

Amos 3:3-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-3/amos-33-8/>

Amos uses a series of rhetorical questions to announce judgment on the disobedient Israelites.

Having reminded the Israelites of their special covenant relationship with the LORD (vv. 1–2), Amos used a series of rhetorical questions to announce judgment on the people who failed to obey the covenantal principles. A rhetorical question is a question that is asked to make a point rather than to get an answer. So, as Amos asked these questions, he brought to light the principle that nothing happens without a reason.

In verse 3, Amos said, *Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?* The answer to this question is obviously “no.” Two men cannot walk together without having first made an appointment. They must have agreed to meet in a certain place and to travel together until they reached their destination. Likewise, the LORD would not walk with Israel if He had not established a covenant relationship with them, a covenant by which He would accept them as His “own possession among all the peoples” of the earth (Ex. 19:5).

In the next verse Amos used the imagery of a lion to ask two questions. The first question reads, *Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?* A negative answer is implied here. A *lion* does not roar unless he has his prey in sight and is ready to jump on it. The second question reads, *Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something?* Another negative answer is implied. A *young lion* does not growl or utter his voice unless he has caught something. Similarly, the LORD would not roar from Zion if He were not about to attack Israel (Amos 1:2). Such an attack was unavoidable because Israel had failed to follow God’s covenantal stipulations.

Verse 5 also contains two questions, both of which relate to bird trapping. Amos first asks, *Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?* A *trap* is a device used by humans to catch and retain animals. Amos expected his audience to understand that a bird flying in the air would not fall into a *trap* on the ground unless someone set a baited snare. In the same fashion, Amos asked, *Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?* No. A *trap* set to catch animals would not jump or *spring up from the earth* unless triggered by something. Israel has triggered its own discipline with evil and disobedient behavior.

In verse 6, the prophet switched from the animal imagery (vv. 3–5) to that of fear and terror of battle. He said, *If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?* In the ancient world, people usually blew a trumpet to signal a danger of some sort. Such an alert could cause fear among people. Therefore, as the people of Israel answered “yes” to Amos’s question, they are being given an opportunity to slow down and think about the impending danger for their behavior. This point is further confirmed when Amos asked, *If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?* All events are in God’s hands. Through this rhetorical question which implied a “yes” answer, Amos reminded the people of Israel that the Suzerain God who chose them and took them as His treasured possession was the only one who could send a *calamity* to a

city. So, whenever a calamity occurred, the Israelites would think deeply about the prophet's message since he was predicting judgment on them. The *calamity* would not be an accident, but discipline.

Elaborating on his main point that nothing happens without a reason, Amos now said, *Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets*. In Bible times, the LORD often used *prophets* to speak on His behalf to tell His covenant people truth. The truth was often about their misbehavior, and calling them to repent. It could also be about what God would do and what they needed to do.

For example, the LORD used the prophet "Ahijah the Shilonite" to predict the division of the empire of King Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:29–39). This prophecy was fulfilled right after Solomon's death, when his son and successor, Rehoboam, rejected the advice of the elders who asked him to lighten the load of Solomon's policies of heavy taxation and forced labor—they asked for a tax cut to improve their lives (1 Kgs. 12:1–20).

Similarly, Isaiah predicted that a certain ruler named Cyrus would allow the Israelites to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28). This prophecy was fulfilled during the time of Ezra. When Cyrus became king of Persia, he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, saying, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2–3). As a result of Cyrus's decree, the "temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius" (Ezra 6:15). These examples show that the LORD always revealed His plan to *His servants, the prophets*.

In spite of this, the people did not have a great track record of listening to the prophets. Stephen proclaimed this to the rulers, who proved his point by stoning him:

"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."
(Acts 7:52-53)

Jesus confirmed this perspective, when He lamented over Jerusalem, saying:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."
(Matthew 23:37)

Amos concluded by saying, *A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?* These two lines are parallel, suggesting that the word "lion" refers to the LORD. That is, the all-powerful God roared like *a lion* to announce judgment on His covenant people. The people of Israel would be filled with fear and terror because God is a

consuming fire (Deut. 4:24). And since the LORD had clearly revealed His intentions to the prophet Amos, he [Amos] was compelled to *prophesy*. God raised up His prophet to warn the people about His judgment, calling them to repentance. God is always justified when He judges, but is not willing that any should perish (Ps. 51:4, 2 Peter 3:9).

Biblical Text

Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?

⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?

Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*?

⁵ Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?

Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?

⁶ If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?

If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?

⁷ Surely the Lord God does nothing

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⁸ A lion has roared! Who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?