[4] Thus says the LORD:

“For three transgressions of Judah,

and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,

because they have rejected the law of the LORD,

and have not kept his statutes,

but their lies have led them astray,

those after which their fathers walked.

[5] So I will send a fire upon Judah,

and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.”

So now we turn to Judah. Judah, as we know, was the southern kingdom which came into existence when Israel had civil war after the death of Solomon. This kingdom continued the line of David, and continued, though not well, the temple in Jerusalem. As we see, Amos continues his denunciation with the three and for four transgressions, which again, means for their many sins or transgressions.  
 What has Judah done? They have rejected the Law of the LORD. They not kept his statutes. We know Judah should have continued to follow after God better than even Israel, since they had the temple in Jerusalem. Like Israel, they also should know the Law since they were part of the people God brought out of Egypt. Unfortunately, they did not keep the law of God. This law is more than border skirmishes, in fact, one could see how the Law they had was more than the natural moral laws the other nations disobeyed. Judah, disobeyed the covenant they made with God, and such an accusation is very condemning.  
 However we also notice, “their lies have led them astray.” Some commentators say, “Their fakes” rather than, “their lies.” The focus is on idolatry. We know that idolatry was forbidden in the Law, but we also know that Judah practiced idolatry throughout much of it’s existence. We see that is the case when Amos says, “Those after which their fathers walked.” Hence, it wasn’t just a short history, but a long history of disobedience to God.  
 Because of their failure to maintain the covenant, God will send a fire upon Judah, devouring the strongholds of Jerusalem. This is startling for Judah, since at the beginning Amos told us that God was roaring from Jerusalem. Yet, even the most holy place on earth will not escape when the people are judged.

[6] Thus says the LORD:

“For three transgressions of Israel,

and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,

because they sell the righteous for silver,

and the needy for a pair of sandals—

[7] those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth

and turn aside the way of the afflicted;

a man and his father go in to the same girl,

so that my holy name is profaned;

[8] they lay themselves down beside every altar

on garments taken in pledge,

and in the house of their God they drink

the wine of those who have been fined.

We can imagine, since we know Amos spent time in Israel prophesying, that many who heard the previous condemnation would have some glee over the fact that it was Judah. The reason for this is that Judah was the seventh nation, and it had the greater atrocities against it. Little did they know of the coming judgments from God against Israel.  
 Amos begins Israel with the same as the other nations, for three and for four. For their many sins, their many transgressions, God will not revoke the punishment.  
 He begins with the rightoues and the needy. We notice that these are parallels, that is they are not necessarily synonomous with each other. Instead, both have suffered in the same ways. The righteous are sold for silver. This likely represents court cases in which those who are in the right are often denied justice. The mention of silver reflects the idea that it is the rich who are the ones who are pulling strings to make sure they get their way in the court system.  
 We also notice that the needy are sold for a pair of sandals. Again, it represents not the benevolent slavery which is so strong in the Law, but a slavery which treats humans as less than humans. As though they are worth enough for a pair of sandals. Likewise, if coupled with the previous, it may be that the righteous needy are receiving injustice, in that they lose court cases and are forced into slavery because of it.  
 The social injustice continues as the poor are trampled upon. In this way they are hindered from progress, as though a great weight is placed on their shoulders. They are unable to escape their circumstances because of the injustice. Whether through the courts, or the anti-benevolence of the rich upon them, they are waylaid from progress because the corrupt society around them.  
 If social immorality isn’t enough, there is also sexual immorality. A man and his father sleep with the same woman. As we’ve seen many times such a situation is against the sexual laws found in Leviticus 18-20. Ultimately this represents blatant covenantal disobedience as they go against cultural taboos set forth in the Law.  
 One might be wondering, where are the religious during this time? Unfortunately we learn that they are in league with the corruption. The fact that they lay blankets down at their altars. The use of the plural altar here is a reminder that the Law forbade temple worship in many places, but focused specifically in Jerusalem at the temple. Likewise, the laying out the blankets is a reflection that in the Law one could only borrow another’s garment for the day, and must return it at night (Exodus 22:25-27). The reason for this was that one did not know if that was their only garment, and the one whos garment it was should not have to suffer in the cold. Yet, they do not do this, instead those who take the garment keep it for the night.  
 This leads to the reality that the goal of fining was for restitution. Instead, the money gained from fines were being used to debauch themselves. Where? But in the house of God. Such religious debauchery were reminiscent of Caananite, not Israelite, religious temple worship. Thus, they are looking more and more pagan, and less and less holy as they are called to.

[9] “Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them,

whose height was like the height of the cedars

and who was as strong as the oaks;

I destroyed his fruit above

and his roots beneath.

[10] Also it was I who brought you up out of the land of Egypt

and led you forty years in the wilderness,

to possess the land of the Amorite.

[11] And I raised up some of your sons for prophets,

and some of your young men for Nazirites.

Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel?” declares the LORD.

Under normal circumstances, the above verses would be the end of it. But, no, now Amos continues his condemnation of Israel by focusing on their long history of failure to follow after God. He does this by showing God’s kindness to them, and their failure to obey despite God’s kindness.  
 He begins with recognition of the destruction of the Amorite. Amorite is virtually synonymous with Canaanite. It especially denotes those in the high forest who were well entrenched, and we see that with the words, “height like the height of cedars and strong as the oaks”. Even though that was the case, God still cast them out and gave their land to Israel. They’re fruit was destroyed above and below at the roots, all done by God.  
 Not only this, but remember further how God brought them up out of Egypt. He led them in the wilderness for forty years. Both of these acts represent God purposefully acting. He acted by bringing the plagues upon Egypt, and by providing for them in the desert, all so that they could possess the land of the Amorites, the Canaanites.  
 Yet, that is not all, despite these obvious acts of grace by God to this nation, He also did more. He raised up prophets and Nazarites. The prophets were the ones who called the people back to God when they disobeyed. They were social critics, reminding them of the way in which God would have them live. Instead of listening to the prophets, they often rejected them. Despite God’s grace in sending such individuals, the people scorned them.  
 Likewise, the Nazarites were those whose vows showed a chaste life in complete obedience to the Law of God. Like the prophets, Nazarites could be male, female, slave, or free. They lived in purity to see the will of God carried out. Thus their lives represented the holy God whom had led this nation, in slavery, in wilderness, in conquest, and even further as a nation.

[12] “But you made the Nazirites drink wine,

and commanded the prophets,

saying, ‘You shall not prophesy.’

What was the peoples response to such grace, their response to these agents of faith? The Nazarites were encouraged not to fulfill their vows, instead they were told to drink wine, sometimes, perhaps, even forcefully. In either case it represents the lack of orthodoxy for the religion which God had given. It could represent it being a joke, as though being a Nazarite really didn’t mean anything to the people, or it could be a way to represent the people who forced the Nazarites to break the vows despite their best intentions.  
 Just as bad, the prophets whom God sent were told not to prophecy. Again, we see this antireligious sentiment. A lack of desire to follow after God and His statutes, and to silence those whom God chose to bring them back from their wickedness.

[13] “Behold, I will press you down in your place,

as a cart full of sheaves presses down.

[14] Flight shall perish from the swift,

and the strong shall not retain his strength,

nor shall the mighty save his life;

[15] he who handles the bow shall not stand,

and he who is swift of foot shall not save himself,

nor shall he who rides the horse save his life;

[16] and he who is stout of heart among the mighty

shall flee away naked in that day,”

declares the LORD.

We now come to the judgment of Israel. For the previous verses we saw why their judgment comes, and now we see the results of their immoral, unethical, and unjust society. God will press them down in their place as a cart full of sheaves represents someone who wants to run, but they cannot. Though they will see to flee, the judgment will be so great that they will not be able to escape it.  
 There are now civilian and perhaps military individuals brought into focus. The swift, those who are quick in running, will not be able to flee for their flight will perish. The strong will not be able to maintain his strength against the judgment, and the mighty will not be able to save his life. Such a judgment will bring all the people who would normally be able to battle, and instead bring them destruction.  
 The one who handles the bow will not stand. Bowmen in antiquity, and even up through the Middle Ages, were a necessary and pivotal group for warfare. It was necessary for them to hold their ground especially for accuracy, but even they will not be able to stand against the judgment.  
 Likewise, the swift of foot is again mentioned, those who should be able to flee to save himself from utter defeat will be overtaken. This is further seen by the rider on the horse, or even the charioteer. They will not be able to flee from the coming judgment of God for the blatant disobedience to God.  
 Ultimately, even the strout of heart. Those who are most bold, most able to hold their own on the day of battle. The great and mighty warriors, even they will flee away from that day. To flee naked may be literal, as it may represent those who with armor on strip themselves to try and run faster. Either way, these individuals will not be able to escape the judgment day of God.  
 This is the declaration of the Lord, that these things should take place because of their disobedience, because of their immorality, and because of their blatant rejection of the graciousness of God Almighty.  
  
Main Point: The main point of these verses are to draw the net around the people of God. First, Judah, who should be at the forefront of following the Law of God and yet they rejected it by disobeying the Law. The second is Israel, the main focus of this entire grouping of nations and the catalyst. Their failure, their immorality, their disobedience, their failure to remain in covenant, and their blatant disregard for God and His Law will cause destruction to come upon them.  
  
1. When the Religious Fail: Something which many of us might have noticed is the way in which neither kings, nor priests, are mentioned in the critique especially against Israel. The likely reason for this is that both had become so corrupt that any mention of them was unnecessary. In fact, one would argue, especially in regards to the priests, that what we are seeing a failure of the religious on the society, with the exception of the prophets and the Nazarenes.  
 So what happens when religion fails? What happens with those who claim to follow after God, those who should be following after Him, cease from their claims? What happens on the society when the religious fail? Well, we see what happens in such a society. We see what happens when the priesthood gets corrupted, and it is that the society itself gets corrupted.  
 Some may wonder, alright, what does that have to do with us? I would say, everything. We who gather together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ are priests. We are, according to the New Testament, a kingdom of priests. Each of us has a duty as priests to remain in the faith and continue to know the God who we proclaim.  
 Yet, when our congregations begin to cease being holy, that is different, other, than the world around them, then we have a problem. When our congregations begin to seek other ways, we have a problem. When we bow down to other gods, we have a problem. When we seek methods and means of the world to act out the business of the Church, we have a problem.  
 The Church is to be the light of the nations. That light is not our own light, but the light of Jesus Christ through us. If we live and act in a way which is contrary to Christ, then what becomes of our light? It dims. A light that ceases to be light is no longer light but darkness. Thus, when our congregations cease looking like Christ and look more like the world, then darkness is all that there is.  
 If that is the case, then light is nowhere to be seen, and how then can we say we are following Christ? We become no more than Israel, no more than Judah, in their travesties and their abominations and immorality when we decide to follow a different course than the one given to us through the Law, the prophets, from God Himself.  
 We have dealt with such an issue in our congregation’s doctrinal statement when it comes to sexual immorality. But the reason why such a statement needs to be considered is because the world around us is beginning to accept such lifestyles. Hence, we have a few options. We could follow the world, and just put religious icing on the cake of the world, or we can follow God and go against the world and the society which is around us.  
 If we do the former, if we simply follow the world and accept what the world accepts, then we fail that society. We not only fail that society, but we also fail Christ, we become like those nations of old whose religious failed them. When the Church looks like the world, then it is of the world, and there is no fruit to be found therein.  
 However, if we go against the world, and we stand firm on the Gospel, and we stand firm on the teachings which have been with us for thousands of years, then we can know we are being prophetic and priestly to the world and not failing the society around us.  
 Yet it is not enough that we should talk of doctrinal statements, though they are immensely important! We know our stance is with the Bible when it comes to sexual immorality, and where the Scriptures go, we go. However, we also need to remember social justice in general. The Law speaks of slavery, but is benevolent and benign compared to the slavery which occurred in those nations and across the world.  
 At the same time, can we in America say that we are any better with the issue of slavery? Can we say we are better when we look at slave wages across the nation? How there are million and billion dollar companies who keep their employees at a barely livable wage? Is it possible, that around us, at all times, we see the poor unable to escape their own bonds because the society around them doesn’t care?  
 I would say, yes. However, I would also say that the fault lies not in capitalism, nor does it lie in the companies themselves, per se. Instead, it lies on the Christians who have been silent, on the Christians who have been willing to separate their religion from the rest of their lives. From Christian businessmen and businesswomen who would know that humans are created in the image of God, and yet treat their employees in such sorrowful ways so that they can gain a profit.  
 You see, the issue isn’t just the religious in their own religious culture. It is the culture itself that was the problem for Israel and Judah. It was that they failed to follow the Law which deals not only with religious matters, but social matters, law and court matters, as well. Because for them, there was no separation of religious with lifestyle or religious with society at large.  
 We as Christians should live the same way, not separating our religious ideology from our lifestyles, our work, or our society. We are blessed to live in a society in which we are free to bring the Christian worldview to the forefront. We have every right to speak up about any of the societal issues in which society finds itself in. That is what makes America truly great, is that we all can come together and persuade each other of what is best for the society, and we can do it in relative peace.  
 As it is, when we are silent, then that is another place that the redemption of Jesus Christ is taken over. When businesses take advantage of workers, it is not that they fail, it is that we have failed to speak against such practices and show the world a better way. Show the world the wisdom of God if we follow after Him and how it brings greater peace and growth for all.  
 We cannot force businesses to accept our paradigm, nor can we force them to accept our ideology, we can’t force anyone. But that does not mean we cannot seek to persuade and engage in conversation with those individuals in the society which we share. As Christians, we cannot fail here, and we cannot fail out there.  
 So what do we do? We proclaim the Gospel in love. We live our lives according to what God has decreed according to the Scriptures. We seek to glorify God with our hearts, our minds, our bodies, and our souls. We give ourselves to Christ in all things, not some things. We raise ourselves up here so we can be a light out there. We give all of everything we have to Christ. If you are thinking of something right now that you can’t give, then give it in whatever way is most faithful to Christ.  
 In this way, we become a light to the society around us. We see what has happened when we fail society. We see it every day. We see fear, we see hopelessness, we see corruption, not only in our congregations, we see it across the nation and in every area. We’ve tried doing it one way for a century, it is time for us to wake up, change course, and simply be faithful to Jesus Christ where we are and in every capacity in this life. If the world doesn’t follow, then we know the judgment which comes for them, but let us never be ones who follow the world instead of Christ, and let us not give ourselves to darkness, but rather to the light of the world, knowing the power of Christ to save.

2. Covenant Breaking: Something more to consider is the reality of those who willingly break the covenant they had with God. If we reflect on it, the people of Israel and Judah were both to dedicate themselves to God as a holy people, distinct from all others. Instead of doing this, they decided to blaspheme God by disobeying His commandments, by exploiting the poor and oppressed, treating humans with little or no dignity, and dedicating themselves to false ideas, false beliefs, of other gods.  
 It is for this failure on their part that judgment will come even to those who are the people of God. We should not assume that the God was impatient. Actually, God was very patient. He was not only patient with His own people, but He was also patient with the pagan nations around Israel and Judah. God has always been patient with humanity, yet, we often see humanity rejecting God despite His patience with them, and the revelation He gives through nature and through the prophets, to turn to Him.  
 Today, we spent the majority of our time looking at Israel and Judah who did this. We looked at those who were God’s chosen people, who rejected Him. From this we need to be cautious. Not only are we to be cautious about how we handle ourselves in the world, how we are to proclaim the Gospel with our lives in all measure of our lives, but also there is a warning for us what can happen if we are negligent.  
 Many of us have considered Christianity, and many of us consider American Christians and wonder, what on earth are we thinking? We have many who do not believe in the Bible, many who willingly believe false doctrines, many who have no desire to persue the glory of God, who have no desire for fellowship with believers, no desire for righteousness and justice. We have many Christians in America who are apathetic, at best, to following Jesus Christ with all their lives.  
 Yet, if you were to ask them if they are believers, they would say that they are. It is here that many individuals who fall into such a category should take what we have read today and take heed. God does not take kindly to those who claim to follow Him but do not. The Israelites and Judah actually thought they were in the right, they didn’t think that they had a problem with God by the lifestyles and beliefs they held. They were doing what was right in their own eyes, and not what was actually right according to God.  
 Can we see individuals in our own generation in our own Christian culture who would fall to the same sway? Those who claim to follow God and yet nothing indicates that they actually do? It is to such individuals that we have warnings like these in the Old Testament of the chosen people who are far from God. But we also have such warnings in the New Testament as well. Consider what we read in Romans.  
 “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the same kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.” Romans 11:17-24.  
 So what do we read from Romans? A warning. If those who claim Christ do not continue in the same kindness then we will be cut off from the tree. We will experience the judgment as Israel and Judah before them.  
 The same is further said in Hebrews, though even more severe. We read, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful things to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:26-31.  
 Again, we see what happens to those who claim to be of Christ, and yet they do not live according to Christ. We see what happens to those who say they partake of the covenant, and then live against the covenant which has been established by the blood of Christ. Only judgment will occur to such individuals who, like Israel and Judah before them, say they follow and then do not.  
 Such individuals are covenant breakers just as those who we’ve read about today were covenant breakers. As such, we need to take care to not fall into the same trap. We need to make sure that we remain in the covenant, by turning in repentance and faith in Christ.  
 By seeking to live in step with the Spirit of God in love. By seeking to give all of ourselves to God. All of our morality, all of our ethics, all of our philosophies, all of our beliefs, all of our mind, body, soul, strength, and all of our hearts. So that Christ who is in us can be all in all, in all things, in all ways.  
 Thus, we learn from Israel and Judah. We learn to live for God, not against Him. We learn not to fall sway to the societies around us. We learn to stand firm on the faith of Jesus Christ. We learn to seek justice, to be the Salt and Light of the world, a reflection of Jesus Christ for the world to see. So that when they look at us, they will glorify our God in heaven and say, “there is a people who know God.”  
 This is our purpose. To seek obedience in the covenant which we have all laid claim to if we claim to follow Jesus Christ. Do not break the covenant! Do not fall into injustice, unrighteousness. Do not fall into false beliefs and lifestyles. Instead, seek what is true, seek Christ, and live according to the will of God. Though we stumble, we know we have an advocate in Christ, and as such, we have everlasting hope in the blood of Jesus which saves us from our sins.  
 So we cannot expect perfection in this life, but we can still seek God and try with all our might to follow Him in faithfulness, knowing that our shortcomings will be overcome through Christ who has overcome the world, even the world that we struggle with, He will overcome. To this we give praise to God for Jesus Christ who is our salvation, and the covenant we have through Him, reminding us of grace, but also reminding us of judgment.  
  
3. The Gospel: Though we have harsh warnings here against those who would seek to break the covenant of God through their disobedience, there is always hope in Christ. For those who do repent, who do seek Him in faith, even though they stumble, they will overcome in the end by the power of Christ. This is our eternal hope, and our eternal peace, knowing that Christ has overcome, and all those who are in Christ will overcome as well if they remain faithful.  
 The Gospel begins with our origins. God created all things by the power of His Word. Last of all He created humanity to be His image bearers. Because God is a God of love, reason, knows, can be known, has personhood, and displays chesed we can as well. It is here we find dignity, sanctity, and worth to human life.  
 Yet, like God, we were able to choose. We could either choose to follow God in obedience and into life, or disobedience into sin and death. We chose the latter and have continued to make that choice ever since. Because of this our relationships with God, ourselves, each other, and the world are broken. It is because of this we continue to accrue a greater moral guilt before our God every day, not a feeling of guilt, but true guilt before our God.  
 God did not leave us in this state forever. Instead He sent His Light and Word into our darkness, and that was Jesus Christ His Son. Jesus lived, died, and rose again in time, space, history, and flesh. It is to Him all the prophets’ point. It was by His sacrifice we find our redemption. Because of Him our relationships can begin to be reconciled, and because of His blood our guilt before God is cast aside. His victory in life and over death becomes our victory in life and over death.  
 All that is required of us is obedience in two things. The first is repentance. We are to live a lifestyle which is congruent with the Scriptures for the glory of God. We are to not live however we please, nor are we to live for self, instead we are to live for God and His holy Name in adherence to the Scriptures, walking in step with His Spirit.  
 Second we are to place our faith in Jesus Christ. We must recognize our dependence upon the Son of God for our salvation. It is not what we are able to do which saves us, but what Christ has done. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, for the glory of God alone we are saved.  
 For those who are disobedient in these things there is only condemnation. None can stand before God with their deeds in hand, for sin has corrupted even their greatest deeds. Because of this, to stand before God apart from Christ is to stand worthy of all judgment because of sin.  
 For those who are obedient, however, there is no longer condemnation. Instead, they stand before God redeemed of their sins through Christ. Their lifestyles are no longer bound to sin, but bound to Christ. They become inheritors of an eternal kingdom, where they will experience the love of God, and the peace of God, forever.  
 As we consider these histories of these nations who came before us, let us remember the Gospel. As we consider our own culture, and the warnings given to us in these verses, let’s seek to overcome the world which devoured these nations. We overcome when we are faithful to Jesus. So be faithful, know the Gospel, and seek the glory of God with all your life now, knowing those who remain faithful will enter into that glory in the life to come. Amen.