

Amos 1:3-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-1/amos-13-5/>

The LORD pronounces judgment on the inhabitants of Damascus because they slaughtered the people of Gilead.

Although Israel and Judah were the primary audience of God's message delivered through Amos, six other cities and nations —Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab —were also indicted. For each oracle, Amos confirmed his prophetic call with the statement *Thus says the LORD* (Am. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, and 6). It is worth noting that each of the oracles begins with the formula "For three transgressions of [name of city or state], even for four," though Amos only listed one transgression for each nation, except for Israel which received all four of them (Amos 2:6–16). It is likely that the formula was used as a rhetorical device to emphasize the fact that the cities or nations committed crime after crime, thus deserving God's judgment. Stated differently, the cities/nations would not be judged merely because of one transgression or even two. Rather, they were guilty of a huge quantity of sins, which the prophet described as "three transgressions... even four."

Beginning with Damascus, Amos stated, *Thus says the Lord, 'For three transgressions of Damascus and for four, I will not revoke its punishment.'* As mentioned earlier, the statement *thus says the LORD* tells the reader that the message of Amos originated from God. The LORD was the one who gave His words to His prophet. In this section, the divine message concerns *Damascus*.

The city named *Damascus* was the capital of the nation of Aram during the 10th through 8th centuries BC. It is still the capital of modern Syria today. Here, Damascus represents the entire nation of Aram (or Syria). God commissioned Amos of Tekoa to proclaim His words to the Arameans to let them know that He took note of their *transgressions*, their offenses, and would judge accordingly. The word *transgression* refers to acts of rebellion committed against someone in authority, such as when Israel rebelled "against the house of David" (1 Kgs. 12:19; 2 Kgs. 1:1).

Here in Amos, we see that the people of *Damascus* rebelled against the LORD because *they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron*. Any crime committed against human beings is ultimately against the LORD because He is the sole creator. God authorized human government in Genesis, where He said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). This was to prevent the earth from again being filled with violence (Genesis 6:11). In this case, God Himself is making the judgement. Although God delegated authority to human governments to execute justice (Romans 13:4), He is still the ultimate judge.

The city of *Gilead* was an Israelite region located on the eastern side of the Jordan River, just south of *Damascus*. It was rich in pasture (Numbers 32:1) and famous for its balm (Jeremiah 8:22). As such, it attracted the Arameans who were one of the most frequent enemies of Israel.

Such an attraction caused the Arameans to thresh the Israelites of *Gilead with implements of sharp iron*. Amos used the imagery of threshing to convey the damage wrought by Damascus upon the inhabitants of Gilead. Grain is threshed with farming instruments, which back then might include a heavy board, studded with sharp metal used to pull over the grain to separate it from the husk. In similar fashion, Damascus had *threshed Gilead* with their instruments of war. For this they will be judged by God.

An example of Damascus's war against Israel is found in 2 Kings 10 where "Hazeal [the king of Damascus] defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites and the Reubenites and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the valley of the Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan" (2 Kgs. 10:32–33).

Because of the Arameans' war crimes, the LORD said He would *send fire upon the house of Hazeal and it would consume the citadels of Ben-hadad*. Hazeal was the king of Damascus in the second half of the ninth century BC, while Ben-hadad was his son and successor (2 Kgs. 13:3, 22–25). Deuteronomy 4:24 says that God is a consuming fire. Fire is used symbolically for God's judgment, which would fall on *the house of Hazeal and the citadels of Ben-hadad*. The *house of Hazeal* referred to any of the descendants of *Hazeal*, including *Ben-hadad*. The reign of this lineage would be destroyed for their wrongdoings.

God stated that He would *also break the gate bar of Damascus*. In ancient Israel, gates and doors were usually locked with a *bar* made of wood or metal that slid into openings in the posts. The *bar* would secure the *gate* or the door to prevent outsiders from entering to hurt the residents of the city. Here the LORD said He would *break the bar* to allow Damascus's enemies to enter. The power and strength of Damascus would be broken. This likely refers to the entire kingdom of Aram, of which Damascus was the capital.

God also said He will *cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven*. This judgment includes the peoples of this region (probably the Biq'ah Valley) which was likely also a part of the kingdom of Aram. God would cause the one holding *the scepter* to be *cut off from Beth-Eden*. The place called *Beth-Eden* refers to an Aramean state located on the Euphrates River south of Carchemish. The expression "one who holds the scepter" is a figurative way of talking about someone who occupies a royal position. The authority of Aram will end here as well. The inclusion of the valley of Aven as well as *Beth-Eden* together with Damascus might indicate the entire kingdom of Aram.

As a result of God breaking *the gate bar of Damascus*, *the people of Aram would go exiled to Kir*. Not only would the kingdom of Aram fall, and its rulers have their authority crushed, its people would be conquered and taken into exile by its conquerors. The city named *Kir* was the place where the Arameans originally lived (Amos 9:7), although its precise location is unknown. Amos's prophecy concerning Damascus was probably fulfilled in 732 BC when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III captured the city, weakening it for the rest of the Old Testament period (2 Kgs. 16:9).

Biblical Text

3 Thus says the Lord,

“For three transgressions of Damascus and for four

I will not revoke its *punishment*,

Because they threshed Gilead with *implements* of sharp iron.

4“So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael

And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad.

5 “I will also break the gate bar of Damascus,

And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven,

And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden;

So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir,”

Says the LORD.