

Amos 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

After pronouncing judgment on six pagan nations, Amos turns to Judah, his home kingdom. The prophetic formula "Thus saith the LORD" establishes divine authority. "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four" uses Hebrew poetic parallelism indicating multiplied, overflowing sin—not literally three or four offenses but systematic, habitual covenant violation. The number pattern (3+1) suggests completeness and certainty of judgment.

"I will not turn away the punishment thereof" translates *lo' ashivenu*—literally "I will not revoke it," referring to God's decree of judgment. Once God's patience reaches its limit and He decrees judgment, He won't reverse it. The reason: "because they have despised the law of the LORD" (*ma'asam et-torat Yahweh*). The verb *ma'as* means to reject, despise, or treat with contempt. Judah didn't merely violate specific commands but rejected God's entire revealed will (*torah*), the comprehensive instruction He gave to govern covenant life.

"And have not kept his commandments" parallels and intensifies the charge. The verb *shamar* (keep, guard, observe) indicates faithful, vigilant obedience. Judah failed to guard what God entrusted to them. "Their lies caused them to err" refers to false gods, false prophets, or deceptive ideologies—the Hebrew *kazav* means

lying, deception, or falsehood. "After the which their fathers have walked" indicates generational pattern of idolatry and apostasy, repeating ancestral sins rather than learning from judgment.

Historical Context

This oracle against Judah would shock Amos's audience. Northern Israelites likely approved his judgments on Gentile nations (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab) and probably even Judah, their southern rival. But Amos's indictment of Judah for rejecting God's law establishes a pattern: God judges His own people by higher covenant standards than He judges pagans. Gentile nations face judgment for crimes against humanity; covenant peoples face judgment for covenant unfaithfulness.

Judah's specific sin—despising God's law—differs from the brutal atrocities cited against pagan nations. Judah possessed God's revealed will through Moses, had the temple, the Davidic dynasty, and the priesthood. Their privileges increased their accountability. Jesus later articulated this principle: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Judah's judgment came through Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, about 160 years after Amos prophesied.

The mention of ancestral sins points to transgenerational patterns of covenant unfaithfulness. Judah's kings often tolerated or promoted idolatry (Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Ahaz, Manasseh), despite occasional reforms under godly kings (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, Josiah). This instability contrasted with God's unchanging covenant faithfulness, demonstrating human inability to maintain righteousness apart from divine grace.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Judah's judgment for rejecting God's law challenge Christian complacency about possessing Scripture without obeying it?
2. What modern "lies" cause believers to err and perpetuate generational patterns of sin?
3. How should the reality of increased accountability with increased revelation shape our approach to biblical knowledge?

Interlinear Text

וְעַל יְהוּדָה פְּשָׁעֵי י שְׁלֹשָׁה עַל יְהוָה אָמַר כֹּה
H3541 Thus saith H559 of the LORD H3068 H5921 For three H7969 transgressions H6588 of Judah H3063 H5921

עַל אֲשִׁיכָּהּ נֹו לֹא אַרְבָּעָה
and for four H702 H3808 I will not turn away H7725 H5921

יְהוָה הַ תּוֹכַת אֶת מֵאָסָם
the punishment thereof because they have despised H3988 H853 the law H8451 of the LORD H3068

כִּזְבֵּיהֶם וַתַּעֲוִם שָׁמְרוּ לֹא וְחֻצֵּי
his commandments H2706 H3808 and have not kept H8104 caused them to err H8582 and their lies H3577

אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ וְאֲבוֹתָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם:
H834 have walked H1980 the which their fathers H1 after H310

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 20:24 (Parallel theme): Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols.

Ezekiel 20:13 (Parallel theme): But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.

Ezekiel 20:16 (Parallel theme): Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.

Isaiah 28:15 (Parallel theme): Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

Hosea 12:2 (References Lord): The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

Jeremiah 8:9 (Word): The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?

Jeremiah 9:14 (Parallel theme): But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them:

Nehemiah 1:7 (Word): We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

Romans 1:25 (Parallel theme): Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Amos 3:2 (Parallel theme): You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

