allied with Jehoram of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah against Mesha, king of

Moab (see 2 Kings 3:4-27). “The reference here in Amos is... to the revenge which probably the king of Moab took on the king of Edom, when the forces of Israel and Judah had retired after their successful campaign against Moab, leaving Edom without allies. The Hebrew tradition is that Moab in revenge tore from their grave and burned the bones of the king of Edom, the ally of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat, who was already buried” (JFB, note on verse 1).

In any case, “highly significant is the fact that Amos here pronounced the punishment of Yahweh on a social crime involving a non-Israelite. In his other oracles, the crimes were, for the most part, against the covenant people. Amos understood that an aspect of God’s law transcended Israel. He affirmed a moral law that extended to non-covenant nations, a law that would surely bring punishment if violated. It is not the complex legal code of Sinai for which the Moabites were held liable but the law of social responsibility, respect for human dignity and the rights of all people” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Amos 2:2-3). Certainly, this was within the spirit of the laws God revealed to Israel—indeed, such principles were revealed by God from the very beginning of mankind (and all of mankind is thus accountable).

Moab was eventually conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, again, the devouring fire of verse 2 seems to mainly point to a coming latter-day destruction, as described in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

Amos Preaches Against Judah and Israel (Amos 2:4-3:15) Amos continues his oracles.

7. Judah (Amos 2:4-5) is also condemned along with the heathen nations. People have often claimed that God had favorites, but these prophecies show that God is fair in dealing with the nations. All would suffer similar consequences if they failed to live up to what the world at large knows as plain human decency—moral principles transmitted down from God’s earliest revelations to man. God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). But the condemnation of Judah is for more than violating common human decency. The inhabitants of Judah, like those of Israel, were God’s covenant people. Their special relationship with Him made them even more accountable than the gentile nations. They were to obey God’s law, but rejected it (verse 4). In fact, they even followed false gods when, more than anyone, they should have known better. The devouring fire prophesied for the gentile nations is seen here coming against Judah too. And while Judah was overrun by Nebuchadnezzar, (2 Kings 24-25), who did burn Jerusalem (25:9), this prophecy is almost certainly for the end time as well.

8. Israel now becomes the object of Amos’ correction. And it was to Israelites that he was preaching at Bethel. Concerning his oracles, The Bible Reader’s Companion states: “Amos begins with the most distant nation, and then, in a wide swing, moves to lands circling Israel. One can almost hear the delighted ‘Yes! Yes!’ of his listeners as they hear the prophet denounce one enemy after another. But then, unexpectedly, the prophet pounces. The severest

condemnation of all is reserved for Israel itself. How his listeners' hearts must have sunk as Amos' finger at last pointed directly at them!" (chap. 1-2 summary).

He begins with their sins against society (Amos 2:6-8). They have become so hardened through their disobedience to God and following false religion that God's ways of righteousness and mercy no longer influence their thinking. The "righteous" being sold here simply means those who are in the right—they should have justice on their side but are condemned as guilty. Bribery takes the place of true justice. The language in the Hebrew here strongly suggests that litigation is the main issue. "Either a bribe as small as a pair of shoes is enough to swing the verdict, or a debt as small as that of a pair of shoes is enough to bring a man into the dock: such is the covetousness of the community" (New Bible Commentary: Revised, 1970, note on verse 6) Amos then reminds Israel of God's gracious acts towards them throughout their history. They have ignored Him as a source of needed help and would suffer the consequences (verses 6-16).

In chapter 3, Amos quotes God as saying, "You only have I known" (verse 2), which, "in this context, means 'You only have I chosen.' God's relationship with Israel was not only intimate, it was exclusive. God had been faithful to Israel; yet Israel had not been faithful to God. For this reason, the nation would be judged" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 2). God then asks the question, perhaps the most well-known quotation from the book, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (verse 3)—that is, unless they continue in general agreement. Others translate the verse a little differently: "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (NIV). The answer to either question is a resounding no. Israel and God had an agreement that they would walk together, but Israel broke the covenant and the law of cause and effect comes into play. That's the point of verses 3-6—each effect must have a cause. "It follows that disaster is an effect of some action, in this case action by the Lord.... It should have been clear to Israel that their sufferings were God's messengers, warning them against their sins. We are not to take every personal disaster as a warning of judgment or judgment itself. But we are to examine ourselves to discover if anything in our lives might have moved God to act" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verses 3-6).

Verse 7 is one of the most important statements about prophecy in the Bible: "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." God is not cruel and uncaring. If He is going to punish a nation, He will let them know in advance to give them an opportunity to repent (Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33; Jeremiah 18:7-8). And if a true servant of God understands a revelation or warning from God, he cannot keep it to himself. Both his fear of God and his concern for people compel him to preach and pass along God's message (Amos 3:8; 7:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:16; Matthew 10:27).

In verse 9 of Amos 3, God calls the Egyptians and Philistines to witness His judgment on Israel, implying that Israel is even worse than they were. While they had attacked other nations, Israel's oppression was against its own people. Moreover, "they had not received God's revelation at Sinai; yet Israel, having received it, had violated it grossly and repeatedly" (Nelson, note on 3:9-

10). Indeed, the Israelites' morality was so warped that they no longer knew to do right (verse 10). As the chapter ends, Amos' prophecy deals specifically with two major problem areas in Israel—false religion (verse 14) and the importance attached to wealth and power (verse 15).

Israel's Punishment for Failing to Heed (Amos 4-5)

Amos again reminded Israel of the way God had dealt with them since they came out of Egypt and how they had ignored the warnings. God would now destroy Israel as a political power, saying, in effect, "enough is enough." God then lists six calamities to come upon Israel: famine (4:6); drought (verses 7-8); crop destruction (verse 9); plague (verse 10); defeat in war (verse 10) and fiery destruction of cities comparable to what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 11). This final calamity tells us that the prophecy is for the end time, as this did not happen in the destruction of ancient Israel by the Assyrians. Ezekiel 6:6 makes it even more plain: "In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste." Referring to major cities of our day, this seems to signal nuclear devastation or some as yet unknown means of mass destruction.

God says, "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (verse 12). For some, this will be by death. But for the rest, it means God soon coming to earth—i.e., in the end-time return of Jesus Christ. "To be confronted—inescapably—by the God it had scorned and rejected would be a fate more terrible than Israel could imagine" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 12). In chapter 5, God lists a seventh calamity through Amos: captivity (5:3), a punishment mentioned in 4:2-3 and made clearer in 6:7. In 5:3, we are told that of those who go into captivity, only a tenth will survive (compare Isaiah 6:11-13, Living Bible).

God explains that He is the ultimate power to whom Israel should look—not their false gods. Interesting in His proclamations is a mention of the hydrological cycle of evaporation and rain, also referred to elsewhere in Scripture (compare Ecclesiastes 11:3; Job 36:27-29). One might wonder how this could have been so accurately understood by ancient authors—thus perhaps providing further evidence of God's inspiration of Scripture.

God's Anger With His People (Lamentations 2)

"The second dirge (2:1-22) emphasizes the destruction God caused in unleashing His anger on the Holy City... A grimly determined God has laid Zion waste, rejecting His city and its temple (vv. 1-9). In utter agony, Zion's proud inhabitants have crumpled to the ground. They are terrified, tormented, and stunned; shattered by the events which have at last revealed the futility of false prophets' reassurances. God has done as He promised and planned (vv. 10-17). The writer calls his people to prayer (vv. 18-19), and they cry out, describing their condition in pitiful terms, and acknowledging God as the cause of their pain (vv. 20-22)" (Bible Reader's

Companion, chapters 1-3 summary). This is a bold reminder of the fact that God desires worship that comes from a converted heart, not that which comes from ritual or a building— even ritual He instituted and a building He blessed!

In verse 2 we see that destruction has come on “all the dwelling places of Jacob,” including, but not limited to, “the strongholds of the daughter of Judah.” Verse 3 shows God having cut off “every horn of Israel,” the horn being a symbol of strength and power. God “has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire.” As noted previously, the book of Lamentations concerns not only what happened to ancient Judah, but also what will befall both Judah and Israel in the end time. This is startling to consider, when one realizes it encompasses the most powerful nations of the past 200 years—the former British Empire and the present superpower of the United States.

The beginning of verse 6 is perhaps better translated, “He has done violence to His tabernacle, as if it were that of a garden...” That is, as Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary quotes Calvin in its note on verse 6, “His tabernacle (i.e., temple) as (one would take away the temporary cottage or booth) of a garden.”

Verse 9 laments, “The Law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD.” The Nelson Study Bible comments in its note on this verse: “These words do not suggest the end of the Law, but rather the ceasing of the work of the Law in the lives of the people for their blessing (see Deut. 6:1-3)... Divinely appointed instruction ceased for both the nation and the individual. This is not to say that the Law or prophecy were no longer available. God spoke to Jeremiah ten days after the prophet requested a word from God (see Jer. 42:4-7); furthermore Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied during the 70 years of the Exile.”

In Lamentations 2:11 we see the writer of the book—again, probably Jeremiah—with eyes swollen shut from weeping over what is happening to his people. As a true servant of God who cares deeply for the people he is sent to minister to, he is sick with grief to the point of vomiting. And yet this sense of overwhelming grief may not just be the mindset of the book’s writer, as it is inspired by the ultimate author—God Himself. God does not miss anything—not the cries of infants or their mothers. He is afflicted when His people are afflicted (as Isaiah 63:9 makes clear: “In all their affliction He was afflicted.”). Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, “He does not afflict willingly” (3:33).

So why does He persist in the affliction? Besides being just and fair, God knows the punishment is totally necessary. Jesus prayed to His Father on the night before His crucifixion, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But that was not to be. Sometimes there is no alternative. God is working towards an everlasting plan, and punishment and suffering are sometimes necessary to produce positive results that last for eternity. The destruction and suffering of Israel is a lesson that all mankind can and will benefit from (compare 1 Corinthians

10:6-7). Even this study of these words is part of their benefit! When we have trials today and God allows them, His purpose is always a greater one of eternal good for the one afflicted (James 1:2).

Of course, in the midst of affliction, the suffering is hard to bear—and difficult for those trying to provide comfort. “How shall I console you?” the book asks. “Jeremiah had no words to help the grieving women of Jerusalem as they looked helplessly on their dying babies” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Lamentations 2:13). Again, we should remember that God too, not just His prophet, grieved over what He decided had to be done in response to the rebellion of the nation. In this sense, we should view the book of Lamentations as not just the lamenting of Jeremiah and the people of Israel, but also of God Himself.

This situation is so dire that the mothers have actually cannibalized their children (verse 20), just as God had warned would happen in the terrible siege conditions that would result from His people forsaking Him (Deuteronomy 28:52-57). We will see this mentioned again in Lamentation 4:10. This horrifying act had been perpetrated in past siege conditions (see 2 Kings 6:28-29). And, as shocking as it is to contemplate, it will yet happen again at the end of the age.

This is a sobering picture of where disobedience leads. May we learn the lesson—and avoid the consequences—as we approach the terrible times that lie just ahead of us all.

1 Corinthians 2-3

Chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians is all about the Spirit of Elohim. Paul attempts to describe this Spiritual language and entity and how beautiful and important and set apart it is. He stresses his personal realization that this language, wisdom and understanding is not a result of perfect speech or big fancy words. It is a language he tries to describe as secret, yet known, to the spirit man... the spirit man can hear and understand these things.

All he has to do is speak of Messiah and Him crucified and the Spirit of Elohim does the rest! Additionally, the art of persuasive speech – ie as an attorney or philosophy does not apply to the wisdom of God, in fact, what does work to explain the Spirit of God is the demonstration of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Walk the walk is what Paul is saying and that is what he is trying to bring to the Corinthians.

Although Isaiah told us that “eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor have entered into the heart of man what Elohim has prepared for those who love Him,” Is. 64:4... there is also a perfection in the spirit of the believer and in the spirit man who can understand, hear, and take to heart these truths of the Spirit of Elohim. Out of the heart comes all actions and words. This is where the secret Spirit of Elohim is revealed to others and it is “spirit to spirit” and can be no other way. The carnal man cannot perceive nor receive these matters and so sees them as foolish.

Chapter 3. Because the Corinthians were new in the preaching of the matters of Messiah, they were still listening and receiving as carnal men. Paul says he was speaking to them as babes and fed them with the simple matters only before, and yet now, he STILL has to speak to them in this manner which is a testimony to the fact that they are still carnal and not spiritual.

How does he know this? Because of these: envy, strife, divisions among the brethren. The assembly sounds like they were arguing and fighting about whether Paul or Appollos was right about something or which one of them should get the most listen and reverence. This is quite ludicrous because it is only Elohim who is to be followed and revered! If someone takes offense concerning a particular religion or insult of their particular religion.... Guess what? The same is true for you. You are being carnal because we are not to follow any man or servant of Elohim, but Elohim Himself. He did not bring religion to us.... Mankind and Satan has done that.

In fact, if we have built our faith upon a religion, rest assured that foundation is going to be tried and burned up. Then, will we still be standing? There is only one foundation and corner stone and that is Messiah. Here is your responsibility and it is great: do not boast in men or the world, whether Paul, Peter, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Protestant, Messianic, Michael Rood, Monte Judah, Joseph Dumond, Apollos, life, death, the world, prophecy, or any other thing in all the world we fight over — politics too. ALL belongs to Elohim and you belong to Him.