

Judgment on Israel and Judah

Key Verse: *“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 2:4

Selected Scripture:
Amos 2:4-8

KING SOLOMON’S REIGN

had brought great prosperity throughout the kingdom of Israel. Peace ruled within its borders during his lifetime, and those borders were extended to include many adjoining nations. With these blessings, however, came many responsibilities with regard to managing such a vast kingdom. Solomon appointed princes and officers to assist in this work. (I Kings 4:1-21) Additionally, in an attempt to keep the diverse population content, Solomon took wives from many conquered nations along with their idols. Angered by this disobedience, God declared he would take away the nation from Solomon, divide it into pieces, and give the ten northern tribes to Jeroboam instead of Solomon’s

son, Rehoboam.—I Kings 11:9-13, 28-37

Later, during the reign of a second King Jeroboam, son of Joash, the northern kingdom of Israel enjoyed

one of its most prosperous periods. (II Kings 14:23-28) He recovered land which had been lost by his forerunners, subdued the kingdom of Moab, and captured parts of Syria. At the same time, the two-tribe kingdom, Judah, under the reign of Uzziah, also was enjoying great prosperity. Many people in both the northern and southern kingdoms became very wealthy, and began to lead a luxurious life. Unfortunately, this prosperity brought a collapse of moral standards. Ignored were the great ideals and commandments of God to help the poor, and to practice justice and loving-kindness. The rich oppressed the poor. Might was right, and it was a time of great corruption.

In response to this gross disobedience, God sent the Prophet Amos not with a warning, but with a sentence. The phrase in our Key Verse—"Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof"—is stated eight times in the first two chapters of Amos' prophecy. The expression "for three . . . and for four" has the thought of repetition—that which goes toward excess—sin in this case. This foretelling of a speedy doomsday applied especially to Israel and Judah because they were God's chosen and peculiar people.

God had not made himself known to any other nation, nor made a covenant with any other people, except Israel. He had given his laws only to them, and they had a special responsibility to keep his commandments, as they had promised at Mount Sinai. (Exod. 19:8) However, instead of God's favor making them loyal in heart to him, they had continually despised his favor through disobedience.

In foretelling the troubles he would bring upon Israel because of their misused privileges and opportunities, God wanted them to know distinctly that these judgments were not matters of accident or chance, but of divine providence. How reassuring, but also sobering, to know that there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning in the words and promises of our God.—James 1:17 ■