Daily Devotions for Lent and Easter from Amos

RESTORE THE ROAR!

R. Reed Lessing

Copyright © 2012 Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

All rights reserved. Unless specifically noted, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture quotations are the author’s translation.

Hymn texts with the abbreviation LSB are from Lutheran Service Book, copyright © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Cover illustrations: © Shutterstock, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America
Ash Wednesday

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down
Amos 1:1

On this day Christians around the world go to church and have ashes placed on their foreheads. The ashes symbolize repentance and contrition. The motifs of burning, fire, and ashes come together. Ashes are on our foreheads indicating inward repentance. The burning fire points to God’s righteous judgment on sin. And there is nothing left but ashes.

The Lord roars, and the earth melts (Amos 1:2; 9:5). The Nile River trembles (8:8). Everything seems to go up in smoke (e.g., 1:4, 7, 12; 2:2; 5:6). The people fall (5:2), and all the sinners are judged (9:10). “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke punishment,” roars the Lord (2:6). The fire, burning, ashes, and earthquakes are God’s judgment on sin. In 721 BC, Israel will end up buried under the rubble and the wreckage of the Assyrian army.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down. St. Paul writes, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). God’s judgment also burns against us for our sin. We stumble, trip, and fall. Then we find ourselves buried in debris and garbage, covered with the grit and grime of me-centered living. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down. But thanks be to God; He lifts us up through the victory of Jesus Christ, our Lord (Romans 7:25). Christ comes into our wreckage. He painstakingly and lovingly digs us out of the chaos we have made of our lives. His blood washes us clean from the ashes covering us. And He puts on us His own white robe of righteousness. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Who will get me out from under this mess? Jesus will. Jesus does!

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

What Can I Possibly Learn from Him?
Amos 1:1

What can I possibly learn from this person? Why should we listen to her? She’s not even from around here. What could she tell us that we don’t already know?” These same kinds of questions were asked about Amos. “Who is this guy? Isn’t he just a shepherd and dresser of sycamore figs? He’s not even from a school of the prophets. What are his qualifications to preach to us?” (Amos 7:14). God chose Amos to call Israel to repentance for their arrogance and sinful pride. He also called the prophet to offer grace and mercy to all who turn to the Lord (9:11–15). Amos responded to his enemies, “Yes, I’m a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore figs, but God told me to bring you this message” (7:15).

God’s choice of Amos as His witness to divine truth is in keeping with His election of the patriarchs who were “wandering Arameans” (Deuteronomy 26:5); Israel, who “was the least of all the people” (Deuteronomy 7:7); and climactically Jesus, who was rejected and crucified as a common criminal (1 Corinthians 1:22–23).

God calls the most unlikely people to accomplish His will, and this includes you and me! We often respond, “Who am I to speak up for the Lord?” Our task though, just like Amos, is to announce the Law to bring people to repentance. And then, all the more, announce the precious word of Gospel: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Who are we to speak like this? We are God’s blood-bought, heaven-bound, and Spirit-filled children. All so that we, following the prophet Amos, boldly and courageously live for our Lord!
**Friday after Ash Wednesday**

**What’s in a Name?**

Amos 1:1

Do you know anyone named Amos? Of course, there are “Famous Amos” cookies. I Googled “famous people named Amos” and found only one. I wonder why there aren’t more people named Amos. Perhaps it is because Amos means “to load,” “to carry a load,” or “a burden.” No wonder Amos ranked 997th in popular baby names in 2010!

Often in the Bible people were given names not because their parents liked how they sounded but because the name carried a theological meaning. The best-known example is our Savior—“And you will call His name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Amos was called, well “Amos,” because he carried the load of God’s wrath against His people and bore the burden of divine judgment. Does this make Amos famous? By no means! In fact, He was told to stop preaching and go back home (Amos 7:10–17).

God’s heart, though, is not one-dimensional anger toward His people. He cannot cease to love. Even when He wants to nullify Israel and banish the memory of this people, His heart is full of compassion. And this means that He is willing to carry the burden of judgment much further than Amos. In Jesus Christ, God climactically bears not only the burden of Israel’s sin but also the sin of the world (1 John 2:2). Jesus was laden with the iniquity of the world (Isaiah 53:4–6) when He carried it in His body (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that we might be declared righteous by grace through faith (2 Corinthians 5:19). While Amos carried judgment and condemnation, Christ is the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the world. What’s in a name? If the name is Jesus, then the answer is everything!

---

**Saturday after Ash Wednesday**

**Who Is the Real King?**

Amos 1:1

Amos preached during the decade of 765–755 BC. Amos 1:1 states that the prophet’s ministry was during the time when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Joash was king of Israel. The fact that these men are called “king” shows the root of the problem. Israel’s first kings, Saul and David, were called princes (e.g., 1 Samuel 9:16; 2 Samuel 7:8). This is because there is only one King, the Lord. The first time in the Bible that Israel makes this proclamation is when Pharaoh, Egypt’s king, and his forces drown in the Red Sea. God’s people joyfully announce that the Lord alone is King and He will reign forever and ever (Exodus 15:18).

When Israel was poised to enter the Promised Land, another king tried to exert dominion over the nation. This led to Balaam’s announcement to Balak that the shout of a king (the Lord) is among the people (Numbers 23:21). The Lord is not just “the King,” He is “your King” (Isaiah 43:15). Earthly power and authorities are secondary to the majesty and rule of our great God. This King, and not Uzziah or Jeroboam son of Joash, has complete command of world history.

Jesus is the King. “The reign of God is near, repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15b). In Christ, God’s kingdom has invaded the world. This is why the Jews in Thessalonica attacked Paul and Silas saying, “They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7). And this King showed His great love for us by dying on a cross that had the title, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (Mark 15:26). While millions have postured themselves as the ultimate authority, on the Last Day, every imposter will be exposed. Thank God for Christ’s merciful and mighty rule in our lives!
Amos’s ministry ended “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1) that happened about 760 BC—a tectonic shift so massive that one could simply refer to it as the earthquake. The prophet predicted as much. Seismic shaking is a major theme in many of Amos’s oracles. Just as earlier shakings in the Bible indicated God’s presence (e.g., Exodus 19:18; Judges 5:4), the earthquake in Amos 1:1 announced that God was active in the prophet’s ministry. But there was more divine shaking to come.

An earthquake also vindicated Jesus Christ, our Lord. Matthew 27:51 states, “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.” The earthquake indicates that God was present, even in the midst of our Savior’s death and despair. Paul explains that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Describing the events on Easter, Matthew 28:2 states, “and behold a great earthquake happened.” This seismic shock of salvation signals that God the Father accepted His Son’s death as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And so the earth will shake one last time to announce our Savior’s presence at the end of the age. Hebrews 12:26–28 says as much: “But now [the Lord] has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” And that says it all!

I know a young man whose first word was car. As a little boy his favorite toys were Matchbox cars and Hot Wheels. He would amaze his grandmother by identifying the makes of cars as they drove down the street. One day she thought she could stump him with a certain Swedish model, but he just said, without hesitation, “Grandma, that’s a Volvo.” That boy was all about cars. It is almost as if his first word set the tone for his entire life. Even now as a young adult he loves cars. He watches stock car races on television and races cars with friends on the Internet.

The prophet Amos’s first word in his book is recorded in Amos 1:2. It is “Yahweh,” translated “Lord” in most English Bibles. Yahweh is the personal name of Israel’s God. Exodus 34:6 is the only time Yahweh is repeated in the Old Testament, making this the quintessential revelation of what “Yahweh” means. The Gospel/Law characteristics in the creed of Exodus 34:6–7 define the name for us. His grace-filled qualities of mercy and love are mentioned first because they are from eternity and last into eternity. His judgment upon sin follows. It appears in time and will end on the Last Day. The only word used more than once in Exodus 34:6–7 is “steadfast love,” which is God’s defining characteristic.

“Yahweh” is demonstrated most vividly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for us and for our salvation. No wonder Amos’s first word was Yahweh, for it defined the prophet’s faith and hope. Yahweh defines our life as well, for through Christ we rest in the arms of this same loving God!
Tuesday, Lent 1

THE ROAR OF THE LION
Amos 1:2

Male lions generally roar only when they are in their own territory. They do it to proclaim ownership of the land. And if you watch a lion roar, you will notice that he roars with his entire body. The roar seems to begin at the tip of his tail and travel through his whole body, exploding out of his mouth. These deep and full-bodied roars can be heard five miles away and cause windows to shake. The lion’s roar says, “This land is mine! It belongs to me; I will take care of it.”

The Lord is like a lion. From the core of His being and from the center of His territory, He roars to be heard throughout the land and by all the people. Indeed, “from Jerusalem in the south all the way to Mount Carmel in the north” (Amos 1:2). The Lord says, “This is My land! Why do you think it belongs to you? These are My people! You leaders that pervert justice and righteousness, stay away. I will care for My people!”

Injustice was the norm in Israel. Jeroboam the king (Amos 1:1) and Amaziah the priest at Bethel (7:10–17) represented the nation’s corrupt and callous leadership. The strong ruled over the weak with an iron fist and without compassion. But the roaring Lion was on the attack to claim and protect His people.

One day the Lion would be called the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). The Lion’s mighty power is made most perfect in the weakness of the cross (2 Corinthians 12:9). As a Lamb, Jesus bled and died for all sins, including those of Jeroboam, Amaziah, and ours. And on the third day the roar was back. Jesus is alive to love and claim us as His own.

Wednesday, Lent 1

UPSETTING THE STATUS QUO
Amos 1:3–2:16

Amos peppers the nation’s leaders with “in-your-face” challenges. By relentlessly posing unsettling ideas, Amos seeks to upset the status quo. One example of this consists of a series of oracles against nations (1:3–2:16). Whether in a warfare, public lamentation, court, or worship setting, oracles against nations always boded well for Israel. The prophet’s audience, in all likelihood, cheered and applauded after each neighboring nation was condemned. The sermon builds to a climax as seven nations are placed under divine fire. The people could then safely assume that the sermon had ended and go home. But God’s wrath was about to fall upon Israel.

The oracle against Israel (2:6–16) came as a shocking surprise. There are seven oracles, beginning with Aram (1:3–5) and ending with Judah (2:4–5). Seven is a number commonly used in the Bible to denote completeness, making an eighth oracle unexpected. Little did the audience (presumably at Bethel) know that the prophet’s analysis of the crimes of the nations was in reality a noose that was getting ready to tighten around its neck!

Jesus also employed rhetorical surprises in His antagonistic context (e.g., Matthew 23:25–26; Mark 3:6; Luke 4:28–29; John 8:59). Of course, His most well-known are in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12; Luke 6:20–23). But the Savior also says, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it” (Matthew 16:25), and “The last will be first and the first will be last” (Matthew 19:30; 20:8). Indeed, shocking inversions are at the very heart of the Gospel. We who were once dead are now, by faith, alive forevermore. We were once blind, but now we see. Salvation is ours because God’s Word of Law yielded to the Gospel’s greatest inversion of all. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen” (Luke 24:5b–6a).
Thursday, Lent 1

Surely God Is on Our Side
Amos 2:6

The Battle Hymn of the Republic was a popular marching song during the American Civil War. I find it interesting that this hymn assumes God is on the side of the Union and against the Confederate armies. The hymn’s images include God trampling grapes, striking enemies with His sword, sounding the trumpet, and judging the wicked. I can imagine that these types of images were also in the minds of the Israelites as they heard Amos proclaim God’s judgment on the nations of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (1:3–2:3). Just like the Union army that would march and sing, the Israelites were sure that they were in the right and that God was coming to vindicate them. I imagine them sitting there safe and secure, eating, drinking, and making merry (6:1–7), waiting for God to come “marching on.” “Glory hallelujah!”

God was “marching on” all right, but not just against Israel’s enemies. He was preparing an imminent attack against His people! “For three sins of Israel and for four I will not revoke My wrath” (2:6). Secure in their sin, the nation’s leaders were eating, drinking, and making merry. They had taken advantage of the poor and the weak, using and abusing them to gain a better life for themselves. God is “trampling out the vintage” all right, but the vintage, Amos says, is Israel!

“Glory hallelujah,” God has absolved us of all our sins. God has saved us from our own self-centeredness and self-confidence and has given His Son to be our Savior. He has transferred us from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:13). In this kingdom, He is always on our side and marching on, for us.

Friday, Lent 1

Surviving in a Sex-Crazed Culture
Amos 2:7

Advisory to Parents: This devotion contains a frank presentation of sin against the sixth commandment.

A man once wrote to Dear Abby: “I’m married and I’m having an affair with two different women. Please tell me what to do, but don’t give me any of that morality stuff.” Abby wrote back, “Dear sir, the only difference between humans and animals is morality. Please write to a veterinarian!” How can we survive in this sex-crazed culture? Amos must have asked the same question. Apparently, large numbers of men were engaging in illicit sex (2:7). In light of 2:8, with its description of wine, an altar, and a shrine to “their gods,” this young woman is probably a prostitute.

Amos is not presenting an arcane set of sexual taboos, nor is he being excessively priggish. Rather, he is describing Israelite society in which rape, incest, and illicit sex had become the norm. This defiled God’s holy name (2:7) and was an affront to His will, because men and women are to express their sexuality within the confines of marriage (cf. Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6). How can we do this?

The first step is to monitor our media. Where do I allow my eyes to go on the Internet? Do I watch too much trashy TV? Second, we need to maintain our marriages, lest we become sitting ducks for affairs. Third, we as invited to meet our Maker. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba he confessed, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan the prophet replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin” (2 Samuel 12:13). Jesus loves you, this we know. For the Bible tells us so. And in light of this love we will survive in this sex-crazed culture!
Saturday, Lent 1

Our Creed

Amos 2:9–11

The Apostles’ Creed teaches us about our relationship to God. He is our Creator, and we are His creatures. He gives us all that we are and all that we have. He provides for our salvation, and He keeps us in the Christian faith. Amos warned Israel that they had forgotten these divine gifts. In Amos 2:9–11, the prophet reminds Israelites of all that the Lord has done for them, but rather than giving thanks for their special relationship as His chosen people, they became self-centered and self-absorbed. Instead of honoring God by caring for creation and fellow creatures, they took advantage of the earth and other people. God offered salvation, but Israelites preferred to rely on themselves. God offered the gift of faith, but they preferred the idols of their own making.

When we confess the Apostles’ Creed, we might pray: “Lord, we confess You as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but we so often sin by going against what we say we believe. We confess that You are our Creator, Provider, and Preserver, but rather than trusting in You, we rely on our plans, efforts, and ingenuity. We say that You are our Redeemer, but we so often think that we have the ability to save ourselves. We affirm that You are our Sanctifier, but we don’t allow You to have Your way with us and change our sinful ways. O God, we thank You that You use Your Word and Sacraments to remind us of our relationship with You and all that You have done for us. Keep us always mindful that Your grace toward us provides everything we need. We pray that You would refresh us with Your Holy Spirit, that we might live in accord with our confession, trusting in Your care for us, believing in Christ who loves us, and in the Holy Spirit who leads us. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Second Sunday in Lent

God’s Gift of the Land

Amos 2:9–10

The order of the events in Amos 2:9–10 accents God’s gift of the land. The order is as follows: (1) the Lord destroyed the Amorites; (2) the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt; (3) the Lord led Israel in the desert for forty years; and (4) the Lord destroyed the Amorites. By beginning and ending with God’s judgment against the Amorites (also called Canaanites) Amos accents God’s gift of the land.

At first glance, though, it does not appear that the New Testament is as concerned about the Promised Land. However, a closer look shows that Israel’s land promises had a tremendous impact upon the New Testament. After Joshua defeated enemy nations and parceled out the land (Joshua 1–22), he told the people, “You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed” (23:14). Israel finally had the land, often called an “inheritance” (see Leviticus 20:24). And, though individuals could lose their land, it was to be returned in the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:24–32).

Baptized into Christ, we also have a permanent inheritance. Because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus we have “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.” God vigilantly guards it in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3–4). And, just like Israel, we did nothing to earn it or deserve this gift. Our new life in God’s kingdom is like the day’s wage paid to workers who had labored for only an hour. It is a repentant criminal hanging on a cross next to Jesus who is welcomed into the kingdom. Now we have a down payment of this inheritance (Ephesians 1:14), but the day is coming when we will live perfectly in the New Jerusalem, our heavenly promised land!