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AMOS 3: 1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying:

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This chapter begins with reproving the twelve tribes in general, Amo 3:1, Amo 3:2; and then particularly the kingdom of Israel, whose capital was Samaria. Thee prophet assures them that, while they were at variance with God, it would be unreasonable in them to expect his presence or favor, Amo 3:3-8. Other neighboring nations are then called upon to take warning from the judgments about to be inflicted upon the house of Israel, which would be so general that only a small remnant should escape them, Amo 3:9-15. The image used by the prophet on this occasion, (see Amo 3:12), and borrowed from his former calling, is very natural and significant, and not a little dignified by the inspired writer's lofty air and manner.

Verse 1

Against the whole family - That is, all, both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In this all the twelve tribes are included.

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AMOS 3: 2 "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins."

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Verse 2

You only have I known - I have taken no other people to be my own people. I have approved of you, loved you, fed, sustained, and defended you; but because you have forsaken me, have become idolatrous and polluted, therefore will I punish you. And the punishment shall be in proportion to the privileges you have enjoyed, and the grace you have abused.

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AMOS 3: 3 Do two walk together, unless they have agreed?

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Verse 3

Can two walk together - While ye loved and served me, I dwelt in you and walked among you. Now ye are become alienated from me, your nature and mine are totally opposite. I am holy, ye are unholy. We are no longer agreed, and can no longer walk together. I can no longer hold communion with you. I must cast you out. The similes in this and the three following verses are all chosen to express the same thing, viz., that no calamities or judgments can fall upon any people but by the express will of God, on account of their iniquities; and that whatever his prophets have foretold, they have done it by direct revelation from their Maker; and that God has the highest and most cogent reason for inflicting the threatened calamities. This correctness of the prophets' predictions shows that they and I are in communion.

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AMOS 3: 4 Will a lion roar in the thicket, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?

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Verse 4

Will a lion roar - Should I threaten such a judgment without cause?

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AMOS 3: 5 Can a bird fall in a trap on the earth, where no snare is set for him? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when there is nothing to catch?

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Verse 5

Can a bird fall in a snare - Can ye, as a sinful people, fall into calamities which I have not appointed?

Shall one take up a snare - and have taken nothing - Will the snare be removed before it has caught the expected prey? - shall I remove my judgments till they are fully accomplished? This is a curious passage, and deserves farther consideration. The original, literally translated, is nearly as follows: "Shall the trap arise from the ground; and catching, shall it not catch?" Here is a plain allusion to such traps as we employ to catch rats, foxes, etc. The jaws of the trap opening backward, press strongly upon a spring so as to keep it down; and a key passing over one jaw, and hooking on a table in the center, the trap continues with expanded jaws, till any thing touch the table, when the key, by the motion of the table, being loosened, the spring recovers all its elastic power, and throws up the jaws of the trap, and their serrated edges either close in each other, or on the prey that has moved the table of the trap. Will then the jaws of such a trap suddenly spring up from the ground, on which before they were lying flat, and catch nothing? Shall they let the prey that was within them escape? Certainly not. So my trap is laid for these offenders; and when it springs up, (and they themselves will soon by their transgressions free the key), shall not the whole family of Israel be inclosed in it? Most certainly they shall. This is a singular and very remarkable passage, and, when properly understood, is beautifully expressive.

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AMOS 3: 6 Does the trumpet alarm sound in a city, without the people being afraid? Does evil happen to a city, and the LORD hasn't done it?

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Verse 6

Shall a trumpet be blown - The sign of alarm and invasion.

And the people not be afraid? - Not take the alarm, and provide for their defense and safety?

Shall there be evil in a city - Shall there be any public calamity on the wicked, that is not an effect of my displeasure? The word does not mean moral evil, but punishment for sin; calamities falling on the workers of iniquity. Natural evil is the punishment of moral evil: God sends the former when the latter is persisted in.

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AMOS 3: 7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets.

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Verse 7

Surely the Lord God will do nothing - In reference to the punishment, correction, or blessing of his people: -

But he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets - They are in strict correspondence with him, and he shows them things to come. Such secrets of God are revealed to them, that they may inform the people; that, by repentance and conversion, they may avoid the evil, and, by walking closely with God, secure the continuance of his favor.

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AMOS 3: 8 The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken. Who can but prophesy?

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Verse 8

The lion hath roared - God hath sent forth a terrible alarm, Who will not fear? Can any hear such denunciations of Divine wrath and not tremble?

The Lord God hath spoken - And those only who are in communion with him have heard the speech. Who can but prophesy? Who can help proclaiming at large the judgment threatened against the nation?

But I think נבא naba, here, is to be taken in its natural and ideal signification, to pray, supplicate, or deprecate vengeance. The Lord hath spoken of punishment - who can help supplicating his mercy, that his judgments may be averted?

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AMOS 3: 9 Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod, and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see what unrest is in her, and what oppression is among them."

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Verse 9

Publish in the palaces - The housetops or flat roofs were the places from which public declarations were made. See on Isa 21:1 (note), and on Mat 10:27 (note). See whether in those places there be not tumults, oppressions, and rapine sufficient to excite my wrath against them.

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AMOS 3: 10 "Indeed they don't know to do right," says the LORD, "Who hoard plunder and loot in their palaces."

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Verse 10

For they know not to do right - So we may naturally say that they who are doing wrong, and to their own prejudice and ruin, must certainly be ignorant of what is right, and what is their own interest. But we say again "There are none so blind as those who will not see." Their eyes, saith the Lord, they have closed.

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AMOS 3: 11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "An adversary will overrun the land; and he will pull down your strongholds, and your fortresses will be plundered."

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Verse 11

An adversary, round about the land - Ye shall not be able to escape, wherever ye turn, ye shall meet a foe.

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AMOS 3: 12 Thus says the LORD: "As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued who sit in Samaria on the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed."

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Verse 12

As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion - Scarcely any of you shall escape; and those that do shall do so with extreme difficulty, just as a shepherd, of a whole sheep carried away by a lion, can recover no more than two of its legs, or a piece of its ear, just enough to prove by the marks on those parts, that they belonged to a sheep which was his own.

So shall the children of Israel be taken out - Those of them that escape these judgments shall escape with as great difficulty, and be of as little worth, as the two legs and piece of an ear that shall be snatched out of the lion's mouth. We know that when the Babylonians carried away the people into Chaldea they left behind only a few, and those the refuse of the land.

In the corner of a bed - As the corner is the most honorable place in the East, and a couch in the corner of a room is the place of the greatest distinction; so the words in the text may mean, that even the metropolitan cities, which are in the corner - in the most honorable place - of the land, whether Samaria in Israel, or Damascus in Syria, shall not escape these judgments; and if any of the distinguished persons who dwell in them escape, it must be with as great difficulty as the fragments above-mentioned have been recovered from a lion. The passage is obscure. Mr. Harmer has taken great pains to illustrate it; but I fear with but little success. A general sense is all we can arrive at.

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AMOS 3: 13 "Listen, and testify against the house of Jacob," says the Lord GOD, the God of Armies.

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Verse 13

Hear ye - This is an address to the prophet.

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AMOS 3: 14 "For in the day that I visit the transgressions of Israel on him, I will also visit the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar will be cut off, and fall to the ground.

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Verse 14

In the day that I shall visit - When Josiah made a reformation in the land he destroyed idolatry, pulled down the temples and altars that had been consecrated to idol worship, and even burnt the bones of the priests of Baal and the golden calves upon their own altars. See 2Kgs 23:15, 2Kgs 23:16, etc.

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AMOS 3: 15 I will strike the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will have an end," says the LORD.

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Verse 15

I will smite the winter house with the summer house - I will not only destroy the poor habitations and villages in the country, but I will destroy those of the nobility and gentry as well as the lofty palaces in the fortified cities in which they dwell in the winter season, as those light and elegant seats in which they spend the summer season. Dr. Shaw observes that "the hills and valleys round about Algiers are all over beautified with gardens and country seats, whither the inhabitants of better fashion retire during the heats of the summer season. They are little white houses, shaded with a variety of fruit trees and evergreens, which beside shade and retirement, afford a gay and delightful prospect toward the sea. The gardens are all well stocked with melons, fruits, and pot herbs of all kinds; and (which is chiefly regarded in these hot countries) each of them enjoys a great command of water."

And the houses of ivory - Those remarkable for their magnificence and their ornaments, not built of ivory, but in which ivory vessels, ornaments, and inlaying abounded. Thus, then, the winter houses and the summer houses, the great houses and the houses of uncommon splendor, shall all perish. There should be a total desolation in the land. No kind of house should be a refuge, and no kind of habitation should be spared. Ahab had at Samaria a house that was called the ivory house, 1Kgs 22:39. This may be particularly referred to in this place. We cannot suppose that a house constructed entirely of ivory can be intended.