

# Amos 3:9-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-3/amos-39-15/>

*Amos describes the oppressions and tumult within Samaria and predicts that God will use a foreign nation to judge His own people. As a result, the altars of Bethel and the great houses in Israel will be destroyed.*

Having announced the LORD's judgment on the disobedient Israelites (vv. 3–8), Amos proceeded to describe the offenses against the covenant for which they would be judged. In doing so, he issued a command, saying, *proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt*. The place called *Ashdod* was a city in Philistia located midway between Joppa and Gaza, about three miles from the coastline of the land God apportioned to Israel. It is identified with modern Tel Ashdod, 15 km north of Ashkelon and approximately 4 km inland from the Mediterranean Sea (1:8).

Using sarcasm, Amos invited the people of *Ashdod* and those of *Egypt* to *assemble* themselves *on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst*. *Samaria* refers to the region occupied by the northern kingdom of Israel. These neighboring pagan nations were traditional oppressors of Israel. They both had cultures where the strong exploited the weak (Leviticus 18). These nations are supposed to be seeing the positive witness of Israel living in self-governance, loving and caring for one another, and see by the witness that there is a better way to live. The great prosperity and quality of community that stems from the self-governing, caring way of life is supposed to demonstrate to them how to be blessed. Instead, they will simply see the same kind of exploitation that is common in their own lands.

By assembling on the *mountains of Samaria, Ashdod* and *Egypt* would have a bird's-eye view of Israel. What would they see? They would see *oppressions*. God's law forbade oppressing others. Judgement was to be fair, no matter who was being judged. People were to be treated as neighbors. As Jesus said, the law could be summed up by saying "love God and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). Further, the law stated expressly:

"You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns."  
(Deuteronomy 24:14)

The other thing the foreign nation spectators would see is *great tumults*. The word translated *tumults* can also be translated "destructions." When people begin to exploit one another, it inevitably results in escalating destruction. There is a competition to see who is the strongest. Whoever wins gets to exploit the most. However, this competition results in large degrees of destruction, leaving poverty in its wake.

Then *the LORD* declared, *these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels do not know how to do what is right*. Not only were those in Israel not loving their neighbors, they were

hoarding *violence and devastation*. The *citadels* would be the buildings with protective walls. Likely occupied by those with the most wealth. What was being stored inside? *Violence and devastation*. This likely means people were getting wealthy through oppression rather than through service.

To *hoard up* means to accumulate. This reflects what was going on in Israel during the time of Amos. The rich of Israel became greedy and practiced great social injustice against the poor, instead of living as loyal citizens, helping each other and caring for one another according to the law. It was fine to get rich; God desired them to be immensely blessed. But through service rather than exploitation. Therefore, the LORD said to Israel, *an enemy, even one surrounding the land, will pull down your strength from you and your citadels will be looted*.

To *be looted* means to be taken by pillaging. The rich oppressors in *Samaria* (Israel) accumulated wealth at the expense of the poor and the needy. Appropriately, the LORD would raise up an *enemy* nation, *one surrounding* Israel, to overrun the Israelite land and take away these riches. The oppressors would thus be punished measure for measure (Deut. 19:21).

Such a judgment on *Samaria* would be devastating. The *LORD* made it clear when He said, *Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion's mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away*.

In the ancient Near East, a shepherd who had lost an animal to a lion or other predators was required to bring some remains of the animal (such as *a couple of legs or a piece of an ear*) to the owner as proof that the animal had been killed. Such an evidence would place the shepherd above any suspicion of theft and would free him from having to make restitution (Gen. 31:39; Ex. 22:10–13). The prophet used that picture to describe Israel's destruction. During that time, the homes of the rich merchants and the wealthy ones would be taken by pillaging. Only fragments of wealth such as *the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch* would remain in Israel to give pitiful evidence of their destruction.

Considering this impending judgment, *the LORD GOD, the God of hosts* invited some people (perhaps the people of Ashdod and those of Egypt, as in verse 9) to *hear and testify against the house of Jacob*. These witnesses would hear so that they might testify to God's verdict against His covenant people, the *house of Jacob* or Israel.

Having summoned other peoples to hear and testify against Israel, the LORD then stated, *For on the day that I punish Israel's transgressions, I will also punish the altars of Bethel*. The place called *Bethel* was previously "Luz" (Gen. 28:19). According to Genesis 28, Jacob renamed the place because of his wonderful dream in which God made great promises to him, one of which being the guarantee of God's continuous presence (Gen. 28:10–17). Upon awaking from his sleep, Jacob said, "The Lord is certainly in this place, and I did not know it!" And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:16–17).

Unfortunately, Bethel, which was once "the house of God," later became a place associated with pagan worship. King Jeroboam of Israel made two golden calves and set one in *Bethel* and the

other in Dan (1 Kgs. 12:25–33). Therefore, in the book of Amos the LORD said that when He punished *the altars of Bethel, the horns of the altar would be cut off and they would fall to the ground*. The *horns* were considered the holiest part of the altar. Thus, to *cut them off* was akin to desecrating the altar, removing all its special qualities, and transforming it into nothing more than a broken and damaged stone.

Furthermore, the LORD would destroy the luxury afforded by the people of Samaria. He declared, *I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house*. The wealthy class in Israel enjoyed a luxury lifestyle. Many of them had a summer residence to take advantage of the cooler climate, and a winter residence to escape the extremes of weather and temperature. Both types of homes would be destroyed by God on the day of His judgment on Samaria.

Finally, the LORD declared, *The houses of ivory will also perish, and the great houses will come to an end*. The use of *ivory* inlays for home decorations was a common phenomenon but was restricted to kings and other wealthy men in the ancient Near East (1 Kgs. 10:18). For Amos, *ivory* inlays symbolized much of what was wrong with the luxury-loving Israelite community of the century in which he lived. The rich were living in luxury with wealth gained through oppression.

One example of a type of oppression specifically forbidden in the law which could have been a substantial part of the evil being done was for the employers to withhold the wages of their lower-paid workers (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Another could have been refusing to release those who became servants in order to pay their debts, and not allowing them to go free after six years of service (Deuteronomy 15:12). It could also include not releasing debts every seven years (Deuteronomy 15:1). The Ten Commandments forbid envy, and all these types of behaviors stem from envy and its sister, greed.

As a result of the oppression and destruction, God’s judgment would result in the demolition of *the houses* decorated with *ivory* as well as *the great houses*. Disobedience to God always carries negative consequences.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>9</sup> Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, “Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see *the* great tumults within her and *the* oppressions in her midst. <sup>10</sup> But they do not know how to do what is right,” declares the Lord, “these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels.”**

**<sup>11</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord God,**

**“An enemy, even one surrounding the land,  
Will pull down your strength from you  
And your citadels will be looted.”**

**<sup>12</sup> Thus says the Lord,**

**“Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear,  
So will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away—  
With *the* corner of a bed and *the* cover of a couch!**

**<sup>13</sup> “Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,”**

**Declares the Lord God, the God of hosts.**

**<sup>14</sup> “For on the day that I punish Israel’s transgressions,**

**I will also punish the altars of Bethel;**

**The horns of the altar will be cut off**

**And they will fall to the ground.**

**<sup>15</sup> “I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house;**

**The houses of ivory will also perish**

**And the great houses will come to an end,”**

**Declares the Lord.**