

Amos 2:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime:

Analysis

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof—The oracle against Moab uses the same formulaic structure as previous judgments. The escalating numbers "three... and for four" (Hebrew *al-sheloshah... ve'al-arba'ah*) indicate fullness of guilt—Moab has committed crimes beyond measure, crossing every threshold. **Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime**—*Al sorfo atsmot melek Edom lasid* (עַל שָׂרְפוֹ עֲצָמוֹת מֶלֶךְ־עֲדוֹם לָשִׁיד). The Hebrew *sorfo* (burning) and *lasid* (to lime/powder) describe desecration of royal remains, reducing them to ash used for construction material.

This specific charge is unique among Amos's oracles. While other nations are condemned for atrocities against Israel (Gaza and Tyre for slave trafficking, Edom for perpetual hatred, Ammon for ripping up pregnant women—1:13), Moab is judged for violating Edomite royal remains. This demonstrates a profound theological principle: God judges nations not only for crimes against His people but for violating universal moral law reflected in treatment of all humans. Desecrating corpses—especially royal remains—violated ancient Near Eastern conventions regarding proper burial and respect for the dead.

The specific incident isn't recorded in Scripture but likely refers to warfare between Moab and Edom, possibly related to conflicts mentioned in 2 Kings 3:4-27. The point is that extreme dishonor to human remains—even enemies—

offends God because humans bear His image (Genesis 9:6). This aligns with Mosaic law requiring proper burial even for executed criminals (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), a principle Paul references regarding Christ's crucifixion (Galatians 3:13). Moab's violation revealed contemptuous disregard for human dignity that warranted divine retribution.

Historical Context

Moab occupied the plateau east of the Dead Sea, descended from Lot through an incestuous relationship with his daughter (Genesis 19:30-37). This shameful origin contributed to ongoing hostility with Israel, though Deuteronomy 23:3-6 forbade Moabite entry into the assembly while commanding kinder treatment than for Ammonites. Ruth the Moabitess became the great-grandmother of David, showing God's grace transcending ethnic barriers.

The burning of Edomite bones likely occurred during border conflicts between Moab and Edom, both small kingdoms competing for territory and trade routes. The act represented ultimate contempt—not satisfied with killing the king in battle, Moabites exhumed and desecrated his remains. This violated universal standards of human dignity, provoking divine judgment.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's judgment on Moab for violating Edomite dignity (not Israelite) demonstrate that He holds all nations accountable to universal moral law rooted in the image of God?

2. What modern equivalents to desecrating human remains (denial of proper burial, treatment of bodies with contempt, abuse of prisoners' corpses) should provoke moral outrage today?

Interlinear Text

כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	עַל	שְׁלֹשָׁה	פְּשָׁעֵי י	מוֹאָב	עַל
H3541	Thus saith	the LORD	H5921	For three	transgressions	of Moab	H5921
	H559	H3068		H7969	H6588	H4124	
וְעַל	אַרְבָּעָה	לֹא	אֶשְׁיָבֶנּוּ	עַל			
	and for four	H3808	I will not turn away	H5921			
	H702		H7725				
		שָׂרָפָהּ	וְעַצְמוֹת	מֶלֶךְ	אֶדְוֹם		
	the punishment thereof because he burned	the bones	of the king	of Edom			
	H8313	H6106	H4428	H123			
	לְשֵׂידָה:						
	into lime						
	H7875						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 25:10 (References Lord): For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill.

Amos 2:4 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked:

Amos 1:3 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron:

Proverbs 15:3 (References Lord): The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

Amos 1:11 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever:

Amos 1:13 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have ripped up the women with child of Gilead, that they might enlarge their border:

Amos 2:6 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

Amos 1:9 (Sin): Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant: