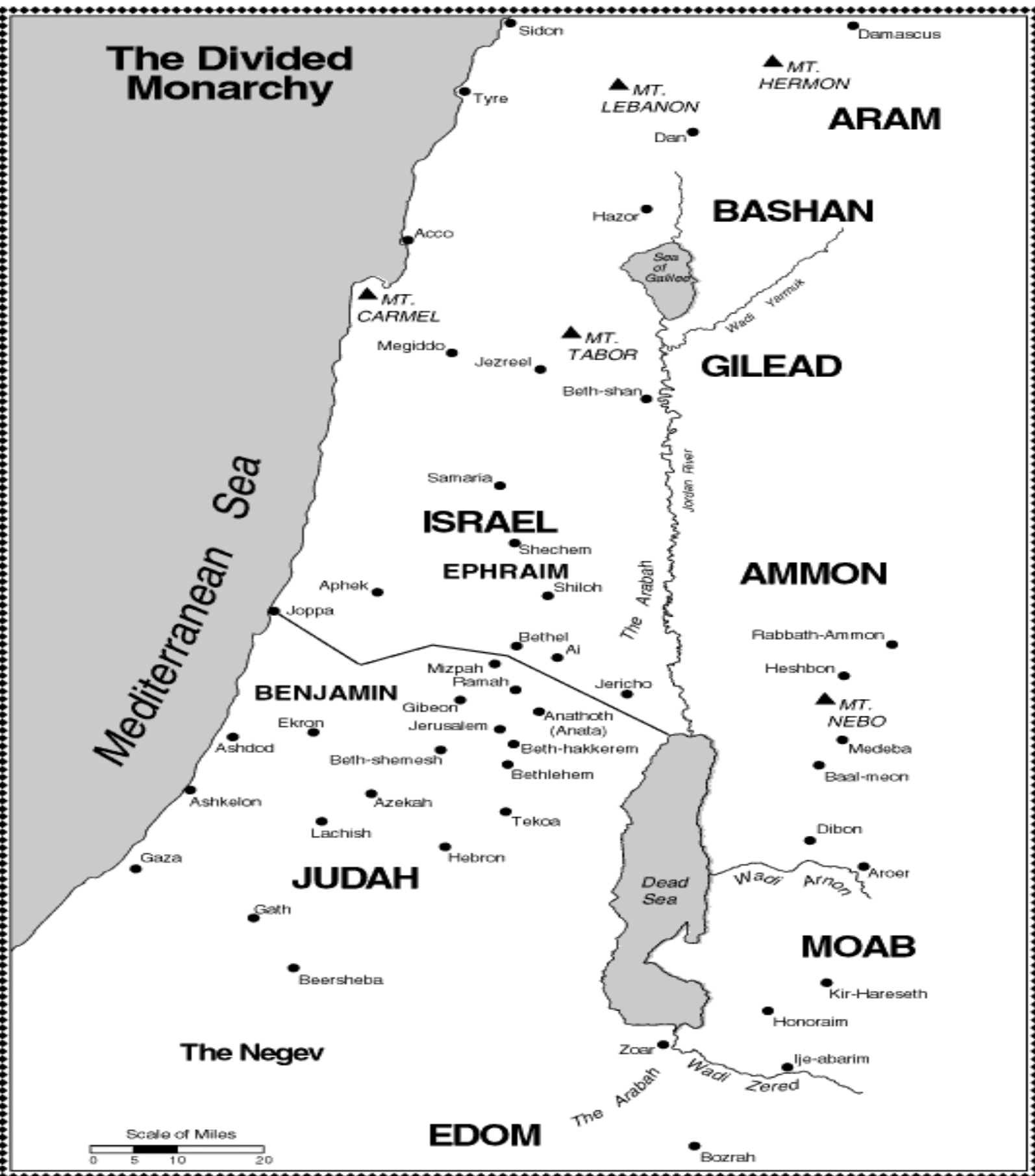


Focus Text

"And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers." Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. I will break the gate-bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir," says the Lord. Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds. I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish," says the Lord God. Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds." Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah." Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour her strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together," says the Lord."

(Amos 1:2–15, ESV)



I: The Message of Judgement

"And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers." (Amos 1:2, ESV)

"Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David."
(2 Samuel 5:7, ESV)

"The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel." (Joel 3:16, ESV)

Amos begins by stating that the Lord is roaring a message of judgment against the enemies of Israel, that the shepherds (himself included) mourn for their fate, and that the top of Mt. Carmel withers a sight of pagan worship.

This sets a serious tone for the oracles spoken against the neighbors of Judah and Israel.

II: Aram

"Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. I will break the gate-bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him who holds the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir," says the Lord." (Amos 1:3–5, ESV)

As we begin these visions, it is easy to become overwhelmed and confused. Remember to look at the provided map. These oracles are given in sections to neighboring countries surrounding Israel. While the names and places may be strange and unknown to the 21st-century American reader, they were very familiar and known to the ancient Israelites.

As we move through these visions, we start with Aram, which is North of Israel.

"Damascus" was the capital of Aram, located to the northeast of Israel. The Arameans were Israel's most frequent and most powerful enemy."¹

We are not sure what three of the four sins or wrongdoings are. One we do know is their violent action toward their southern neighbor, Gilead. As you can see in the quote below, Aram has been inhumane toward them, and God personally declares judgment on them.

¹ Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The point of the oracle is that they will be overthrown by God (Day of Judgement) and return to exile in the land of Kir. Kir is where the nation of Aram started. Returning, there is a sign of the great nation being uprooted and their legacy ending at the place of their beginning.

"The third element in the Damascus oracle is the identification of one specific sin. That sin was brutal treatment of some Gileadites conquered by the Arameans. Both the Septuagint and a Qumran fragment of Amos have "the pregnant women of Gilead" as the recipients of Aramean cruelty. This reading is obviously connected to 1:13b. Regardless, the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Gileadites is the concern here."²

III: Philistia

"Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds. I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod, and him who holds the scepter from Ashkelon; I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish," says the Lord God." (**Amos 1:6–8, ESV**)

The Philistines are Judah's Western neighbors who occupy what is today the Gaza Strip. War and fighting have been a part of this community for thousands of years, sadly. God's judgment on them, as you can see below, is their exportation of people in the community. Whether this is the slave trade or conquest and relocation, we are not told. The same pattern of three or four sins is used in this oracle. This three or four language could either be literal sins, or it is a metaphor. Three in Hebrew can be seen as complete. Four then is overflowing.

One common note is that these visions are directed toward the rulers and leadership. God is making a promise that the governing rulers of these lands will pay dearly for their sins against those whom they have sinned against.

"The sin of Gaza was the capture and sale of either "whole communities" of people, including women and children, or people at peace with Gaza. The word *šēlēmā* may be translated either "whole" or "peaceful." Deportation of an entire community (or a community keeping a covenant of peace with Gaza) was only one aspect of Gaza's double-edged sin. Sale of captives to Edom was the other side of it."³

² Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

IV Phoenicia

"Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, and it shall devour her strongholds." (Amos 1:9–10, ESV)

As we have seen with the Philistines, God cares deeply about people. God did not miss the Phoenician slave trade. What is interesting here is the Covenant of brothers. Bill Smith, in the New American Commentary, elaborates on this in the second quote. There is an understanding of the value of human life, and the nation of Phoenicia has squandered that value. God is going to set fire to Tyre, the capital, because of their treatment of their neighbors.

"1:9 Tyre was the strongest of the Phoenician cities in the mid-eighth century b.c. Its wealth and influence derived from its strategic position as the hub of a vast trading empire (Ezek 26–28). One of Tyre's commercial activities was slave trading.³⁸ This activity links the oracle against Tyre with the preceding oracle against Gaza. The indictment against Tyre is a similar, though shortened, version of the indictment against Gaza. They "sold whole communities of captives to Edom." Unlike the oracle against Gaza, this oracle elaborates on the act's treacherous nature."⁴

"A covenant of brothers" is a unique expression in the Bible. Treaties between states were common in the time of Amos. Solomon of Israel entered a covenant with Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:12). With Ahab's marriage to the Sidonian Jezebel, Israel must have entered into a treaty with the Phoenicians (1 Kgs 16:31). Such covenants made the partners "brothers" (1 Kgs 9:13), a term describing a close tie characterized by loyalty and love. Breach of covenant (probably between Israel and Tyre) made the sinful act of selling slaves (probably Israelite) to Edom far worse.^{40"}⁵

⁴ ³⁸ Paul, *Amos*, 59.

Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ ⁴⁰ S. Paul may be right in his conclusion that "there is no need, however, to identify the 'exiled population' as consisting of Israelites" (*Amos*, 59). At the same time nothing in the text argues against that identification.

Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

V: Edom

"Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever. So I will send a fire upon Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah." (Amos 1:11–12, ESV)

As we learn, Edom and Israel have always had a tense relationship. Because of Edom's treatment of Israel, kicking them while they were down, God will make war (fire) against them on both their southern (Teman) and Northern (Bozrah) borders.

"Edom at times had been subject to and at other times independent of Israel. Always the mood was hostile, stemming back to the prenatal struggle between the twins, Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom; cf. Gen 25:22–23). Most of the time Edom was subject to Israel.

The specific sin of Edom was hostile action against his brother. Most interpreters identify the "brother" as Israel."⁶

VI: Amon

"Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of the Ammonites, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border. So I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour her strongholds, with shouting on the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind; and their king shall go into exile, he and his princes together," says the Lord." (Amos 1:13–15, ESV)

Gilead once again is being attacked, this time from her southern border. Once again, as in our continued pattern, God will cause their leadership to go into exile and set fire to Amon in an act of war for their violence.

"The sin of Ammon was that "he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead." In the "three sins ... even for four" formula, this atrocity was the nation's overflowing sin. What circumstances caused the Ammonites to resort to such brutal treatment of the pregnant women of Gilead? Were the perpetrators at war with the region? This act was a common feature of border wars to terrorize and to decimate the population (2 Kgs 8:12; 15:16; Hos 13:16 [14:1])."⁷

⁶ Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ Smith, Billy K., and Franklin S. Page. 1995. *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*. Vol. 19B. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Application

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:34–40, ESV)

Now that we are equipped with some knowledge and geography, these visions appear more clearly.

What they point toward is God's care of humanity. All the nations are being judged for one primary reason: lack of care for their neighbors.

Jesus, on being asked what are the greatest Commands of God cited "Love God" as the first, and then "Love Neighbor" as the second. He then makes the case that all the Law and prophets, including Amos, come back to this reality.

Sometimes, people make the false claim that God has somehow changed in the Old Testament. However, God seems very angry at those who are attacking Gilead even though these are not His people. He seems angry at the ancient slavery that was taking place. What this first set of visions invites us to think about is the fact that God cares for all humans. How are you doing at loving your neighbors?

Amen.