

Upside down can be a scary position to be in. Upside down *is* a very scary position for *me* to be, I found out, while on an amusement park ride called the “Pirate Ship” at Valley Fair. If you’ve never been, trust me when I tell you that the ride takes you high up into the air and then places you in an intense upside-down position watching people’s loose change fall from their pockets and other belongings drop swiftly to the earth far below and leaving you longing for safe, solid ground!

Upside down was also how I felt during my first year at seminary when I found myself in a class called “Hermeneutics.” Hermeneutics is about methods of interpreting the Bible, but for a while back then, it felt more to me like methods of how to make a guy feel confused, lost, helpless, and in short- upside down.

Upside down. You know the feeling—on a roller coaster, connected to a bungee cord, learning a brand-new subject, or trying to raise teenagers!

Amos certainly knew the feeling, because God’s program in his book is to capsize, invert, overturn, and upend everything.

An example of the prophet’s inversion is in Amos 1:3–2:16, which consists of a series of oracles against nations. Whether in a warfare, public lamentation, court, or worship setting, oracles against nations always boded well for Israel, that is, before the prophet Amos came along. For example, in 1 Samuel 15:2–3 and 1 Kings 20:26–30, the prophetic proclamation against the enemy is matched with a specific promise of *victory* for *Israel*. Amos upends this genre and adapts it for his own purpose to make a *stinging accusation* against Israel’s elite.

From Amos 1:3 through 2:5, the prophet’s audience, in all likelihood, cheered and applauded after each neighboring nation was condemned. “Hey, this Amos guy, is a great preacher!” The sermon builds to a climax as three, four, five, six nations are placed under divine *fire*. With the judgment pointing to Judah (Amos 2:4–5), the number reaches *seven*. The people could then safely assume that the sermon had ended and they could all go home saying, “All’s well that ends well!” “Way to tell them, Amos!” They figured it was time for the Aaronic benediction (Numbers 6:22–27), everyone gets dismissed, and then it was the normal post-service discussion about the weather and events of the week. But Amos was not done preaching. The Lion was still roaring (cf. Amos 1:2; 3:8; 5:19). God’s wrath was about to fall upon *Israel*.

And the oracle against Israel (Amos 2:6–16) came as a complete and shocking surprise. There are seven oracles, beginning with Damascus (1:3–5) and ending with Judah (2:4–5). You may remember that seven is a number commonly used in the Bible to denote **completeness**, making an **eighth** oracle unexpected. Little did the Israelite audience (presumably at Bethel) know that the prophet’s analysis of the crimes of the nations was in reality a **noose** that was getting ready to tighten around its neck!

The first seven oracles were small sparks of fire when compared to the **mighty blaze** that fell upon the leadership of the Northern Kingdom. Amos upsets the equilibrium of those in his audience who were embracing the belief, “Come weal, come woe; our status is quo.”

The prophet lived and preached in such a way that the monarchy, the temple, the covenants, the land, and the state were all turned inside out and **upside down**.

One of Amos’s most unsettling statements comes at the beginning of our text today/ this evening (3:1–2). He begins this section with the words, “Hear this word that the LORD has spoken concerning **you**, O children of Israel, concerning the entire clan which I brought up from Egypt, saying. . . .” The prophet’s audience might have concluded that the exodus was a sign of God’s ongoing and eternal favor (e.g., Numbers 24:8; Judges 6:13; 1 Kings 8:51–51); it forever guaranteed Israel’s “favored nation status” before the LORD.

In the next verse, however, Amos flatly **contradicts** these expectations. He quotes God as saying, “You alone have I known from all the families of the earth; therefore, I will visit upon you the fruit of all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). Just as Amos shocked his unsuspecting audience with the Israel oracle (2:6–16), so again he overturns expectations by using **Gospel** events to announce **Law**.

A few years ago, a scientist did an experiment where he made cocaine available to monkeys. They would pull a lever, and a feeding tray would give them a hit of cocaine. Soon the monkeys got addicted to the cocaine. These were happy monkeys! But then the scientist began to hold the next fix. How many consecutive times do you think the average monkey would pull that lever to get the next fix? 12,800 times. Over and over and over and over again, “Gotta have it, gotta have it, gotta have it!”

In like manner, we are addicted to sin. Gossip, anger, worry, laziness, excuses, selfishness. You name it; it has us. Over and over and over and over again we scream, “Gotta have it, gotta have it, gotta have it!”

God, therefore, also says this to us. "You alone have I known from all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you the fruit of all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

Thank God that He does not leave us with Amos. There is another prophet in Israel who was more than a prophet, and because of Him, we have hope despite our willful rebellion. Paul says this about Jesus, "Being in very nature God, He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Talk about upside down!

Omnipotent. The owner of all things, Jesus says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). The King of kings, He becomes a slave. The Creator, He is spit on by His creatures. The source of truth, He is found guilty of a lie. The source of light, for three hours He hangs in the darkness. The source of life, He is crucified, dead, and buried. Jesus went from the pinnacle of praise in the universe to the ultimate absolute nothing. "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him; nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2).

As the Lord of Inversion, He chose fishermen instead of Pharisees and sinners instead of Sadducees. Jesus chose thorns for His crown instead of silver and gold, and spit and blood instead of sweetness and light. His choices led to torment and torture and darkness and death. Jesus experienced all the judgment of the Father, for all the sins of the world, including yours and mine.

Baptized into this kingdom, our lives are now inside out and completely **upside down**. Once we were lost, but now we are found. Once we were blind, but now we see. And once we were dead, but now we are alive!

Amos knows all about this upside-down life. He writes in Amos 3:8, "The lion roars; who will not be terrified? The Lord GOD issues a decree; who cannot but prophesy?" Amos dared to speak up about the wretched state of affairs in his country, and he did this regardless of the consequences for himself or for anyone else.

As God's chosen and elect, loved and forgiven sinners, we are also empowered to live in such a way that what the Thessalonians said about Paul and Silas as recorded in Acts 17:6, will be said of us. "These men who have turned the world **upside down** have also come here" Amen.