



# JUDGMENT STARTS WITH US

Lesson 2

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## DEVOTIONAL

*"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"—1 Peter 4:17.*

As a pastor, I have accompanied several people to courtrooms and stood by them as judges questioned them. A courtroom can be a very intimidating and fearful place, filled with unfamiliar language, furniture, and lawyers darting back and forth, speaking in hushed tones, as sheriff officers walk back and forth in order to ensure proper courtroom behavior. I remember being with the accused in the waiting room before they entered into the courtroom. Some pace and talk quickly, others question what will happen to them, while others just sit their contemplatively, trying to understand it all. One thing is for certain, there is always fear of what's about to happen—and there should be. The judge has the ability to dole out punishments in accordance with the law, and that can be a terrifying thought, especially if there is guilt.

Talking about judgment is one thing, but going before a judge is something entirely different. Whenever we speak about God judging, it is easy to talk about how God might judge someone else—we have definite opinions on a person's guilt, innocence, or how we might want to see him judged. It is easy to point out other people's sin, but it is hard to hear when people point out ours. The law is merciless—we don't go before the judge of all the earth innocently. We go guilty, and He determines our punishment.

Peter talked about this in the New Testament and pointed out that judgment doesn't end with God's people; instead, that's where it actually *begins*. This concept is nothing new. Even in Amos' time, God reserved His strictest judgment for His people. As God's people, we are expected to know better and do better, which is why God starts judgment with us. And if we as God's people fail and are judged, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? It is a terrifying thought.

Judgment does not always involve a punishment for sin. Sometimes judgment can be for the purpose of discipline—and it can result in blessing if it causes us to turn from our sin to God. While judgment may begin with us, we know that the judgment for us will be different from the judgment for those who do not know God's Son, Jesus Christ. Our judgment is for discipline, while theirs will be for condemnation.

Throughout the history of God's people, and as today's passage has shown, judgment has always begun with the covenant community. In the New Testament, we may not always know what we suffer, but we do know that if we respond properly to God's judgment, we will either be purified, disciplined, or will gain some eternal reward. God had decreed judgment to Nineveh, but they repented at the preaching of Jonah and God stayed His hand (Jonah 4:11). God listens to us when we humble ourselves before Him. Even in the midst of judgment, God can and has given mercy (2 Chronicles 32:26), even to the most wicked (1 Kings 21:29). Let's make every effort to humble ourselves before God, turning away from our sin, ready to receive all that He has for us.

## OPEN IT

1. Have you ever had to go with someone to court? What did you see there? How did it make you feel?

## READ IT

Amos 2:4-16

## EXPLORE IT

2. What was Judah guilty of?
3. What had led them astray?
4. In vv. 6-8, we are told that Israel was guilty of seven things. What are they?
5. How had God helped Israel in vv. 9-11?
6. What did the Israelites do when God's prophets spoke?



10. Amos told the Israelites that God's judgment was certain. Even though judgment was coming, was there any possibility for mercy for them? If not, then why did God let them know judgment was coming? Why not simply destroy them?
11. Israel was judged on the basis of how they treated others. If someone from a foreign land were to come and evaluate how we as Christians treat those around us, what might they say?
12. Some believe that social justice is something new, but according to Amos, it is quite old and God cares a great deal about it. Is justice a Gospel issue? If so, what does it look like? If not, why not?
13. Is there a danger in pursuing social justice? Why do so many Christians appear to be divided over the subject of social justice in our culture today?
14. Amos indicts the nation of Israel for their sexual impurity (v. 7). Such an indictment was to illustrate how bad it had become for Israel. Why might God indict the contemporary American evangelical church in regards to its sexual impurity today? How bad has it become in the church?

**15. Why does God feel the need to remind them of all of the things that He has done for them in v. 9-11? What has God done for you?**

### **WHAT IS A NAZIRITE?**

A Nazirite was a person under a special vow of consecration to God. The vow is described in Numbers 6:1-21 and says that while a person is under the vow, he was not to eat or drink anything from a vine, cut his hair, or touch a dead body.

**16. Why did the Israelites make the Nazirites drink wine and command them not to prophesy? Why does that matter?**

**17. Amos spoke about a lot of issues that Israel didn't want to hear. What are some examples of topics that Christians would not want to hear their pastors talk about today?**

**18. What are some subjects that you would like our church to talk about?**