1:6 Notice that the reasons for the judgments are all because of what people did to other people. Human treatment of others is the basis for God’s judgment. We also learn from this chapter that God noticed how Gentiles treated other Gentiles. He doesn’t just ignore the unbelievers, zoning out on their actions and issues with each other. His sensitivity to human sin, and His total knowledge of all that goes on in this world, His reading of every motive behind every action, is simply colossal. It should encourage us that we are not alone in this world; the amazing knowledge of God means we can thereby feel His presence. The reference to “For three transgressions… and for four” can be read as meaning that God doesn’t switch off, as it were, after the third sin; He is sensitive also to the fourth. He doesn’t simply write people off as ‘sinners’ after a certain amount of sin; He keeps noticing their behaviour and the hurt of their sin continues growing within Him.

1:11 *His anger raged continually, and he kept his wrath forever*- The implication could be that anger is an acceptable emotion, but not if it becomes a continual state of mind.

2:1 *I will not turn away its punishment-* A tacit recognition that God can state a punishment or destiny against a person or group, and yet turn away from doing it in the light of their repentance, as happened with Israel at the time of Moses, or with Nineveh in the book of Jonah. However there is a point where such changes are no longer possible; a change of mind is no longer a possibility (Hos. 13:14).

2:2 The “fire” promised here and throughout chapter 1 is not so much literal fire as symbolic of God’s anger and condemnation (see too Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). When Jesus spoke of fire as the punishment of the wicked and used the metaphor of Gehenna, the ever burning garbage site near Jerusalem, He too wasn’t speaking literally but in harmony with His Father’s figurative usage of “fire” in the Old Testament as a metaphor for judgment.

2:7 *To profane My holy name*- In our context, we have been baptized into the same Name. We can likewise profane that Name by our behaviour. This is the essence of the meaning of blaspheming God’s Name.

2:8 *Drink the wine of the condemned*- Under the New Covenant, we too run the risk of drinking the wine of that covenant to our own condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). As we hold that cup, we realize we are at a T-junction; we shall either be saved or condemned, and we should live life in the intensity of that knowledge.

2:11 *I raised up… Nazirites*- Becoming a Nazirite was totally voluntary. Yet God works through our freewill.

2:12 *You gave the Nazirites wine to drink*- Nazirites weren’t allowed to drink wine (Num. 6:3). To lead others into sin, or discourage them from the spiritual commitments they have made, is reckoned by God as worthy of the strongest condemnation. We should be positive and supportive of others’ spirituality rather than destructive of it. Jesus therefore had so much anger with the Pharisees and Jewish leadership for the very same reason.

3:2 We whom God has chosen in Christ are therefore more responsible for our sins than others in the world; they sin with far less accountability than we have. We must remember this when we are tempted to sin as they do.

3:6 A classic proof of the fact that God rather than any sinful Satan figure brings “evil” in the sense of disaster on earth (Is. 45:5-7).

3:7 See on 7:1-6.

3:9 Hebrew poetry rhymes according to the ideas presented rather than the assonance of the words. However, this doesn’t mean that in a couplet, the first part is directly equal to the second part. Subtle differences are set up in order to make a point. The lion has roared: who shall not fear? God has spoken: who can but speak forth? If a lion roars, so a man naturally fears as a result of it. God speaks, and just as naturally we can do nothing but speak it forth. Hence the hearers are to publish God’s purpose to the Gentile nations around them. The lion roars, and man fears; and we are set up to expect: God speaks, and man should fear. But there is an intended dashing of this expectation. God has spoken, just as the lion may roar; but we are not to fear but rather to speak it forth to others. If we believe that the Bible is indeed the inspired word of God, if we hear that voice of Yahweh, we will inevitably speak it forth to others. Hence Peter says that he could never agree not to speak forth God’s word, because to do so is a natural process for the believer (Acts 4:20).

4:4,5 God as it were encourages sinful people in their sin; there’s a downward and an upward spiral, we never remain in a neutral position in our spiritual journey.

4:10 *The stench of your camps*- These words have a strange relevance to the death camps of Europe in the 1940s. The tragedy of Israel’s history, and of so many individual lives, is that despite suffering so much, people refuse to return to their God. Their pain is therefore in vain.

4:13 *He who forms the mountains-* Nothing in the natural creation is static; although the mountains may appear so permanent and lifeless, God is forming them in an ongoing sense. God’s ongoing, unceasing work in the natural creation is the constant comfort that we are not alone.

5:18 It is quite possible to be enthusiastic about the coming of Christ- the final “day of the Lord”- and yet if we don’t live a serious spiritual life, then this day will actually be our destruction.

5:22 Peace offerings were freewill offerings of devotion to God. We can make them and other sacrifices to God, worship God enthusiastically (:23), keep the feasts solemnly (:21- cp. the breaking of bread meeting)- and yet God will be irritated by these things and angry with us if at the same time we are guilty of injustice to others (:24 and most of the chapter). Justice and not being harmful to others is of such paramount value to God.

5:26 In addition to carrying Yahweh’s tent or tabernacle through the wilderness, the Israelites took with them the gods of Egypt and carried their tent with them too. Leaving Egypt through the Red Sea is like baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2); Israel’s wilderness journey is analogous to our lives now as we travel towards the promised land of God’s Kingdom. We mustn’t take with us the gods of this world (cp. Egypt); God’s claim on us is total and exclusive.

6:1-6 The situation described here before the “day of the Lord” in those days is exactly the situation today. Self-indulgence, laziness, over sleeping, over eating, brainwashed by music and ignoring the needs of others, whilst psychologically putting the reality of God’s judgment far away (:3)- this is the spirit of our age, and it heralds the final day of the Lord.

7:1-6 God reveals His intention regarding Israel, but then Amos makes a case against this and is heard. In fact, these and other examples suggest that this is almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His covenant people to change or amend those plans. This could be what 3:7 is speaking of: "Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless He first reveals His secret to His servants the prophets". It's as if He reveals His plans to them so that they can then comment upon them in prayer.

7:2 God is open to changing His stated plan due to the mediation of others. It would even appear that Amos believed God could forgive the sins of others because of his prayers rather than their repentance. For Amos doesn't merely ask God not to execute His judgments, but to actually forgive Israel. There's an obvious similarity with the intercession of Moses; the only other person to pray "Forgive, I beseech You" is Moses- the same Hebrew words are found on his lips twice (Ex. 34:9; Num. 14:19). Moses' amazing example had been meditated upon by Amos as he did his agricultural work- and he rose up to the same level. He prayed the same prayer. We too should be motivated in our prayer lives by Biblical examples, even using the same words. So many Biblical prayers use the words of previous Scripture. God leads us to see the similarities between our situations and those of Biblical figures- e.g. by giving Amos a vision of judgment upon Israel in terms of a locust plague, which was intended to lead Amos to see Israel as Egypt and himself as Moses in making intercession to end the plague. Amos gets into the spirit of Moses by asking God to "cease" (7:5), using the same word used to describe how the plagues "ceased" as a result of Moses' intercession (Ex. 9:29,33,34).

7:14 Amos stresses that speaking forth God's word wasn't at all what he wished to do or was cut out for. Likewise Paul says that because preaching God's word was against his natural inclination, therefore a calling to preach the Gospel had indeed been given to him (1 Cor. 9:17). Paul was sent to the Gentiles and not the Jews as he might naturally have preferred; the disciples were unlearned and ignorant men called to preach to the Jewish intelligentsia; women weren't accepted as legal witnesses and yet the Lord asks women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection; always in the preaching of His word does God use those who humanly aren't qualified to do so. He doesn't use slick presentation, but rather human weakness in order to convert others. Amos doubtless alludes to himself in 3:8 where he says that a prophet cannot but speak out God's word- and this is alluded to by the apostles when they say they cannot but speak out what they have seen and heard of Christ. Note how Amos doesn't actually answer the serious false allegation against him personally, but gets on with speaking forth God's word- for this was his life’s focus.

9:11,12 We have used the Septuagint version of these verses, because this is the form which is quoted under inspiration in Acts 15:14-18. There, James quotes these verses to prove that Gentiles could become called by God’s Name through being baptized into the Name of His Son, the Lord Jesus; and that this process was not predicated upon circumcision. We see, therefore, the huge weight given by the early Christians to every Old Testament word of God. Note that Acts 15:14 speaks of God *visiting* the Gentiles, and quotes Am. 9:12 about the Gentiles *seeking* the Lord as proof of this. God is in search of man, and some men are in search of Him. They meet in that moment of baptism into His Name as it is in His Son, and the union is a wonderful and eternal one.