

Minor Prophets: Amos

Introduction

In a day where people were fooled by the masks of prosperity and political stability, God called Amos to speak to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The nation had allowed itself to commit social injustices and idolatry because of its affluence and advancement. Amos was called to these people to tell them to repent and to bring to their attention these gross injustices. However, when he went to Israel to preach these messages, he was kicked out by the priest at Bethel and had to finish his calling from his home nation of Judah. He preached with power and vivid imagery to an apathetic audience.

About Amos the Prophet

Amos reveals about himself that he raised sheep. Some Bibles will say he was a shepherd, but a distinction needs to be made. The Hebrew word he uses is different than that of the word for shepherd, The distinction is that he may or may not have shepherded the sheep. He was one who may have raised and sold them. A shepherd could have also been a hired hand, but Amos seems to have been the owner, not the hired hand. He also reveals later in chapter 7 that he might also own cattle and that he was a dresser of sycamore fig trees. He may have been in the middle class, not poor, but not rich either.

Amos lived in Tekoa, a village about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. God called him to be prophet out of his “secular job.” So Amos left the fields and the flocks and the herds to go to Israel, the northern kingdom, although he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, to preach against the idolatry and injustice of the well-to-do people there. Amaziah, the priest in Bethel, challenged him and told him to leave. His challenge basically called Amos a sorry excuse for a prophet, to which he replies that God called him out of his other vocations. Amos learned how to be God’s prophet through on-the-job training. He learned first-hand the joys and perils of ministry.

Amos in History

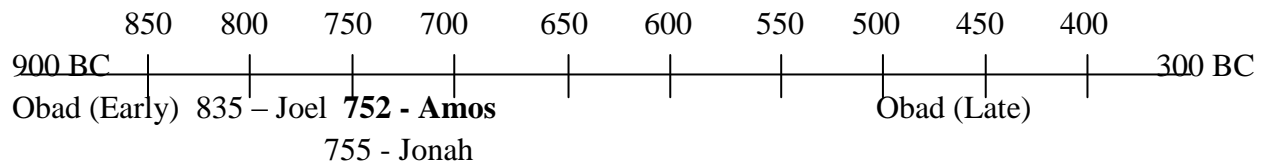
The book of Amos was probably written around 754-752 BC. This is about the time that Amos ministered for a short period in Israel itself before he was kicked out. We know this date almost exactly because of the information he left in the opening of his prophecy. It says in verse one of the first chapter that he wrote this two years before the earthquake in the reign of Jeroboam, which happened in 750 BC.

Jeroboam, the son of Joash, was king of Israel from 793-753 BC. In the southern kingdom of Judah, Uzziah was king from 792-740 BC. Both kingdoms at this time, although divided, enjoyed relative peace and harmony. In the north, there were extreme amounts of idolatry going on, but there was political stability and great prosperity throughout the land. The

prosperity was a shell that God would break, which is why he sent Amos to the north. This is shortly before Isaiah is called at the end of Uzziah's reign in 739 BC.

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Amos

- I. Amos gave oracles against the nations (1:1-2:16).
 - A. Six nations will endure God's judgment (1:2-2:3).
 - B. Judah also will see God's judgment (2:4-5).
 - C. Israel is not rescued from God's Judgment (2:6-16).
- II. Israel's trial and verdict foretold (3:1-4:13).
 - A. Israel will be judged for her treachery (3:1-4:5).
 - B. Israel refuses to repent (4:6-13).
- III. Let repentance and justice reign (5:1-6:14).
 - A. God demands Israel's repentance before judgment (5:1-17).
 - B. Justice will reign supreme again (5:18-27).
 - C. Amos warns against complacency (6:1-14).
- IV. Amos had three visions from the Lord (7:1-9).
 - A. Amos has a vision of locusts (7:1-3).
 - B. Amos has a vision of fire (7:4-6).
 - C. Amos has a vision of a plumb line (7:7-9).
- V. Amos kicked out of Israel (7:10-17).
 - A. The priest of Bethel demands Amos leave Israel and return to Judah (7:10-13).
 - B. Amos replied with scorn and warning (7:14-17).
- VI. Amos continues to prophesy about Israel in Judah (8:1-9:15).
 - A. The Day of the Lord will bring mourning and destruction (8:1-14).
 - B. The northern kingdom of Israel will be destroyed (9:1-10).
 - C. The northern kingdom of Israel will be restored (9:11-15).

The Prophetic Message of Amos

Chapter 1

1:1 The words of Amos who was among the shepherds from Tekoa which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel two years before the earthquake.

In this opening verse, we are given the background of the prophet Amos and the historical setting of his ministry. This book opens by telling us something very unusual about this prophet. Usually prophets were prophets for life, people who were raised up for such a time that was needed. But here, we find that Amos is not a “professional” prophet. He was not part of the prophet schools and did not have any connection to the prophetic ministry. He was a shepherd and sheep raiser working for a living who was called by God to Israel, the northern kingdom.

His hometown was Tekoa, ten miles south of Jerusalem, and he traveled to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam. He would not be well received in this time of prosperity. In the southern kingdom, Uzziah was ruling Judah, his home nation. The specific point of his ministry being two years before the earthquake that happened under Jeroboam helps us to historically narrow this down to around 752 BC, because the earthquake recorded in history is in 750 BC. It was to this affluent Israel that the prophet was to bring the oracle of warning to a spiritually apathetic and even idolatrous nation. Their comfort zones would not handle the warning from the Lord.

1:2 And he said, “The Lord from Zion roars, and from Jerusalem He raises His voice, and the pastures dry up for shepherds, even the top of Carmel withers.

As the prophet begins to relay the message after arriving in Jerusalem, he is going to start out with the oracles against the nations, which Israel will readily listen to. In fact, they will enjoy hearing about God’s wrath coming against the nations. But they do not see it coming as it will come around to them as well.

Verse two is the prophet’s introduction to the words of the Lord against the nations. This verse prepares us to see how powerful and strong the Lord’s voice is. This is seen elsewhere, especially in the Psalms, the strength of God’s commanding voice. Here we see that the Lord roars from Zion. Geographically, it matches with Jerusalem as a city. Zion also has the indication of being the place where God dwells, the Temple mount. But it is also inclusive of the place God’s people will live after the Day of the Lord. But the Lord is seated in His place and He roars like a lion.

When the Lord speaks, all of creation listens intently and reacts to His voice. From Jerusalem the Lord raises His voice so to speak. He is about to speak pronouncements of judgment upon the nations. The oracles are a fairly common section that most of the prophets

include in their writings. Oracles are futuristic pronouncements of God's wrath and judgment upon those who do not listen to and practice His will.

The result as the Lord begins to speak is seen even in nature. The power of His voice as He speaks sweeps through the pastures and fields. With the pronouncement of the Lord's judgment comes the drying up of pastures so that sheep cannot graze. Just as much as the low places, the valleys of pastures are affected, so also the mountains wither at their tops. When the Lord speaks against a nation, the judgment will be instantaneously carried out, and even nature will suffer His wrath.

1:3 Thus says the Lord, "For three transgressions of Damascus, even four I will not relent, for they threshed with the iron threshing sledges Gilead

In this verse we get the first of seven oracles against nations. Each oracle starts with the same prophetic formula, "Thus says the Lord." This formula will begin the Lord's speech through the prophet. Everything the prophet says, although in the first person, comes with the authority of the Lord attached to it. It is as if the Lord is speaking instead of the prophet, using Amos as a vessel to bring His message.

The next formula will be common to all of these pronouncements of judgment, verdicts in the Lord's courtroom. "For three transgressions, even four I will not relent." This formula is used by the prophet to show that God has waited for the nations to repent, except that they have used his grace period to do even more and greater sins. Therefore, God will not relent from bringing His wrath in full force.

This first oracle is against the people of the capital city of Damascus, whose nation was Aram. They were ruled at this time in history by a king named Hazael, as we will see in the next verse. The reason for God's vexing wrath to fall upon this nation is their cruel treatment of the people in Gilead, one of Israel's northernmost cities close to their borders. There is an account in 2 Kings 8:12 to which most scholars believe this proclamation links. The threshing sledge made of iron would then be an image of what the nation of Aram had done to Gilead. They came in and mowed down the people of the land, so to speak. This is what has angered the Lord.

1:4 "Then I will send fire upon the house of Hazael and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad.

The Lord's judgment for the threshing of the people of Gilead comes in the form of consuming fire that will ravage the nation whose king is Hazael. This is the nation of Aram, and his capital is Damascus. God will send fire upon them. This could be physical fire that supernaturally falls or comes through war on their lands while their enemies set their fields on fire. It could also be a figurative fire that simply speaks of destroying and devouring all of his goods.

God will remove their ability to defend themselves as a nation. He will destroy their strength and their military might. They will have nothing to place their hope in and will be defenseless against attack. Ben-Hadad was the former king of Aram. It is believed currently that Hazael was a usurper who killed Ben-Hadad and took his throne, so it is interesting that both are mentioned in this verse, almost giving Hazael a “not a real king” status. A nation in the prophets is sometimes referred to by their king’s name as a way of identifying the nation with the sins of their leaders. This might be the case here.

1:5 “Then I will break the crossbar of Damascus and I will exterminate the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and I will seize the scepter from Beth-Eden, and the nation of Aram will go into exile to Kir,” says the Lord.

The Lord continues His judgment as he says He will break the crossbar of Damascus. The crossbar was much like the bar that locked the gates of castles in the Middle Ages, except that this crossbar went over the main gate settled in the walls of each city. God Himself will break the bar and invade the capital city of Damascus, meaning to take it in battle as spoil. He also says that He will exterminate those who live in the Valley of Aven.

The Valley of Aven is probably not a literal place. Aven means “wickedness” in Hebrew, so it is a place where perhaps sacrifices may have been offered up to an idol. This will be a place where inhabitants will die by the hand and power of the Lord. He will execute them for their wickedness as part of pure judgment. He will also take captive those in Beth-Eden, taking the leadership away from its ruler, as evidenced in the image of seizing that ruler’s scepter. Finally, the Lord’s wrath specifically hits a third people in that all of Aram will suffer as a nation by going into exile. God will essentially take their leaders and their inhabitants, kill off the most vile, and send the rest into exile. This is the worst shame that can be brought in the Middle East, to be exiled from one’s homeland.

1:6 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Gaza, even four I will not relent, for they carried into exile a whole people to deliver to Edom.

The second nation that will suffer the wrath of God for their insolence and sinfulness is Gaza. Amos will use this same formula for each of the seven nations, including Judah and Israel. As the people listened on to how God would punish all of these nations, they would have celebrated and Amos would be popular until he got to the last nation in the list, which would be Israel. But the people do not know that this is coming. They are thinking they are fine with God, so they won’t expect the word to turn on them.

The people living in Gaza have angered the Lord and incurred His wrath upon them in judgment and punishment because they took an entire nation and planned to carry them off, to exile them into the land of Edom. We are not told which people this passage speaks of. The prophet does not mention the whole nation of people that had been uprooted, transplanted to

another location. For this, the Lord was angry, that they delivered them up to Edom. The word for “a whole people” could also be translated “a peaceful people” in which case the people of Gaza were lulling their “friends” into peace and then selling them off to Edom. But we cannot be certain if this is the case.

1:7 “Then I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza and it will consume their fortresses.

This same judgment of fire will not just fall on Hazael and Aram. It will also be God’s mode of judgment for Gaza. He will bring fire to their wall, the city wall that gives them their security and protection. He will burn it down and destroy it. Then the fire will devour or consume their fortresses just as with the Aramites. The Lord is seen as the divine warrior who fights back for His chosen people against the nations. He will use fire to judge these places and will take away their ability to defend themselves, bringing them shame.

1:8 “Then I will exterminate the inhabitants from Ashdod and I will seize the scepter from Ashkelon, and I will return My hand upon Ekron and I will destroy the remnant of the Philistines,” says the Lord God.

Once again, God will exterminate the people in the city of Ashdod. All of these cities are cities that belonged to the Philistines and the Canaanites throughout Israel’s history. The people in Gaza are probably the Philistines at this time. The Philistines were a sea-fairing people that took the land of Canaan before Israel came for its inheritance in the Promised Land.

Another city is mentioned, receiving the same judgment from the Lord that the ruler from Beth-Eden received. God will take his scepter of leadership away from him. This man is the king of the city of Ashkelon, another Philistine stronghold. Then the Lord says He will return His hand upon the city of Ekron. The word for hand is also symbolic in Hebrew of power or might. God will bring the force of His might against this Philistine city, and it will fall. In fact, anything that is left of the Philistines, any of the remnant, will be hunted down and destroyed by the Lord as He personally wages the war of His wrath upon the people of Gaza for their sins against His people.

1:9 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Tyre, even four I will not relent, for he delivered into exile a whole people to Edom and did not remember a covenant with his brother.

The next nation to suffer God’s wrath for injustice will be the nation of Tyre. It’s treachery is more displeasing to the Lord, for it also had taken into exile a whole people, or a peaceful people. But beyond this, there is more of an explanation in detail for Tyre than for Gaza. The Lord is irate with them because this nation did not remember a covenant with its brother.

It is very possible that these whole communities that may have had a covenant or treaty with Tyre were Israelites, because David did make a treaty with Tyre (2 Sam 5:11). But we cannot know this for sure. We do know that the Lord is angry with Tyre for two infractions. One is treachery with a peaceful nation and the other is breaking a covenant. For this, the Lord's anger will rain down upon them in full. God takes covenants and treaties very seriously!

1:10 “Then I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre and it will consume their fortresses.

The same anger of the Lord comes in the judgment of fire upon the walls of Tyre. God will punish them in the same way He has punished the other nations. Fire is one of the ways that God can destroy evil after the flood. He promised to Noah that He would never use floods again to destroy, but fire is a viable option. We are also aware the fire will play a part in the end times. God also used fiery brimstone and sulfur to judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is one reason why this should surprise us as part of God's judgment. This fire like the others will consume the nation's fortresses and leave them vulnerable to attack without walls and fortresses. Any nation can come in and ravage the land, taking it as spoils. Once again, the shame of having your land taken without a defense is unbearable.

1:11 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Edom, even four I will not relent, for he pursued with the sword his brother and he spoiled his compassion, and his anger tore to pieces forever, and he kept his wrath forever.

The next in the oracles against the nations to come under the wrath of God is Edom. Now this may be related to the above nation of Tyre. Tyre was the nation who ignored a covenant against his brother. Here we read that Edom drew the sword against its brother. It is quite possible that the treachery of both nations is in play in this part of the prophecy and that the two nations had made a treaty which Tyre broke and Edom retaliated in kind.

Such a breaking of a covenant with a “brother,” with family, would result in an unquenchable anger that leads the nation of Edom to retaliate in wicked ways. When we get angry just as individuals, we can let our anger crowd our sensibilities. We can let it eat away at us and drive us to retribution. It seems this may have happened for Edom. They allowed their anger to burn hot “forever.”

Their compassion was spoiled or ruined like food. They no longer sought to be merciful to this nation that they considered their peaceful brother. They brought all the wrath they could. The anger ripped and tore the other nation to pieces. It was a destructive anger that a person or nation cannot take back. It would leave wounds that will not heal. They chose to grasp their anger instead of compassion. Not only did they react in anger, but they held on to their anger forever. They never let go of their rage. For this reason ultimately, God will return His wrath upon them for their wickedness in their own anger. But He will judge and be wrathful in justice.

1:12 “Then I will send fire upon Teman and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah.

God once again brings the fire of His judgment, this time to the whole nation. Teman is a region to the south in Edom and Bozrah is a region in the upper north of the nation. Therefore, God would bring his fiery wrath to the south and north, showing that everything in between would suffer the same fate. The fire has the same goal as all other times, to destroy their defenses and leave them in their shame for their anger that they could not put down.

1:13 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon, even four I will not relent, for they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead in order to widen their territory.

The fifth nation that will suffer God’s judgment is Ammon. Throughout all of these oracles, the structure has been very clear and it continues to be a repetition. God’s anger is raised against Ammon because the people of that nation ripped open the pregnant mothers, stealing life before it began, aborting babies that could grow up strong and man the borders of Gilead. Without the next generation, the people could not keep the Ammonites out and they would come in and take the city to expand their boarder farther into Israel. Both the abortions and the stealing of the Lord’s land were a great affront to Him, and he would make them pay dearly for their treachery and wickedness.

1:14 “Then I will set ablaze by fire the wall of Rabbah and it will consume the fortresses with a war-cry on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of the whirlwind.

A little different in this verse is the wording of the fires he will send upon the walls of the city of Rabbah. Here, he uses a more inflammatory or emphasized verb, “I will set ablaze.” This shows His anger has indeed been kindled. Rabbah was more than likely one of the chief cities of Ammon that was known as a great city. That same fire would consume their national defenses, this time with an included war-cry, the guarantee that they would be invaded and taken as spoils. The day of battle could have been a specific day or even a reference to the Day of the Lord, although it is probably a historical day that they would never forget the violence they would suffer at the hands of their enemy for the criminal acts committed against Gilead. God would also use nature and the weather to judge against them with strong winds and storms.

1:15 and their king will go into exile, he and his princes together,” says the Lord.

He would also take their king into exile for their crimes, punishing the leader of the nation, as well as the whole nation itself through war and natural disaster. But God would violently remove the leadership of the nation in one fell swoop, taking away the ability of the nation to rebuild and grow strong under leadership. The princes also would not stay.

Chapter 2

2:1 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Moab, even four I will not relent, for he burned the bones of the King of Edom to the lime.

Moab becomes the sixth nation on God’s hit list. For each of these nations, God has a reason for His just judgment. In our own judgment, we often have a reason as well, but it is usually not as perfect as the Lord’s reasons. He does not overly judge, which is practically impossible for us to comprehend, because over-judging comes so naturally to us. God’s extreme zeal and anger burn against Moab because Moab has burned the King of Edom “to the lime.”

We do not know why Moab at this time would burn the king of Edom. Throughout biblical history even up to the modern era, these nations have been warring amongst one another for centuries. Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint a specific dispute or event. However, this was a complete burn of the body of the king. They left nothing but the powder remains of the bones! Lime is a powdery substance, so it shows their complete disdain for the king of Moab. They took it upon themselves to snuff out his life. Such judgment and penalty is left up to God, not to humanity, because He is more just and more exacting. So this is seen also as evil in God’s sight. The hatred of humanity can readily be seen in the brutality of these killings.

2:2 “Then I will send a fire upon Moab and it will consume the strongholds of Keriath, and Moab will die in the uproar and in the shouting and in the sound of the trumpet.

Once again, the common thread of fire comes upon the strongholds of the nation. Keriath was probably a key city to the nation. Moab’s demise is into death on the battlefield as another enemy attacks them as they did Edom. The language here suggests a battle, for there is an uproar or confusion, shouting and crying out as in war, and most importantly emblematic of war is the sound of the trumpet. Trumpets were used in war to organize the troops and also to sound certain commands. In America the most common use of a trumpet is usually to charge into battle because the lines are so large that the ends cannot hear one voice, so a trumpet signals some commands instead.

2:3 “Then I will cut off the ruler from her midst and all her princes with him,” says the Lord.

Not only will the nation be thrown into war and violence and death, also God will cut off the rulers and the princes as well. Their leadership will be taken away because they snuffed out the life of the leadership of Edom. God is repaying them in the way that they paid others. The idea of being cut off may seem like a graphic way of killing a person or a nation, but God here is using the word as being cut off from the people of the nation. The people will no longer have

their figurehead ruler. He will be gone. Then the rest of their leadership will be taken from them. And all of this in the midst of war and death. Their demise will be complete.

2:4 Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Judah, even four I will not relent, for they have rejected the laws of the Lord and have not kept His statutes. and their lies have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked.

Now the seventh nation to receive the wrath of God would be a surprise to us, but not to Israel. God does not stay far among the Gentiles to judge. He judges the whole world, including His chosen nation of Judah and, later the Israelites will find out, Israel as well. Now for the other nations, you may notice that God judges them based on their conscience, what they know is wrong to do. They know it is wrong to harbor an anger that leads to evil. They know it is wrong to take the life of another.

But when God comes to His own chosen people, He raves against them with anger and judgment for a completely different reason. While the nations did not receive the laws of the Lord, the nations of Israel and Judah had received His special revelation, His exact commands. He has every right to be angry because they have heard His good and pleasing laws, and then rejected them by not following and obeying them. They have not kept the commandments. Many times throughout Israel’s history, the nation has been warned to follow the commandments, to keep them as precious to their hearts as gold. But in not following the laws, they have shown their disdain for God and for His laws.

Therefore, God will not just judge all of the enemies of Israel and Judah. He will also do some in-house cleaning. The nation has already been split into two kingdoms because they have not heeded the law of the Lord. This law is the word Torah here, meaning His instructions and teachings. They have turned to their own ways, as we see in the book of Judges. Now God will bring His judgment on them because they have not obeyed. Instead of believing and heeding the truth of God’s laws, they have turned to lies just as their forefathers had turned.

They continually commit the same sins and do not learn from history. They are just like their fathers. If God sound a bit like a nagging spouse, remember that these are His chosen people. Out of concern for them He has given them the laws which lead to life and happiness, but they have chosen differently. And for that choice, God allows them to fall under judgment, for it is the only way that they can see the truth and His love and come back to Him. He has begged throughout the prophets, trying to show them that they were running fast into His judgment, but they had to experience it for themselves.

2:5 “Then I will send a fire upon Judah and it will consume the strongholds of Jerusalem

God’s judgment does not vary. His expectations may have been different between the Gentiles and His own people, but His judgment for their disobedience and violation of His holiness is the same. He will bring the fire upon the whole country of Judah. Some scholars

suggest that this is not literal but rather that God's bringing the fire means sending in enemy armies. This would certainly be true for Judah's chief city of Jerusalem, for we know from history that the Babylonians sack Jerusalem in 586 BC and carry them off into exile.

However, the oracle does not proclaim this fact. The sacking of Jerusalem is not a common historical event. It happens rarely in history, so we know that this prophecy looks to that time of the Babylonians. Jerusalem, God's holy city, will fall as payment for their refusal to listen to and obey the voice of their covenant Lord and to adhere to His Torah. To be just, the Lord's judgment falls on all who do not obey Him, whether they are His chosen people or not. Amos, the prophet from Judah, speaks God's message, even when it is against his own nation.

2:6 “Thus says the Lord, “For three transgressions of Israel, even four I will not relent, for they sell for silver the righteous and the needy for shoes,

While the people of Israel would have cheered at the Lord's judgment of all the nations around them which have been thorns in their flesh, the mood would have grown quiet and somber when they heard that common phrasing which initiates another oracle, another proclamation of judgment, and then heard in its midst their own nation's name! They may have even begun to stop their ears so they would not hear. They surely know what's coming. The pattern has not changed much for other nations.

Even when Judah, much closer to them came up on the list, they would have rejoiced because Judah is no longer tied to them. But then their own nation comes up on the list as the eighth nation. The reasons the Lord is unhappy with them are less about sticking to His laws, as in Judah's case. However, by doing social injustices as He mentions, they are violating specific laws, and therefore guilty of the same trespass as Judah.

At this time, Israel is experiencing the wealth and prosperity, eating up God's blessing given to other kings and the time of blessing during the united kingdom. They are wealthy and have political and military stability. Sometimes it is in our strength that we are most vulnerable to fall. In their wealth, they have become greedy for money, willing to sell off the righteous, who are more precious to God than silver. But their priorities have changed. They value silver more than the righteous! Also, they begin to neglect the needy, selling them for a common pair of shoes or sandals. Those who are in great need are fed to the markets for the needs of the wealthy. The injustice has inflamed God Almighty, for His law adores the righteous and provides for the needy!

2:7 “those who trample into the earth's dust the head of the poor and turn aside the way of the afflicted, even a man and his father go into the same girl, so that My holy name is defiled.

With vivid imagery, the prophet pursues his goal. He mentions people that would trample under foot and into the ground the heads of the poor. This is a metaphor for their absolute

advantage over the poor. God has always meant the blessing of wealth to be used to bless those without wealth. But the people of this nation have also flipped this principle on its head, using the poor for common labor and disrespecting them. They have lost the feeling of care for those whom God desperately cares.

Even the afflicted are turned aside. This part of the verse could also be translated, “and turn aside from the way of the humble.” In such a case, we can understand that when a person or nation is wealthy, they become prideful. They forget the source of their wealth and prosperity. They begin to believe that it’s by their own means they have seen provision and wealth. In this very real sense, they are turning away from the way of those who are humble. They have forgotten how to give God thanks for His goodness. They have taken for granted everything that He has given them. Worse than all of this, they believe now that they can cause their own prosperity.

Another specific section of the laws has been violated, that of sexual sin. God’s anger burns against them, and His nostrils flare because a young man and his father commit sexual sin with one and the same girl. This is a violation of the marriage covenant. There is a suggestion here that a father’s son is married to a girl and they share her, which defiles the girl and the marriage. Sexual sin, a very base carnality, shows the heart of these people. In violating the sexual laws of God, these people have profaned what God set up and ordained as sacred. In defiling marriage, they have defiled the Lord’s name, which is holy and set apart, unique.

2:8 “Then upon garments taken in pledge they lay down beside every altar, and they drink the wine of those who have been fined in the house of their God.

As God continues to enumerate the great sins and social injustices of the Israelites, he mentions a specific provision for the pledging of a garment. Garments were pledged as a sort of hold, a trust, that the person would repay their debt. However, they could only be held in the daytime, so that the person could sleep in the garment and stay warm during cool desert nights. This practice can be seen in Exodus 22:6 and Deuteronomy 24:13. The fact that they are sleeping on a pledged garment means that they have ignored the law of giving it back for the night.

Even worse than violating this law of kindness, they do it right in front of the altars throughout Israel, which point first to violating God’s law, and second to the fact that they have many altars, which points to idolatry, another breaking of the commandments. Another sin of theirs besides these two in this verse is the misuse of wine held for a fine. When people were fined, they paid in wine, and these people in their wealthy arrogance, are drinking that wine. They are giving it a separate use than it was intended, which is a form of defilement. And they do this right in the midst of the house of God!

2:9 “Yet I exterminated the Amorite before them, whose height was like a cedar’s height, and his strength like the oaks. Then I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath

All of these sins they perform against the Lord and against His law in spite of forgetting their origins and how He fought their battles for them. He was the one who annihilated the Amorites, even though they were tall and mighty. The Lord recounts how it was not the Israelites, but the Divine Warrior who cut this tall nation down to size. He is pointing to Himself as the source of their sufficiency, reminding them of their humble beginnings in this section.

The Amorites were so tall compared to the nation of Israel that the Lord uses tree images. Cedars in this part of the world and elsewhere are known for their height, very tall trees that reach to the skies. And oak is a great wood for building, because it withstands the test of the elements and time, a strength of sorts. The Lord reminds them of formidable enemies they could not defeat on their own. He reminds them where the wealth and ability has come from.

Destroying their fruit from above refers either to all of the production and wealth of the Amorites or to God's even commanding the weather to dry up their crops. The roots from underneath speak of the roots the Amorites have laid down. God has wiped them out. This also shows us that God destroyed them completely, from the top to the bottom. There was nothing left. And He did this for His chosen people who have now turned away from Him.

2:10 “And I brought you out of the land of Egypt and led you in the wilderness 40 years to possess the land of the Amorite.

God then travels back forty years from the moment He has just mentioned in crushing the Amorites for them to the time that they were slaves in Egypt. A slave has nothing, no goods, no wealth. They serve. They are the lowest on the social food chain in status and in ability. God shows them their past. They are rich now, but they were the poorest of the poor and enslaved to another nation. They may have land now, but they came from desolate places where they had nothing. And it was only because of God that they were placed in this position.

Emphatically, the Lord retells their story with Himself as the Victor and Hero. The word for “I” shows up in the beginning of almost every sentence. He is bolding the statements, “And I did this...and I did that.” Not only did God take them out of slavery, but He led them in the wilderness, teaching them His ways so that they would be prepared to receive the land as a gift. And it was the land of the Amorites! God goes backward, starting with the taking of the Promised Land and going back to the slavery of Egypt, illustrating how He has always been their source from their very conception.

2:11 “And I raised up from your sons prophets and from your young men Nazarites. Is this not indeed so, O sons of Israel?” declares the Lord.

Not only did God save the Israelites from the slavery and overbearing labor of the Egyptians. Not only did He rescue them countless times in the wilderness. Not only did the Lord stand on the battlefield and conquer their foes as the Divine Warrior. These things were all

absolute necessities. But God went beyond the necessities. Then He blessed Israel with gifts from among the Israelite camp. He blessed them with the gifts of prophets who speak His word so they did not have to divine His will from Him as the pagans would do.

Not only did He raise up from among their number, among their own sons these prophets with words from the Lord to guide the nation, but He also raised up Nazarites. Nazarites are special people who usually judged or led Israel. They stood for God's ways and God gave them strength and power for special missions that required complete dedication.

In true form, the Lord brings His case against Israel, and after stating some of the basic and necessary acts He has committed for their survival, God goes one farther and reminds them that He has not just provided their needs, but also given them special gifts along the way. In a biting challenge, He asks them the rhetorical question, "Is this not the way things are?" In other words, "Have I not stated your history with Me?" God's courtroom case is airtight. All the Israelites can do is respond with praise and affirmation. However, God is not finished with His judgment.

2:12 "Yet you provided wine for the Nazarites to drink. Even to the prophets you commanded saying, 'Do not prophecy!'"

The Lord's tirade continues against the people of Israel as in complete surprise He not only recounts their ungratefulness to Him in the wilderness and on the battlefield, but that they have also rejected the pure gifts of Nazarite leadership and prophets. The blame for these heinous crimes is placed solely on the shoulders of the people of Israel.

The Lord is very clear in His anger. They were the ones to provide wine for the Nazarites, who were not to cut their hair, drink wine, or encounter the dead. But the Israelites readily enticed them with wine, violating the vows the Nazarites had taken. Instead of blaming the Nazarites themselves, the Lord places blame on the people.

Not only did they mistreat His gift of leadership unto them, but they also violated the prophetic office by demanding that the prophets not prophecy. Prophecy was sometimes extremely confrontational, depending on the depths of the depravity of its audience. But to command that these gifts from the Lord for the good of the community be ceased was to send the gift back to the Giver, a sort of "Return to Sender" command that made God's blood boil. Everything that He has done to bless this nation has been ignored!

2:13 "Look now! I will press you down underneath just as the wagon filled with sheaves presses down!"

The language continues to become more and more irate. The grammar continues to pile up with anger as the Lord now moves from bringing up the accounts of His justice to how He will justly respond to their apathy and historical revisions claiming they have done these things for themselves. The emphasis begins to show up more often as the Lord takes them to task.

First we will notice the oft used conjunction that demands one's attention. This first word is usually translated "Behold!" or "Look!" It is an emphatic exclamation of warning to grab one's attention, or simply used on its lighter side to call attention to something. It would be like yelling "Hey you look out!" to someone playing in the street as a Mac truck comes around the curve. Here the prophet, speaking the words of God to the nation, warns that this behavior will no longer be tolerated.

Tongue and cheek, the Lord proclaims with vengeance that He will press them down into the ground like a heavy wagon carrying sheaves presses down into the ground as it is pushed. They will be crushed under the weight of God's heavy judgment. He will not cease until he has made them part of the ground. They will not bear the weight of His judgment. This is the reason for the word to start out with a warning. They do not want to see the day that the Lord crushes the house of Israel in this way. The word for press down is the word for crush. The idea of Israelite-indented ground is not farfetched here.

2:14 "Even flight will perish from the swift; even the strong will not make firm his strength, nor will the hero rescue his life."

The idea of people unable to escape God's judgment is not new. In fact, the fact of God's explosive judgment is enough for us. God will judge with such perfect vengeance that neither will it be endured nor escaped. The full idea of this verse comes in the form of being forced to suffer through the judgment God rightly provides. Those who are quick, runners, and swift in their movement will not be able to escape. The word for flight here is also the word for refuge. There will be no refuge from God's judgment. His judgment will be full and endured by all who deserve it.

Those who are strong and the heroes, or those who are mighty or manly, will not have any strength. The proper idea here is that these men of valor who are strong, whose strength comes back after being used up. They will not be able to be reenergized. The strength will not return. They will run on reserves until they are empty, and then there will be no strength. The destruction of the Lord's vengeance will be so bad that the strong, those who would be able to survive, will not be able to live. Forget about being able to rescue others. The hero will not even be able to rescue his own life. Every man for himself will be the rule in God's vengeance.

2:15 "Even the one handling the bow will not stand and the swift of foot will not save, nor the horse rider, nor will he save his own life."

Think of any possible escape you can. The mighty and the strong, the heroes of Israel, have no strength to save or escape themselves. Now we take on some others, most of whom would probably have been in the military of Israel. The bow handler would not be able to stand up in firm defiance against the vengeance of God. Not only the bowmen, but also the fast runners would have no help for the people of the nation.

Those who ride horses would not even be able to get away themselves, let alone take people with them. No avenue of salvation would come to Israel when God takes His vengeance. They will experience the full wrath of God. Why would they do this? Because they would not honor God or revere Him for His salvation of them and His blessings. They proclaimed themselves the source of prosperity, angering God who is the true source. The fact that the prophet systematically speaks of the military of Israel one by one may suggest that the Lord is hinting His wrath will come through the invasion of a foreign army.

We must be careful in our day to give credit where credit is due. God is the source of all provision in our lives. There is never a time when we have gone beyond the daily reliance upon Him for everything. Even when you think that you can provide for yourself or when you are self-sufficient, God may introduce you to humility. Humanity has an inability to slay the dragon of pride and self-sufficiency.

Money has its roots in the probability that humans would rather swell their pride with wealth than rely or depend upon anyone else. A constant battle wages within us that God can simplify through teaching humility. And this also was the lesson being proclaimed for the well-to-do Israelites. Their arrogance would bring God's vengeance, crippling their military, their economy, and their pride.

2:16 “Even the stout of heart among the mighty will flee naked in that Day,” declares the Lord.

Finally God deals with another category of courageous fighter, the stout of heart. This is the equivalent of the hard-headed who will stay and fight with resolve despite the danger or the worthlessness of their sacrifice. The message to such people is that in the Day of the Lord, when God's vengeance rains down on those who have awakened it, They will stay too long, so long that at their own personal expense, they will be stripped of everything and will flee.

The Day of the Lord, that Day, will be a time in which no reliance upon oneself will save. Only the salvation that the Lord provides will give any help in the Lord's Day. This will be a judgment like no other ever seen. It will bring the people low, kill morale and leave them with nothing. Amos points to their inevitable future under the current plan of the nation to live out pride and wealth to its fullest without regard for those whom the Lord regards. If they continue on this spending spree without remorse, the Lord will show His vengeance. Amos stands in the gap as one of the last to preach the warning before the destruction.

Chapter 3

3:1 “Hear this word which the Lord speaks against you, O sons of Israel, against all the families which I brought up out of the land of Egypt,” saying,

As chapter three opens, The prophet once again brings the Lord’s word to the people. It is not a word they wish to hear. One might imagine this is the beginning of the same message, yet spoken at a different time. There may have been a certain amount of time between the finishing of the oracles against the nations, culminating in Israel’s judgment oracle and this prophecy from the Lord.

No longer would Amos be popular in Israel where he prophesied. As soon as they heard the pronouncement against Israel, the people would have turned on him. When a nation has such pride, a blow like God’s future judgment would cause three possibilities in the minds and hearts of its people. First, they may choose to fully accept the word, to repent and to turn back to the Lord and rely upon Him alone. Unfortunately, this seems to be the most unlikely with prideful people. One way or another, God will address the pride in their hearts.

The second way would be to do what this nation had done, to believe that the Lord would not do such a thing, to reason it away, or to even mock the prophecy, suggesting that it is not being fulfilled. This approach would discredit the prophet and his message, and the people would ignore his severe and solemn warnings. The final way would be to reject the message and its messenger. These last two happened to be the way of the hard-hearted, stiff-necked, well-to-do Israelites. They hear of destruction through God’s vengeance, and yet they look around and see nothing at present to suggest God will bring His wrath.

The people would think that they were being blessed by the Lord because they were rich, that they were doing all the right rituals in the temple, so God could not be unhappy with them, and that their political/military future was bright. They were discounting the fact that they were living on previous blessing, not current blessing, that God was waiting for them to return to Him, not grow even more wicked. In fact, in His waiting, they will become depraved enough to bring that judgment rather than stave it off.

In this context, then, it is appropriate for the prophet to call the people to hear. Understood within the word “hear” is the word “heed.” When the Israelites listened, they would obey. It will not be what they want to hear. It will be a personal last warning. It will make them look deep inside to see their violations of God’s justice. It will force them to look on the decaying sided of their culture, rather than to continually prop up their pride and wealth.

It is neither a surprise nor an accident that the Lord speaks to them as a “family.” That word is meant to carry the punch of intimacy with it. And God refuses to let them forget that He was the founder of their nation when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. Every year, the Israelites celebrate the Passover in which God passed over their firstborn and set them free from Egypt. This would be an intimate setting for the Lord to bring His word.

3:2 “Only you have I known from all the families of the lands. Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.

The tone of this introduction remains personal and intimate, based on the family image with which God began. He reminds them that they are a chosen people, a separate, unique, and holy nation that He has made. This is all understood in Him telling them that he has only known them. The word for know can be an intimate knowledge, a knowledge not based on learned facts, but experiential understanding of the people of Israel.

God could have chosen any nation. He could have intimately known any other nation of any other land, but He chose them. How was He repaid? With their unfaithfulness, their vitriolic sins, their evil deeds, their denial of the covenant, and their taking advantage of His goodness. How then will the Lord respond to such rejection?

As any scorned lover would. He will punish them for every single sin and every iniquity. The word for iniquity carries the idea of moral deeds done with a knowledge that they were wrong, causing guilt in the perpetrator. These are not things Israel was unaware of. They were willful violations of God’s law and social injustices done with understanding that they did not please the Lord! This is why His judgment will be upon the family, the children, He has known, and upon the people of God.

3:3 “Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?”

The Lord will now begin to ask rhetorical questions of the nation, drawing them out of their pride. He seeks to characterize His relationship with them according to the covenant, which had blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. As God continues to lay out His case, He will focus first on the fact that the covenant unites two equally accepting partners. In this case, those two parties are God and the nation of Israel. A covenant was an agreement that could not be broken. It is unlike a contract we would use today because there was no time stamp.

These rhetorical questions have the obvious answer of a negative response. First, the image of two people walking together because they have decided and agreed to meet is chosen by the Lord. People do not randomly meet in a meeting. The appointment is much like we would consider an appointment as to a doctor’s office. Two parties agree to meet and exchange something. So also, when two people would “walk together” in business, it was due to mutual consent. This is the first of the Lord’s ways of saying, “You wanted this too. And now you must hold up your end as I have held up Mine.” Israel’s unfaithfulness is about to become the centerpiece of this trial.

3:4 Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den if he has caught nothing?

These two rhetorical questions involve lions, but give the same basic image to the Lord's argument. He offers that even the animals don't cry wolf. Lions only roar and cry out when there is a need to do so. The first question brought out that both Israel and the Lord had agreed to the covenant. This set of questions points out that the Lord has good reason to cry out against Israel. They may think that the Lord is crying foul for no reason, but even lions only roar and cry out when they have found some prey. The Lord's argument is not empty. There is substance to His claims against Israel, otherwise, He would not call them to judgment.

3:5 Does a bird fall upon a snare on the earth when there is no trap for it? Does a snare rise up from the ground when it has taken nothing?

The futility of these questions calls for a negative response. Traps do not go off without cause. There is a cause and effect relationship in these verses. You cannot have one without the other. This once again refers to the breaking of the covenant. You need all of the essential parts. You must have the covenant, or there is no covenant for Israel to enjoy. So they cannot deny the covenant, just like a bird does not get caught in a snare when the snare does not exist.

But also, the second question brings a different shade. Just as the bird cannot be caught without a trap, a trap does not catch anything without something to be caught. Israel must know that it is caught in the trap of the covenant. God would not roar as a lion if they had committed no offense. And the covenant is there between the two parties and has been agreed upon. Now, also, the judgment God brings is not without cause. The cause and effect relationship has been ignored by the prideful Israelites, but God is reminding them that there is a cause to it.

3:6 Is a trumpet blown in a city and the people are not afraid? Will evil come to a city and the Lord has not done it?

As the rhetorical questions continue to roll, God now brings the idea of destruction and war in the question, moving more toward His judgment. There are several reasons for a trumpet to blow in a city, but the first of those reasons is an attack upon the city by an enemy. Although trumpets were also used in worship and for several other reasons, the first was as a warning to the inhabitants that a siege was about to occur.

The second question is more interesting and more telling than the first. This next question actually might cause some people to wonder. The question suggests that the Lord can and does cause disaster upon a city as part of His will. This is not uncommon in the Old Testament. But many in certain streams of theological thought will have a problem with this.

The kind of evil we are talking about is a matter of perspective. To those in the city a disaster, like an enemy seiging and sacking their city may be part of the Lord's plans. There are a

couple of examples for this point. First, think of the Israelites taking the Promised Land of Canaan. To the Canaanites, God's command to utterly destroy every city would be evil disaster, but for the Lord's plans for Israel, this was the good plan of God to give them the land that He had promised.

In our current example, God would now bring His judgment as evil disaster to the cities of Israel for their disobedience. As part of the covenant, Israel would lose the land for its disobedience. This would come as evil to the Israelites but as part of God's master plan to get rid of their disobedience and idolatry.

So the "evil" that the Lord brings upon Israel will be for its good. Later in the New Testament, Paul will bring this to light, that God works out all things for our good. And James will remind us that God does not tempt anyone and is not tempted. He cannot be bribed or forced to do something that we want Him to do. God is stronger than any evil, so He can change its affects to good!

3:7 Thus the Lord God does not do anything without revealing His secret to His servants, the prophets.

Because God's ways are not discerned with His perspective, God tells the prophets about His plans, and they are His mouthpiece, announcing to the people the things God is about to do. The prophets serve both the Lord and the people. They deliver His message in service to Him, and they serve the people by informing them of God's will and ways. When God is about to move or to do anything, He tells the prophets so the people of God will know what He will do.

3:8 The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who will not prophesy?

Tying in to the questions about lions, the Lord now is seen as the roaring Lion of Zion. When the lion roars, those in its wake are afraid because of its fierce hunting skills. The Lion of Judah, the Lord who is the God of Israel roars now against the people of Israel, bringing His case against them. He is using the prophet Amos to do it.

When the Lord speaks His mind to His people, just as those hearing the danger in the lion's roar, the prophet must prophesy the word of God. It is only natural for the prophet to bring God's word when He speaks. This structure compares the lion to the Lord. Just as the lion elicits fear, God's spoken word elicits the prophets to prophesy.

3:9 Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt and say, "Gather yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great confusion inside her and the oppressed in her midst."

Included in this formal accusation now is a call to the witnesses of other nations. The Lord calls upon Ashdod and Egypt as witnesses to Israel's polished outside appearance and wicked, decaying morality inside. Ashdod would have been in the regions of the Philistines. Egypt was a superpower to the southwest. Neither of these nations would have any moral standing, so God's calling upon them to testify against Israel's social injustices is ironic.

The Lord calls them to convene as nations upon their mountain tops, to bear witness to Israel's immorality and the confusion of its society. Samaria would have been a particular thorn in Israel's side. Samaria is a nation of half-Jews, which could not be accepted or stand against Israel on moral issues. The Lord speaks of the confusion of the people, thinking they are wealthy and powerful, and yet they do not do the covenant and see God's current blessing. The oppressed roam Israel's streets without help or care.

3:10 “They do not know to do right,” declares the Lord, “those who store up violence and oppression among their palaces.”

The Lord now tells these nations his claim against Israel, purely for Israel's ears. It is doubtful that these nations are involved more than as illustrations of witnesses that should not have any grounds to testify against Israel. It is to show how much worse Israel has become than the immoral nations around them. God says about Israel that they don't know how to do right. They know what is right, but they refuse to do what is right. They don't bring justice to the deprived and they don't care for the things that God cares about.

Then God fittingly describes the Israelites as those who store up. They are rich, living off of the stored up treasures of yesterday. But the next two words may or may not have surprised them at this point. The words violence and oppression should have surprised them, but if their hearts are hard already, then they would not have been surprised with God's description. Violence carries the connotation of morally wrong destruction. There is destruction that is godly, such as breaking the strongholds of the devil.

But their violence was of a wrong and wicked nature. It was violence against their own oppressed, those on the hinges of society, such as widows, the poor, and the stranger. This word violence refers even to a plundering, in this case, of the oppressed groups. In their wealth, the rich people of Israel were causing social injustice even though they had the means to stop it. The second word gives the shade of a robber who oppresses through stealing. No matter how wealthy they were, they still chose to take from those who did not have anything.

The Lord rages against them for this, and calls their violence and oppression into question, to shame them before these immoral nations. The word that is used for strongholds can also be interpreted palaces. I have used this shade of meaning in my translation to remind the reader that these people are wealthy, living in lavish means like kings while they prey on the weak, helpless, hopeless, and destitute. The depravity of their immorality could not dig much deeper.

3:11 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, “An oppressor will surround the land and will bring down your defenses and your strongholds will be plundered.”

For the numerous sins of this nation, the Lord will bring His wrath down upon them because they have not repented. “Thus says the Lord God” carries the weight of God’s authority behind the prophet’s predictions. “Lord God” is also a heightened form of a reference to God. He puts His name, and therefore His reputation and authority, behind this prophecy.

Amos calls for an oppressor, a destroyer, an enemy or adversary, to surround Israel. Israel is already surrounded on all sides by nations that have a history of turning on them. However, the people would have ignored this statement despite the fact of God’s authority because they were living with relatively calm foreign relations. They were at peace with all of the nations around them. However, this would change.

The idea of surrounding them shows that there is no escape, as the Lord has already belabored. Not only will an enemy come into the land militarily to oppress the people as they have oppressed the outcasts of society in their pride, but they will also suffer the shame of their amazing defenses being whittled down to nothing. The defenses will be taken down by the enemy, fortifications will fall, and no defense will be left for the nation.

But the devastation does not stop there. Next, by the Lord’s design and will, the strongholds and palaces of the nation will be plundered and looted. The adversary will come in, destroy any defenses and then take the offensive abilities of Israel away. The land will be taken swiftly and totally, with no hint of hope.

3:12 Thus says the Lord, “Just as the shepherd saves from the lion’s mouth two legs or a piece of an ear, so the sons of Israel will be rescued who dwell in Samaria with the corner of a couch and a piece of a bed.”

With more vivid imagery, Amos masterfully shows just how futile escape will be when the Lord brings this vengeance upon Israel. Shepherds could not prove if a sheep was taken by a lion, unless some remains were taken back to the owner of the flock, so that the damage could be seen. Otherwise, the owner might believe the shepherd is stealing the sheep, or at the very least, the shepherd has failed in his duties to keep the sheep.

When a shepherd could not defend against a lion or any animal taking the sheep, he could at least salvage enough of the sheep to prove his own innocence as far as stealing the sheep. It would be evidence that the struggle was bravely fought. Lions don’t particularly leave behind any part of their prey. The worst part of this image is that there is only enough to verify the dead and gone animal. This is what Amos says about Israel, that other nations would only be able to identify the Israelites as the victims of God’s wrath. Essentially, God is saying that they’d have to pull out their teeth to get identification when He was done dueling out His wrath.

The rich living in Samaria enjoyed the luxuries of couches and beds. But the Lord would take away these luxuries. All they would be left with was a reminder of what life used to be like

before the adversaries did their part in God's plan. They'd have a memento, a piece of bed here, a part of a couch there. The lives of abundance they had lived would become a bygone of a time before the Lord gave His judgment and fulfilled it. Those who had been pampered would barely be able to prove that they had been wealthy at all.

3:13 “Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord God, the God of hosts

The Lord once again calls upon the other nations to bear witness to His accusations and reasons, to act as jury listening to His evidence. He calls them first to listen to these accusations and reasoning, then to testify against Israel, the house of Jacob, it's ancestor. For the Lord, who was loyal in His love toward this special nation to turn to other nations to receive justice underscores the depravity of His chosen people.

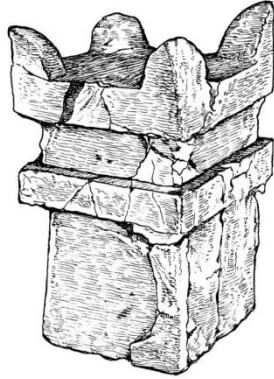
A very interesting title for God shows up here. The common Lord God, in Hebrew seen as YHWH Elohim, is now coupled by Amos with the “God of Hosts,” a phrase only used three times in the Bible. This rare occurrence is more commonly the “Lord of Hosts,” but is rarely coupled already with “Lord God.” Amos is piling up the titles of God to heighten the level of importance to these claims and to show the anger with which the Lord is condemning the nation, showing the immediacy and seriousness of these accusations.

“God of Hosts” is a military term that shows God's sovereignty, His kingship, over at the very least, the armies of Israel, more likely His control over angelic armies and more generally over the whole of the created world. God's accusations are not to be taken lightly because when condemned, the nation of Israel will be crushed by powers under God's command, but out of their control. The devastation will be impossible to calculate beforehand.

3:14 “Thus in the day I will visit the transgressions of Israel upon her, then I will visit the altars of Bethel and cut off the horns of the altar, and they will fall to the ground.

The Lord now promises to the corrupt nation of Israel that on the same day that He visits their sins upon them, or punishes them for their sins, He will also punish them upon the altars of Bethel, one of the chief cities of sacrifice in northern Israel. Bethel means in Hebrew, “House of God.” In the place that is named for God's dwelling place, He will break the altars as punishment for the people's injustice.

Because the people have sinned greatly against the Lord, He will no longer accept their sacrifices. He tells them He will cut off the horns of the altar. The horns of the altar are four extensions that are carved out of the same rock on top of the altar. During a sacrifice, the priest would wipe some of the blood from the sacrifice upon each of the four horns and then pour the rest out at the base.



The horns of the altar were also a place in which those who had committed a murder or a heinous crime could run to one of the cities of refuge and grab the horns of the altar and be absolved from their sin. It was a place of refuge from the blood avengers, a place of grace and mercy. This is the place that God will take away. In that Day, He will take away any sense of refuge, any place of mercy and grace. The judgment will be complete, and He will not turn His ear to hear the people's cries for grace.

3:15 “And I will strike down the winter house along with the summer house, and the ivory houses will be lost and the large houses will dwindle away,” declares the Lord.

Through verses 13-15, the common linking word has been the word house. In verse 13, it is the House of Jacob, a title for the nation of Israel. In Verse 14, Bethel, the House of God, is mentioned. Now in verse 15, there are several houses mentioned, all to show the incredible wealth of the nation of Israel. God says that He will strike down their beautiful homes, their summer and winter houses.

It is a trademark of the rich and famous to have more than one house, and lavish ones at that! Israel was in this very place of prosperity in which the rich owned several houses, as they do in America and other countries around the world. There are many in our world who do not have even one house, let alone more than one. The multiple houses showed the affluence of the Israelites. While they had two or more houses, and even large houses, and houses decorated with expensively imported ivory, there were those among them on the fringe of society without any homes at all.

For these great injustices, the judgment of God was to make the wealthy house collectors homeless. He would make it so that their fancy and expansive homes would be destroyed into mere rubble. They would then know the life which they mocked with their expensive waste. I believe there is a day coming in America where this may be the case. Already we have seen the housing market collapse and many Americans have felt the sting of homelessness. I saw in these times on one channel a wealthy pop star complaining about losing one of his three houses. I don't believe much pity was received. How can we live in such opulence and not let pictures of tragedy, the needs of others, prick the strings of our hearts? May God forgive us for our wealthy waste and apathy toward the poor!

Chapter 4

4:1 “Hear this word, O cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, “Bring and we will drink!”

As insulting as this may seem at first glance to women, Amos means nothing rude by calling the women of Israel cows. In fact, that is not what he is doing at all. He is making a reference to the cows of Bashan, a well-groomed cattle that eat from the very best of the land’s grain and grass. They are cows that enjoy a much more pleasant life than any poor person in Israel, which makes them the perfect image for Amos, a man of the field himself, to use to describe these women.

The word Amos will bring forth is a word they will not heed. He speaks of their coming doom for their treatment of the poor, their lifestyles that mock the needy and yet these women more than likely live in ignorance that as they wine and dine, so many go starving outside of their windows. These are the women living in the bustling merchant towns of Samaria.

By their party lifestyle that ignores the poor and needy, these women are cited for oppression of the worst kind to the poor and for crushing under foot those who are most desperately in need. Their ignorance betrays their pride and arrogance as they call out for their wealthy merchant husbands to bring more wine so they can continue to drink while the poor suffer in the streets. Their cavalier attitude betrays their waste. They drink and drink while so many go without food or water, let alone expensive wine. While these women are living it up in the penthouses, the poor are dying around them. And they don’t care one bit!

4:2 The Lord God swore in His holiness thus, “Behold! The days are coming upon you when they will carry you away with butcher’s hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.

This infraction is viewed by God as an act of depravity, of wickedness and worldliness. His holiness stands in stark contrast for this prophet against the wickedness of these women who, like the cows of Bashan, feed and drink the very finest quality of food and drink, while the poor receive not the worst quality of these things, but nothing at all. So the Lord swears as in a court of law a testimony that He will hold Himself to enact.

Once again we see that word that should alert its listeners and grab their attention: Behold, or Look! This is predictive prophecy that the prophet utters from the lips of the Lord for these women in the well-to-do country of Samaria. When he says, “The days are coming,” Amos points to the future that is probable for the Israelites. He points to what God is going to do, not what is happening right now. But as we have already discussed, they are not a forward-looking people in Israel. They feed off of the past blessings in the present, spending and free-living themselves into the judgment of God.

It is not told these women who will carry them away, but very clear is the method in which they will be dragged off by an enemy. These women will be hooked with butcher’s hooks

and fishhooks. Just like fish are hooked by a trap of food, so these women will be hooked into the judgment of God in the form of exile. But that is not all! As humiliating as this will be, the more humiliating fact of the prophecy is that every last one of them will be taken. No one will be left in the land. The Lord's judgment will be disgraceful and complete. Not one will escape His wrath.

4:3 “And you will go out through breaches, each one immediately in front, and you will be thrown into Harmon,” declares the Lord.

With fishhooks and meat hooks attached to their bodies, the people will be dragged through breaches in the walls, gaps made probably by the invading army's siege of their cities. The siege will force the walls to weaken or even crumble, and these people will be dragged out of their land through the walls that make them feel so secure today.

This also shows that the political stability that they now enjoy will not last forever. They are living off of a dream of the past. Things are changing in their world, things which they have chosen to ignore. They will be lined up in front of one another and carried off to faraway lands. Their homes will be rubble. Their city walls destroyed, and their hope lost. They will take the place of the poor and the foreigner in another land. The Lord will make them like those they ignored and mocked.

Harmon in this prophecy is hard to determine. Most say that it is Mount Hermon, a mountain to the farthest north of Israel, suggesting that their enemies would come from the north. There are others who suggest this is not a place at all. The KJV says palace here, which is extremely unlikely because these women would not be judged or punished by God to go from a house to a palace. It is most likely a place, whether or not we are familiar. The most obvious suggestion here is that the enemy comes from the north, which we know to be true from history as the Assyrians overran the Northern Kingdom and began to deport its peoples. Assyria is to the north of Israel, and Babylon, which was the next strong empire that took Israel and Judah into captivity was from the northeast.

4:4 “Come to Bethel and rebel, to Gilgal multiply rebellion. Bring every morning your sacrifices, every three days your tithes.

The Lord practically dares the people to continue in their ignorance and gross injustice. He calls them to go to Bethel, the main place of worship in Israel, and rebel or transgress. In other words, He is satirically saying the people will not change their ways. The lip service without heart change will continue. They will come and give offerings as if nothing at all is wrong.

He then tells them to go to Gilgal, another popular worship center in the northern kingdom. The words are the same. They will transgress the holiness of the Lord there as well through the same rebellion. They do not seem to grasp that the Lord will not accept their

offerings when they ignore the tragedies that are breaking His heart! The Lord has a special place in His heart and Law for the poor, the widows, the foreigners, and the orphans.

Their continual ignorance of these groups makes their sacrifices mute and obsolete. The Lord is not pleased! They bring their sacrifices without caring for the heart of the Law. They bring many tithes because they have so much! But the Lord doesn't need or care for their money because their hearts are wicked and dark. The offerings and tithes, which may have been meant to appease the Lord, are not working. Even if the people were giving these offerings instead of making their hearts right and taking care of the poor, the Lord is even more enraged. Why continue to act as though nothing is wrong?

We must be very careful today because we can fall into the same paradigm! How many times do we know all the right things to do and say, and yet inside, although we wouldn't tell anyone, we don't really care about the things God cares about? One prayer we must continually pray is that God breaks our heart for the things that break His heart. May we never forget those whom the Lord targets to bring blessing to. We are the ones through whom He wants to bless those people!

4:5 “Then offer a thanksgiving sacrifice from the leaven, and call for voluntary offerings; publish them, for you so love them, O children of Israel,” declares the Lord God.

The people have all these sacrifices and offerings to bring to the Lord. Once again, it is only to pat themselves on the back for their extreme wealth. They bring the leavened bread as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Often in the Bible, leaven is seen as sin or evil. The Passover feast actually tells them to prepare by removing every little bit of leaven from their homes and only using unleavened bread. Jesus used leaven as an illustration in His parables of the evil schemes and sinful deeds of the Pharisees, as well as words that lead into sin.

Another favorite call they would make in Israel in this time of affluence was to call for voluntary or freewill offerings in which people would simply “volunteer” enormous and exuberant amounts of their wealth. Instead of blessing the Lord in humility, their pride would puff up as the amounts would show what they had done with their wealth and how well they had invested, and how wealthy they were. Sacrifices and offerings and tithes at the altars became times of boasting in their wealth and pegging where others were on the socio-economic ladder.

God taunts them and satirically calls for them to keep up this kind of action, which will bring the full weight of His judgment even faster! The people love to publish edicts that call for and summon these offerings and sacrifices. They love to act like they are worshipping God as they worship themselves in arrogance. Offerings were ways of thanking the Lord for His provision and for reminding the giver of his or her true source. But these people were offering boasting in themselves as the source. This is why they so loved to bring these offerings. It was not for the Lord's sake. It was for their own. They had become so arrogant that they had even twisted the system of thanking the Lord!

4:6 “And I even gave to you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, then lack of bread in all your places. Yet you would not return to Me,” declares the Lord.

The Lord continues to point out the blessings He has provided for Israel. These are blessings that go beyond His prevenient grace, or His common grace. For instance, the Lord causes the sun to rise on both the righteous and wicked. Both receive this blessing. The Lord went beyond this, granting the Israelites the finest and whitest and healthiest of teeth. This was in all of their cities, not in one certain area. All enjoyed this special gift of the Lord, but none returned to Him because they realized His grace. Instead, they took advantage of it, expected it, and did not show gratitude.

Attached to the health of the mouth and stomach, when the people did not return gratitude or return to His covenant by obeying His laws, God then took away their bread. This would usually draw them to see Him as their Source of provision. However, the bull-headed Israelites would still not turn back to their God. Even when He took away to remind them of their source, they rebelled against Him.

4:7 “And I even held back from you the rain three months before the harvest, and I sent rain down on one city but not another city. I did not send rain on one field and the field which I did not send rain upon withered.

Another act of special grace was the gift of the rains at the proper time. We had a bad summer this year in certain areas of Pennsylvania. We actually received too much rain, which ruined certain crops and caused certain problems with the harvest. In Israel, there were two big rains that perfectly regulated the crops. The first happened in the Spring right after the farmers planted. The last happened right before the crops were harvested in the Autumn season.

If too much rain occurred between these two, the crops would be destroyed. The Lord made sure that only the rains that were helpful for the crops would occur. Holding back the rain for the three months of growth was actually beneficial to them. However, to keep them from forgetting that the Lord provided the rain, He would not give rain on certain cities and fields so that the people would turn to Him and ask Him for His provision once again, and worship Him with gratitude for that provision.

The Lord was willing to let certain fields wither and certain cities experience drought as a demonstration that He is the Sovereign King over all things in creation. But they refused to acknowledge this. They rebelled against Him despite His image of kingship. He showed that He could provide and control everything, and they ignored His rightful place as the Lord of Israel. They continued to rebel against the Lord and ignore His warnings and His blessings. They refused to rejoin Him in His covenant.

4:8 “Then two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water but not be satisfied. Yet they would not return to Me,” declares the Lord.

Instead of turning back to the Lord and relying upon His faithfulness once again, the people of the affected cities would travel distances to get from other cities what was no longer available in their own. Instead of turning back to God, they turned to others that were still receiving His blessing. Their stiff-necked bull-headedness continues. Because they refused to live under the covenant and tried to shortcut through their disobedience, refusing the covenant but wanting it's benefits, they were not satisfied by the same waters that satisfied those cities the Lord continued to bless with provision. But even that did not return their stubborn, stone cold, hard hearts.

We must realize the principle in this passage and this verse, for it will save us from years of misunderstanding and failure to see God's heart for us. We cannot short change God's blessing without doing the work of the covenant that we share with our Lord. We cannot disobey and still expect blessing. Any blessing we do receive in the midst of our own stubbornness is God's extreme special blessing of grace upon us. More than likely, He is teaching us the same lesson these Israelites ignored. To enjoy the benefits of the covenant, you must do your part of that covenant! Let us never forget that we cannot be satisfied no matter how much we try to shortcut the blessings of the covenant. It is better to do the covenant instead.

4:9 “I struck you with blight and mildew, your many gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees the locust devoured. Yet still, you did not return to Me,” declares the Lord.

The Lord now turns to the judgments He has been bringing against them because of their insolence. Since the Israelites refused to recognize His goodness and praise Him for it, the Lord began to bring the curses that come from unfaithfulness to His covenant. He brought pestilences among them, such as the blight and mildew. Blight can destroy crops and mildew will also eradicate the good fruits and foods in the fields. The Lord purposefully destroyed their gardens that spotted throughout the land.

The people were so blessed to have many gardens, but they did not thank God for His extra special goodness to them. So He brought these things upon their gardens. Their vineyards, fig trees, and olive trees were all affected. Just like when God's judgment comes and He takes the people out of the land for their stubbornness, so also as the people had not escaped, not one tree or garden remains unaffected.

God sent the locusts, much like in Joel's time. He sent the locusts to destroy all of the fig trees and olive trees and the gardens. So the Lord sent not only the blight upon the crops, and not only allowed the mildew to destroy, but then the locusts came as well and devoured the crops. And the Lord must be surprised as He says, “Even then! And yet!” No matter what He did to curb their rebellion, they continued in it. They were begging for greater judgment! They still refused to turn to Him.

4:10 “I sent to you a pestilence in the manner of Egypt. I killed with the sword your young men. I carried away your horses and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils. Yet still, you did not return to Me,” declares the Lord.

The Lord takes more credit still. He not only sent all of these disasters upon them so that they would turn, but He also sent pestilences like He did for Egypt! They should have broken then, for God was treating them as He treats their enemies, who were His enemies before they turned away from Him. He even violently killed the young men of Israel, the strongest and the most vital to the nation’s future. What more could the Lord have done before He brought the fullness of His wrath to change their hearts?

The Lord’s use of the sword was probably through other armies and enemies throughout Israel’s past. He took away the horses, thought to bring power and strength to their military, so that they could see His strength in victory for them. He even burned their camps by fire, like what we would call friendly fire today, yet from the Lord! The stench filled their own nostrils, that smell from the burning of their camps, their tents, their soldiers. The Lord has made them pay for their rebellion through agricultural means, political means, and military means! At what point would they realize His message? Even now He is using Amos to prophesy to them and they will not hear the message!

4:11 “I overthrew some of you like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, but you were like a brand saved from incineration. Yet still you did not return to Me,” declares the Lord.

God also takes credit for terrorizing their political setup when it did not serve His purposes. As hard as it may be for us to think of God as a terrorist, it is a terror to live outside of His will and covenant. He overthrows those who are too lofty, too prideful. He teaches humility through whatever school will be effective. For Israel, even the school of hard knocks was not effective. The full judgment was on its way. And they were egging Him on, asking for it with their actions, thoughts, and words.

The mention of wicked cities like Sodom and Gomorrah would have also grabbed the ears of Amos’ hearers. As Egypt and other nations would have enraged them, so also the mention of these wicked cities would strike fear into them. They knew what God did to Sodom and Gomorrah. Even in the midst of God’s fiery destruction upon those whom He overthrew, yet still He saved some from the fires of His judgment. Even this, to His utter amazement, did not change their hearts!

4:12 “Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel, because I will do this to you. Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

The Lord completes His examples and brings that same resulting sovereignty and power from former judgments and situations to the table of His current judgment. As He has told them of the things He did to try to bring them back to Him, these things would now be the swift and full judgment that He would bring for their rebellion. Those things which He has talked about doing as the Lord has laid out His own rap sheet of judgments He now promises He will execute against the people of Israel.

Because the doom and destruction about to be exercised against them is so grim, the Lord warns them further by commanding them to prepare for the wrath they cannot prepare for. They will indeed meet God in His judgment and they will not be able to withstand His anger. The desolation will teach the lesson they refuse to learn, or it will eradicate them when they fail to learn it.

4:13 Now behold! He who forms mountains and creates winds and declares to humanity what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness and treads on the heights of the earth, the Lord God of Hosts is His name!

Although Amos is finished with his prophecy from God's mouth, he personally adds a warning to the stated claims of the Lord, almost personally responding before the people respond. Amos once again uses that warning marker and reminds them who has just spoken and how powerful and faithful He is to do as He has said He will do. There is no sense that God makes idle threats here at all!

Amos takes a few moments to describe the God who brings His claims against Israel in court. He is the one who can form mountains and create winds! God is the sovereign Creator and He can do things not even imagined in His wrathful vengeance. The word for create is only used of God, for He alone in the Hebrew Scriptures has the power to create. Humans build from what God has made, but God creates.

Not only can He create, but He also knows their thoughts intimately. They cannot get away from Him even in the unseen parts of their beings. God also makes the morning out of darkness and brings from the darkness into light the dawn of the heavens. He not only creates and knows all things. He also sustains! If this were not good enough, God walks on the winds of the heavens. He is untouchable! He walks where no human can walk. His abilities are out of this world.

This fitting description of God's transcendence is completed by reminding the Israelites that not only can God do as He has warned, but He will do what He has warned. The time has come for the covenantal Lord of their forefathers who has control over all things, even the armies of angels and the celestial beings, as His name "God of Hosts" once again is used, to rise up against His beloved people and exercise tough love to bring them back, for nothing else has worked all this time. That name bears the reputation that Amos fleshes out with His description. The Israelites do not stand against some human army. They will indeed need to prepare to meet the Living God as He duels out His wrath for their rebellion.

Chapter 5

5:1 Hear this word which I raise up over you, a lamentation O house of Israel.

Now Amos will himself urge the people to turn to the Lord after speaking God's message to them about the nation standing on the precipice of God's full wrath and judgment. House of Israel is used in the vocative of address, calling the northern kingdom to listen and heed his call to turn to the Lord.

However, he will not just talk to them or even preach. He will use a funeral dirge, a lamentation, which is a creative song that speaks of the dead. In using this medium, the prophet seeks to show them what would be sung over their nation if they choose not to turn to the Lord. If they do not seek Him, they will die, and people will sing songs about their demise! This is corroborated by the fact that he gives the song a genre, lamentation, and also uses the verb to raise one's voice.

5:2 "Fallen no more to rise, O virgin Israel, deserted upon her land with no one to raise her up."

The song opens describing their death as a nation. He gives their situation in that they will fall for good. There will be no getting back up or coming to life again. No resurrection and no hope. Once they choose to go the way of God's wrath, they will be annihilated. The word for virgin here is a common descriptor of Israel in the prophets. It brings in mind the relationship that Israel is to have with the Lord. The nation is to be a virgin in that they know no other gods. The Lord alone is to be her Lover. The image for the prophet continues as the dead and desolate nation is left alone without anyone even to bury the dead. It is deserted and devoid of life. This is the result of not seeking the Lord.

5:3 For thus says the Lord God, "The city that goes forth a thousand strong will have a hundred remaining, and the one that goes forth a hundred will have ten remaining to the house of Israel."

Now the Lord speaks against the nation in this song of lament. He tells them that if they send out thousands and hundreds of men to fight against the Lord, they will have the net result of losing most of those soldiers in battle. The Lord mows down the forces of the cities leaving a tenth of what used to be. There will be no joy in the day that Israel ignores the Lord. When He brings His wrath, they will drink it to the full.

5:4 For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, "Seek Me and live!"

The last verse was a warning to the nation that they still have time before the Lord sends this calamity upon them for their insolence and disobedience, for their stiff necks and hard hearts. He calls to them, singing as a husband sings to His bride. He commands the nation to seek Him. The result of such diligent searching will be the opposite of what Amos has promised for continued disobedience. They will live if they seek Him!

The Lord brings life to this nation that is internally already dead and externally losing everything they had inherited from the promise and the covenant, from the days of plenty. This word is not just for the Israelites of Amos' time, but for everyone who takes pride in their own resources and situation, anyone who rejects the Lord in favor of their own desires and wealth, anyone who forgets that God is their source. The salvation to the problem is to seek the Lord and turn to Him with an open heart made of flesh, not stone.

5:5 “But do not seek Bethel nor go to Gilgal nor cross over into Beersheba because Gilgal will surely go into exile and Bethel will be nothing!”

He then does not just command them to do what will bring life to them, but also cautions them against doing what they would do in human terms. Instead of turning to them and living, they could seek Bethel and Gilgal, two of the foremost places of worship in the northern kingdom. These were high places in which they would offer sacrifices. It is unclear if they were wrapped up in idolatry or if the Lord simply would not look upon their sacrifices anymore. It could very well have been a mixture of both. There are other passages so far in Amos where we have seen the Lord reject their offerings.

We know from a later chapter that Amos is prophesying in the city of Bethel. Bethel means “House of God.” Gilgal and Beersheba were secondary places of worship for the northern Israelites. The reason the Lord gives for them to not simply go and offer more sacrifices in these places is because they will go into exile and come to nothing. The verb for “go into exile” rhymes with Gilgal, and it is used twice in Hebrew to show emphasis. This is why it is translated, “Surely go into exile.”

These cities will be the chief cities to go into exile because of their importance in Israel's rituals. They will bear the brunt of God's wrath into exile. He will level the city of Bethel and send into captivity the lesser important city of Gilgal. Both will suffer different judgments on different levels of harshness, but neither of these high places of worship will escape God's judgment.

5:6 Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire, O house of Joseph, and none to extinguish it for Bethel,

The Lord's speech in the song, the funeral dirge, stops here, but the prophet Amos continues to plead with the people. He once again repeats the call of the Lord to seek the Lord. He reminds them that they will see the result of living if they obey. Now here is where the

language becomes a little hard to interpret. Amos suggests here that if they would not seek the Lord, He might break out on them like fire spreading through a forest at record rates.

This word for “break out against” has been used in the Old Testament in other contexts, such as God breaking out upon in Judges 14, 15 and 1 Samuel 10 and 11. This is viewed as a violent and deadly attack, something no one wants to see happen. Fire may be an image invoking the Mt. Sinai experience where He threatened to break out against anyone who crossed the line. The other image follows upon the verb for devouring used earlier.

The prophet in his poetic songwriting calls Israel now by another alias, the house of Joseph. This is especially poignant and fitting in that Joseph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Northern Israel is sometimes called Jacob, house of Joseph, and Ephraim. This points directly to the northern kingdom as the prophet’s still captive audience despite his prophecies against them. If the Lord breaks out on Israel, there won’t be anyone to extinguish His rage, so Bethel will be wiped off the map by His wrath.

5:7 O you who turn to wormwood justice and cast down righteousness to the earth!

Amos puts his finger right on the pulse of the nation of Israel when he calls them out for taking the justice of God and perverting it into bitterness. This word for wormwood points to a bitter substance made by a certain tree. Out of this substance is made a bitter green oil that causes sickness when ingested. The people have made justice bitter because of their lack of judging and rightly treating those who need justice the most.

He also puts along with justice righteousness that has been cast down to the earth. They high moral and perfect attributes of God, justice and righteousness, are being embittered and trampled upon by a people that should hold them dear. The prophet continues to point to the elephant in the room, those who are treated unrighteously, crookedly by the wealthy in the nation.

The poor and the widow, the sojourner and the orphan go without justice on a daily basis, causing bitterness to settle in those who are righteous, those who are familiar with the justice and righteousness of God have experienced in northern Israel a foreign substance that is called justice and righteousness, but is not the real thing.

5:8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion and overturns darkness to morning and darkens the day to night, who summons the waters of the sea and pours them upon the face of the earth – the Lord is His name!

In this lamentation song, Amos continues by using images of the Lord’s sovereignty that will call the people to submission and obedience. The Lord is the one who made the stars in the sky that have been named and are easily found by humans. These two constellations Pleiades means in Hebrew “cluster” or “heap” of stars. Orion means “brash one” or “fool.” These

constellations are familiar to his listeners. And they know that God not only created them, but also has full sovereign control over them.

This is the same sovereign God who not only controls the unknowns of the universe and the heavens but also makes the light and the darkness happen through the change of day and night. He is the one who guides the lights and controls when it is day and when it is night. He controls not just the creation beyond understanding but also time itself.

This is the same sovereign God who also controls the waters of the seas, so that they end up where He wants them to go. He can even summon them to fall upon the land and cause floods and rivers and any other form of water. God controls all of the things in the world that the Israelites cannot control. He is the true sovereign God.

It is at this point in the song, almost like a pause or interlude, that the prophet cannot resist calling out the holy name of the Lord and pointing to His name. Because the Lord exists, these things happen. Because God is, the darkness and light are maneuvered in time. Because God is, creation happened and the stars are at His beck and call. And because the Lord is, the waters do whatever He tells them to. These examples of His sovereignty cause praise to gush forth from the prophet as he begins to meditate upon the character, the name, the reputation, of the God of the universe.

5:9 who causes devastation to flash against the strong so that destruction comes upon the fortress.

This is the same Lord, who beyond sovereign control of the known world and the unknown world, also can send calamity and destruction upon those who think they are strong in their own eyes. He will show them that they are weak compared to His strength. God will show them that they are nothing when they face Him on their own. They will fall like dominos!

It is because these who are strong fall that their fortresses, their mighty places of strong resistance and defense God does not just remove the strong, but also the works of their hands. He can destroy those who are strong to show they are weak in comparison, and He can take their defenses and crush them to prove that nothing they do will stop Him in His will. Their brute force pales in comparison to the sovereign Lord. They don't have a prayer!

5:10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate, even the one who speaks the truth they abhor!

Now Amos will move on to talk about the sins of the people once again. They are turned upside-down. They are confused and have reversed the reality and definition of God's attributes. They mistreat the things of God and then neglect the people God cares about. They have flip-flopped their understanding from God's understanding. These are the same people who hate those who stand up and pass judgment as given leadership to do so by the Lord and by the proper authorities.

They hate the judge in the gate who arbitrates cases, seeks to bring justice to the cases and situations before him. In the times of Israel here, they would have each city surrounded with a city that defends its inhabitants. Most cities would then have a gate that was used for all travel in and out of the city.

At these gates formed a general community bulletin board type institution including the court system. They hate the just and strong arbitration. They seek for him to be removed because he offers a righteous argument against them. He is the one who does not judge in their favor, but rather in favor of justice.

Just as evil as their refusal and reversal of true justice, they also revile the truth itself. Those who speak in truth, or whose words bring truth to bear and to light, they absolutely abhor. The word here for abhor is much worse than the word for hate above. It is a loathing, a deep-seeded hate that intensifies with rage.

5:11 Therefore, because you trample the poor and you seize taxes on grain from him. Houses of hewn stone you built, yet you will not dwell in them! Beautiful vineyards you have planted, yet you will not drink their wine!

Part of the Lord's punishment and judgment upon the people who live in luxury is to keep them from that very goal. He gives His reason for harshness, that they have trampled the poor and levied taxes against them. The first word for trampled is similar to the second, also referring to taxes. They have taken from the poor what the poor did not have to give, even though they have all that they need.

For this grave injustice, the Lord will make sure that even though they spent lavishly to have luxurious stone houses, cut individually by laborers and precious expensive houses, they will not be able to live in them because of the coming exile. Their utopian society that they built for themselves to enjoy will not be enjoyed by them but by their captors in the exile. This verse may remind you of the passage dealing with the prideful rich man in Jesus' parable that built bigger storehouses for his grain only to have his life taken from him. These people are going to experience that same judgment, except in the quality of life going down, not necessarily death.

How about our culture? America is at least one of the richest nations on earth. We have been building and spending way out of our means! What do you think might happen in our own country? We can already see what happened to our own housing market. I am not saying that this is the judgment of God, but it certainly might remind us that there are more important things in life than having an overly extravagant house in the midst of the poor and needy. Could we also be considered guilty of this same sin on at least some small level? Let us be honest with ourselves before the judgment of the Lord is leveled against us as well!

5:12 For I know your many transgressions and your great sins, you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, who turn aside the needy in the gate.

The Lord reminds them that He is omniscient, or all-knowing. He knows their attitudes as much as their actions. He knows that they have transgressed deeply and often. He knows that they bring affliction and pain to those who seek to be righteous and that they also are corrupt enough to take a bribe from anyone for anything. He knows them because He created them and He knows them because He has been watching them.

Even with all of their deception and trickery, they have not succeeded in tricking the Lord, rather, they have deceived themselves into believing He was not watching. They will not even help the traveler who comes to their gate in need of something like food or shelter. They refuse to help when they have every capability to help others. We see this many times over in our own day of people who reason their sins away for this reason or that reason so that they don't feel the guilt. Funny how it lingers even after all of the reasoning for a time, until the conscience has been seared beyond repair.

5:13 Therefore, he who has insight in his time will keep quiet for his is an evil time.

Because of the reversing of roles between good and evil in this time of the prophet, the desire for wealth over service to the poor, the disdain of just judgments in the gate, and the host of other backwards values of the people of Israel, the prophet readily moves to silence all those who have the true riches of wisdom. This is the case of giving pearls to swine as Jesus would put it.

If there is a man who holds good insight and understanding, he should be silent because his good wisdom will fall on deaf ears. It will be wasted for no good reason. So he should be silent until the time is no longer an evil time, where his wisdom can be accepted and acted upon as from God and not reviled as is the rest of goodness in this evil time.

5:14 Seek good and not evil so that you will live and thus the Lord, the God of hosts will be with you, just as you said.

Now the Israelites receive the way of the Lord out of the social and spiritual decay they are experiencing. All they have to do is fix their values, to once again call upon the Lord as their source. I say, "All they have to do" but we all know that humbling yourself and killing your pride and your ego is the hardest thing any human can ever do. Once again in this book, the command to seek appears.

Amos calls them to seek first the Lord, then to seek to actively please Him in doing good rather than evil. For Amos and hopefully for each of us, the seeking of God is followed by the ethical and practical doing of good, because God is good and those who seek Him live out that goodness to others with justice and equity. There can be no mistaking the parallels between this command to seek good and the other command to seek the Lord. Both of them have as their result that the Israelites will live.

Although the Israelites have only acted as people who serve God, offering up sacrifices that stroke their egos instead of bring glory to the Lord, and tax the poor and treat them with reckless injustice, if only they would heed the words of this stop-gap prophet standing before them and giving them the key to life, they would be saved. But they enjoy too much the pleasures of sin and injustice. The reversal of their values is not what they want for themselves. And the result of seeking the Lord and doing good and living instead of dying is that the ultimate and abundant life of living in God's presence could be theirs. This is why the prophet says that the Lord will be with them again.

5:15 Hate evil and love good and establish justice at the gate. Perhaps the Lord, the God of Hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Amos calls for the reversal of passions and values. He tells them first to begin to hate the evil that they love right now because it gives them immediate gratification and satisfaction. But it is not just a matter of turning away from evil. One must hate to do evil as well! This is what it means to turn away, to repent. It means to hate that which you formerly did. There are many Christians who do not ever learn to hate their former way of life. They think that God's rules mean they can't do "fun" things anymore. They still think of their sin in a positive light as "fun!" But for true repentance, we will not want to sin anymore because we will hate the things we have done!

But there are more action steps to be taken beside just hating evil. There would be a void if all the Israelites did was begin to hate evil. In the same way that they hate evil, in the same breath, simultaneously with hating evil, they must also love good. Loving good fills the void that just hating evil would cause. So they are not just reacting in a negative way, but in a positive proactive way. The prophet also calls them to do justice in their gate.

This was their chief sin that called the prophet from farming in Judah to them, that they treated indignantly the poor and the down-and-out. They did not make sure that justice was a main staple of the poor person's social status in Israel. In fact, they not only ignored the injustice of the poor. They fueled it and made it worse. So the prophet calls them to right action for the poor as well as to love the good things and hate the bad. Paul calls Christians to the same when he tells us in Philippians to think on good and pure and noble things!

Notice once again the common expression throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps the Lord will be with them if they do these things. We have this idea that if we do certain things, it will force God to do what He has promised. That is not the way it works. Our deeds can do nothing to force God's hand. They cannot do anything at all but show Him that we are serious about repentance.

We cannot be saved by works. We cannot guarantee restoration of our relationship with God with good works either. All they may do is show Him our desires have changed. We must remember that the reference here to the Lord of Hosts still suggests that God is coming with His mighty armies and is still angry with the Israelites. But if He sees a true change in them, He may

still turn to grace instead of the sword. He may be kind to Joseph, the father of Ephraim, which the northern kingdom has been called throughout Amos' prophecy.

5:16 Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Hosts, the Lord, “In all the public squares will be wailing, and in all the streets they will say, “Alas! Alas!” They will call the farmers to mourning and wailing and those who know to lamentation,

Continuing in the Lord's results and ultimatums for the people, once again without coincidence, the Lord's title, “God of Hosts” is used to stress that God is coming with His armies in His wrath. The image produced by Amos here would shake any sinner to their core. God speaks as He comes to them with His armies in toe. He tells them of the dread and terror that will languish among the people as He attacks.

The continuing and recurring theme of no person or place escaping God's wrath in His judgment on Israel is revisited as the Lord say that every public square, every street, and later every vineyard will contain people who are wailing and lamenting. The people in the streets call out, “Alas!” The fact that it is said more than once emphasizes the utter fear and devastation they bear witness to.

Not only will every place see God's devastation, but every person from every walk of life will know it, from those who are farmers to those who work skilled or technological and social occupations. Everyone will weep and wail at the sight of the Lord of Hosts destroying with His armies because of their great and many sins.

5:17 “even in all the vineyards will be wailing, for I will pass through in your midst,” says the Lord.

God's destruction and the people's wailing will extend from the cities into the countryside where the crops that sustain the cities are located. All the people from every walk of life will be wailing and lamenting for the Lord's destructive judgment brought by their own pride. The image of God passing through their very midst with His armed forces should have created chills in the spines of Amos' listeners. More than likely, such an image will create anger rather than remorse. This is the Lord's promise, that they will suffer greatly for their sin. It is no different today.

5:18 “Woe to you who wish for the Day of the Lord! Why would you want such a Day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light.

In this next section of prophecy, the prophet Amos takes on those who actually long for or crave the coming of the Day of the Lord. Using the speech of the Lord and speaking for the Lord here, he starts with an exclamation because the idea of wishing for the Day of the Lord is unfathomable to him and to the Lord. He is asking why anyone would want the day of the Lord.

This is a proper question to ask, for when we learn what will transpire on the Day of the Lord, no one would want that! The Lord is utterly surprised at the notion of Israel to long for the Day because He has sent so many warnings and so many prophets to avoid this disciplinary and punishment measure. And now His children are demanding it from Him! How much this must hurt the heart of God!

He now asks that very question. Why would someone want that? He has just described the Day of the Lord to them as judgment and great loss, destruction as never seen, exile and abandonment. Who in their right mind would desire these things? Perhaps they think that they will be the ones vindicated as righteous on the Day of the Lord. Perhaps they are far enough gone in their depravity to long for the destruction just to see it. Some men just want to see the world burn. There is no reason or rhyme to their desire for destruction. They love it more than they love the good.

The prophet then reminds them in typical biblical imagery that the Day of the Lord is a dark day, a day that brings darkness, not a bright day, a day that brings light. From the very beginning of Genesis to the times of the prophets and beyond in the Scriptures, the imagery of light and darkness are used to juxtapose good and evil, righteousness and wickedness. Only the depraved Israelites would be lost enough to long for their own destruction at the hands of God. The prophet is stunned at their reaction to the warnings! And so he calls for a woe upon them, for they are, on their current path, destined for doom.

5:19 “Just as a man would flee from before the lion, yet would meet the bear, or would go to the house and lean his hand against the wall, but a snake would bite him

Images of a man who cannot find any safety now arise in the speech of the Lord. He likens the Day of the Lord to a man who runs into the trouble of stumbling upon a ferocious and hungry lion. He manages by the bare skin of his teeth to allude the lion only to discover and be in the clutches, the claws if you will, of a bear. There is no rest for this weary man. He will know the destruction of one predator or another.

It is also like the man who goes to his own house, the first place of safety and comfort. He leans upon the walls of his fortress of solitude, as sturdy as they are to receive comfort from what probably his own hands have built. He knows how sturdy the house is. He knows the comfort and strength he draws from knowing he is safe and secure. And the moment he rests or leans his hand upon the sturdy walls of his house, a snake bites his hand and attacks him in his stronghold of solitude and comfort. There will be no place to comfort those who endure the Day of the Lord.

5:20 “Is not the Day of the Lord darkness, and not light, with gloom and not gleam in it?”

The Lord now repeats His premise within a question demanding the affirmative answer. The Day of the Lord is not a day of light and brightness, of the gleam of sunlight and revelation.

Instead, it will be a day of darkness and despair, of gloom and thick blackness. There will be no good in it, no safety, no comfort, no rescue. No one should wish for that day. Those who endure it will know no peace, no semblance of goodness. There will be no grace. Only death, destruction, madness, and darkness. It will be a day of confusion and chaos. It will be a day of disaster and heartache, of pain unfathomable for those whom the Lord brings His armies against.

5:21 “I hate, I despise your feasts! I do not savor your solemn assemblies!”

Now God will move from the issue of what the Day of the Lord is really like and how no one should desire such a thing to the issue of their false worship and how it grates against His own senses. This is almost like a final edict against the people, a free-flowing rage speech against them. You can almost see Him saying it as He descends upon them with His armies as the Lord of Hosts. That is the picture we are given in these upcoming verses.

The Lord uses some of the strongest language possible to let them know how He feels about their worship. Remember that the people believe because of their inordinate wealth that God is pleased with them and that He is continually blessing them despite their actions and the state of their hearts. He tells them that he absolutely hates and despises the many feasts that they have in his name.

The words here for despise and hate are very strong verbs in Hebrew. The word despise has a range of meaning from trash to loathe. The feasts to the Lord are like trash, refuse. Beyond this strong usage is the next verb, the one translated as “to not savor.” It’s meaning is in the smelling of refuse or garbage. God is essentially saying, “I hate smelling the refuse of your solemn assemblies.” They are worthless to Him because they’re not about Him or about the people repenting. The stench of these practices mean to bring joy to the Lord is actually having the opposite effect. He is becoming more angry with every passing feast and solemn assembly!

5:22 “Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings I will not be pleased, even your peace offerings from your fattened cattle I will not gaze upon.”

No matter what sort of offering the people bring to the Lord, it does not disuage their guilt or improve their broken relationship with God, despite the fact that this was the purpose of a sacrifice or offering. God no longer accepts them because the people do not repent or turn from their injustices and self-indulgences.

Because the people have no desire or intention to change, the Lord will not accept their sacrifices for their sins. This is much like the idea of sinning knowing that God will forgive, or premeditated prayers of forgiveness for sins one so desires to commit that they pray for forgiveness ahead of time in case they forget to pray afterward! Despite their offerings, God isn’t buying the point of an offering, to change one’s behavior.

The Lord has stopped caring about their gifts. He does not take pleasure in the offerings. He does not look at what they are bringing. Doesn’t matter how fat the cow is, God still does not

see it. Three types of offerings are being given to the Lord. The first is a burnt offering, which was an offering of praise to the Lord. The second is a grain offering in thanks for a good crop in the harvest, and the final is a peace offering one would make between two warring parties. Even the peace offerings God will not accept! The war will continue until He sees a true repentance!

5:23 “Remove from Me the noise of your ceremonial songs, and the melody of your harps I will not hear.

But the Lord is not just dissatisfied with their offerings and sacrifices. He is also dissatisfied with every single time they sing a worship song in His name. He calls those beautiful cultic and ceremonial songs noise. In fact, in other contexts, the word for songs here speaks of worldly songs! He is rejecting the people on every front of worship!

It would be like God saying to each of us, “I hate it when you gather as My family on Sundays to worship Me. I hate it when you sing songs to me with dead hearts and depraved minds! I despise the giving in the offering plate of your money no matter how many zeroes are on the check. I don’t want to hear or see any worship out of you until you despise your sins and repent and never go back!” Even the most beautiful of melodies and music, the using of one’s talents for the Lord He does not accept!

There is no end to His anger. And only one thing can change His mind and stop Him from coming upon them in the Day with His armies. That one thing is to seek Him, humble themselves, and do the good that He has commanded in His Law. But they will not do it. Instead, they offer up fake platitudes to an angry God and think in their pride that He’s the unreasonable one!

5:24 “So let justice flow forth like the waters and righteousness like eternally-flowing streams.

But the Lord calls for justice and righteousness instead of sacrifices and offerings. Instead of the offerings and sacrifices, God wants to see equity and justice flow like the waters of a great river! He wants to see the never-ending righteousness of the Israelites like a stream that does not ever get low in the water table. He wants to see a flood of justice and righteousness from them. But they cannot give what they do not have. They cannot demonstrate characteristics they don’t even remotely possess.

Let us take this to heart. A person can go a long time in religion being a religious person. But eventually it will all catch up to them. You can only lie about your true nature for so long. You cannot fake out the Holy Spirit of God. You can fool people, but you will be lying to them, to God, and to yourself. And when these things catch up with you, when your true nature is revealed, there will be no one who will listen to you, just like God would not listen to these Israelites any longer. The time for grace was over and the Day of the Lord would rain down upon them.

5:25 “Your sacrifices and offerings did you present to Me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?”

Many commentators have much to say about how to interpret this question. Most rhetorical questions are meant to have a negative response. However, some postulate that this one is to have a positive response. Their argument is that the people did indeed offer sacrifices in the wilderness. But those who say no say that there was not a system of sacrifices in place in the wilderness because they did not have the resources to fuel it.

I would take the position that the answer to this question is not necessarily to be answered affirmative or negative, but rather to invoke the people to think of what they did in the wilderness. From a cursory reading, one can see that they had idols and other gods, as well as times where they complained against the Lord. If this is historical precedent, then the Lord is not surprised with their current moorings toward idolatry.

5:26 “But you will lift up Sikkuth your king and Kiyun your idols, your star-gods which you made for yourselves,

Now we are introduced to either past or present gods that the people have worshipped. I would suggest that they are present gods, because he will promise in the next verse that they will carry them into the exile. The word here is translated “lift up” but also has the root meaning of “carry.” Idols were heavy to carry around impeding on the material they were made out of and the scale on which they were composed.

The two gods mentioned here are both related to the celestial body, the planet Saturn, the next brightest light in the sky besides the sun and moon. The two names are names given to different stories about these idols from different cultures they probably traded with. The people of Israel had clearly made these idols and were worshipping them. One might even get the impression that they were worshipping these gods along with God in their sacrifices previously mentioned, which would be called syncretism, the mixing of worshipping God with other gods simultaneously.

5:27 “and I will deport you from here to beyond Damascus!” says the Lord; the God of Hosts is His name.

The end result of this idolatry and gross injustice will be the Lord coming against them with His own armies and deporting them, exiling them beyond Damascus into Assyria. This is indeed exactly what happens in their future and the Northern Kingdom is taken and deported by the Assyrians. In case they had forgotten the picture of God coming with His armies to smite them, once again His title as the God of Hosts is presented and called His name. This means that His character that they will most remember is that He brought His own armies against them.

Chapter 6

6:1 Woe to the carefree ones in Zion and the unsuspecting ones on Mount Samaria, chief dignitaries among the nations to whom the house of Israel comes!

Now Amos presents woes upon the nation of Israel because it has wasted its premier place among the nations. You will see the word for premier, translated differently, throughout these seven verses. It will be translated chief, first, beginning. All of these are the same word in Hebrew. Amos' message is that they are the first among the nations, the premier nation of God, and they will be the first to go into exile because of their waste.

Amos calls them the carefree and the unsuspecting. These are words that show their attitude toward the Lord's warnings. They are ignoring Him. They are living as if there is no demise of Israel, as if there is nothing on the horizon of danger or punishment or judgment. The places mentioned, Zion and Mount Samaria, speak of the northern kingdom of Israel after the divided kingdom. Zion is God's chosen name for His people, yet it is unusually used here in a negative connotation. It is usually used in contexts of hope and fulfillment. Here, it is used to refer to a people about to lose all hope.

Samaria was north of Israel geographically, but was either included in God's judgment or was a name being used to associate Israel with the Samaritans. Samaritans are a sort of half-breed Jewish people. The Jewish women married men who were not Jewish, producing Samaritans. Many Jews would have looked upon Samaritans harshly. In one of Jesus' parables, the Jewish priest and levite pass around an injured Jew on a road, but the Samaritan is seen as the true neighbor to this man, a surprise to every Jew listening.

The word for mountain here refers to all Samaritans, and is a word signifying heights, just like the next word for chief, first, or premier in referring to dignitaries and nobles who represent their nation. Dignitaries tend to live in the lap of luxury, and it was certainly no different in Israel. The outer face of Israel looked wealthy and famous, but the inside was rotten to the core. Many may suggest that this issue of woes goes to the nations, but the context of the rest of the chapter clearly points to Israel as receiving the woes. So these are the dignitaries from the house of Israel that the other nations look to for international matters.

6:2 Cross over to Calneh and walk from there to Hamath the great, then descend to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?

The word for cross over here is a traveling term in this context, however it is one of the words used for sinning (transgress) in the Old Testament in moral contexts. We will see a host of traveling terms here as the Lord points to other great nations to ask a rhetorical question of Israel's dignitaries. He mentions crossing over, walking, and descending. Descending would refer to going down a mountain to a valley.

The nations mentioned here are images for the Israelites. Calneh is a city in northern Syria that was destroyed by Tiglath-Pileasar III, a ruthless Assyrian king. Both Amos and Isaiah will use it as an example of what will happen to northern Israel in the exile. Hamath is a city that was never conquered by Joshua, north of the Israelite border. It was friendly to David and Solomon was able to control it. Finally, Gath is well known to the Old Testament as a stalwart city of the Philistines.

All of these are great cities with great territories. Greatness here is meant in the sense not of vast lands but of political control and military strength. Even some of these fell to the Assyrians. Would Israel be any better off? What did they possess that would keep them from experiencing the same fate? This is what the Lord asks through Amos. There is nothing to keep the Assyrians from taking northern Israel as well. There is no cause to ignore the coming judgment.

6:3 O you who push away the day of disaster yet bring near the reigning of violence

Amos points out these people's waste of God's blessings. He also points out that the coming judgment will be God's retribution for their violence and injustice to their own countrymen presently. The idea of the reigning of violence is more literally translated "seat of violence" in most translations. However, the idea is that violence will sit in the seat or throne, just like God sat in the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.

The people were agnostic or even ignorant of the timing of the Day of the Lord. They were saying that it would never come because, as far as they were concerned, they were fine with God. They offered the proper sacrifices, as we saw in chapter five, and they were experiencing great wealth, political stability, and military might. They thought they were living under the blessing of God. But they were wrong. God was giving them time to change. They were taking that time of mercy and heaping up more of God's wrath against them.

These same people who were pushing away or saying that the Day of the Lord would not come were the same unjust people who were violating God's system of justice for the poor, the orphan, the widow and the sojourner. They were the ones who were reigning in violent measures that unjustly injured the people that God provided for in His covenant. They were the ones reigning unjustly in violence now, but the Lord would soon send His armies on that Day of destruction as recompense.

There are so many today who think they are fine with the Lord, but they are far from fine! They think that He is happy with them and that they are obedient, that they know Him and that they are serving Him, but the devil is using them to cause undue harm to God's people. These people are even in the church sometimes! We must be careful to keep ourselves pure from just religion and to obey everything the Lord has commanded us. We must not rely on nominal belief systems, but we must know the written and Living Word!

6:4 Woe to those who lie down on ivory beds and lounge around on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves in the middle of fattening,

A second woe is not in the Hebrew text, but is understood as the prophet points to another part of his audience that are taking the Day of Judgment for granted. He mentions now those who live in luxury and ignore the signs of the times. They have ivory beds. Ivory was a very expensive commodity in Amos' time. To have an ivory bed or house meant you were pretty much Bill Gates.

Wealth in Israel at this time was flaunted just as today. It was a wasting wealth instead of a wealth that helped others. That was the injustice of it all. Remember the cows of Bashan, the women who were getting even more expensive wine just to drink while the poor were lining the streets their homes sat beside? These people here are lounging around in their couches. They don't lift a finger to help those who are living in dire straits. They are indeed carefree and don't care at all.

Worse than this is the utter waste of what they eat. They are eating the lambs from the flock, probably better tasting meat, but also less meat than they could have gotten if the lambs were kept until the proper time of slaughter for more food. In other words, their killing lambs before they can feed more people because the meat tastes better. Others starve as they eat even finer meat!

They were doing the same with the calves or baby cows who were not yet grown and fattened. This could be translated "in the middle of the stalls" as well, but I wanted to show that the fattening process for these animals was not completed. The injustice being committed here is eating better but feeding less. The ignoring of the poor's plight and wasteful wealth is unmistakable in the angry recounting of the Lord.

6:5 who improvise on the sound of the harp like David, and invent for themselves musical instruments,

He continues now by not showing disdain for these practices in this verse, but for anger of the waste and ignorance and nonchalant indulgence, slothfulness and apathy. The word improvise here speaks of composing and singing songs that don't matter, idle songs. The word for sound that I have used is literally "mouth." They are taking their harps and making idle music, music that serves no purpose.

Without getting too preachy here, I would like to point out that the Lord wanted music that ministered to people and praised His name. That's not what they're doing. They're making songs that don't minister or bless the Lord. They're fooling around, playing without worshipping, using God-given talents for their own glory. That is the sin of this part. May I say today in our worship music settings, there are a small amount of songs that actually worship God? For the sheer volume of songs we produce today, it takes a keen worshipper to separate idle songs from true worship songs that touch the throne and heart of our God!

Now this part about inventing musical instruments is not a sin, unless they are doing it to boost their own pride in instrument-making abilities or to continue to compose idle songs. The making of new instruments is not in the least a sin. In fact, the psalms encourage us to make new songs to the Lord and to use all the instruments we have!

But the point is that we are making these songs “to the Lord,” not for our own gain, fame, or pride in our abilities, which are given to us by God. This is what the Israelites were doing, though. They were using their gifts and their religious expression not for God but for themselves. That is the very definition of secular versus sacred. They were taking objects that were set aside for worship and using them for other purposes.

6:6 who drink wine in ceremonial bowls and with the best oils anoint themselves, yet do not grieve over the collapse of Joseph.

The drinking of wine in these special ceremonial bowls was a common practice, especially for the priests. This verse might be pointing to the priests and calling them out as well, in case they thought they were holier than the others. The bowl mentioned here is used for the offering of libations, or drink offerings. It was not uncommon to put wine in them at all. That is not where the sin lies.

Amos also points to the ceremonial act of anointing oneself with the finest or best oil. This also is not wrong. One might notice a bit of wasting wealth in using the absolute finest of oils to do this, but anointing is a very spiritual and good thing! Many times, the quality of the materials used in worship was a sign of the devotion and joy of the worshipper.

However, the sin comes in the next part of the verse. While doing all of these things, the spiritual and ritualistic things of the temple, the priests who stand as representatives of God in Israel, are ignoring the collapse of the people of God. They are carrying out the programs of the temple without addressing the decay of Israel. They have not even grieved over the collapse of northern Israel. The very heart of pastoral or priestly ministry is to do these very things, to do what God would be doing if He were in the shoes of the minister. God is grieving, but His priests are not. That is their sin. The title of Joseph once again refers to Ephraim, his son, whose name is synonymous with northern Israel.

6:7 Therefore now they will surely be exiled first and the revelry of loungers will pass away.

Because of all of these sins that go up before the anger of the Lord and are stored for retribution in His vengeance and judgment, God will take them into exile using other nations. We know from history that in just a short 30 years, the northern kingdom of Israel will fall to the Assyrians and will be exiled in waves.

Once again we see this idea of height or first in premier. The Lord uses this inclusion of words to show that because they were so privileged to be first in all of these other things, they

will be privileged as the northern nation to go into exile first as well before Judah goes into exile. God just keeps on rewarding them, but this time with what they deserve, not what they desire. These revelries and the enjoyments of a life that ignores the coming Day will soon cease and pass away when the Lord brings upon Israel the armies of a country that will exile them and live in their land.

6:8 The Lord God has sworn by His life, a declaration of the Lord, the God of Hosts, “I abhor the pride of Jacob and his strongholds I hate, so I will surrender the city and all that fills it.

After the woes, the Lord will now proclaim or declare His wrath upon Israel formally. “Lord God” is a combination of the regular word used for lord and the tetragrammaton YHWH. The Lord God is the lord of all and He is the covenantal YHWH, the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. He owns them. They are His, and He will punish. The literal phrasing here is “sworn by His life. The idea is that this is the most powerful thing God can swear by. The gravity of this pronouncement should not be missed by its hearers, for it is the last straw.

Another piling of names for God occurs here as Amos and several biblical writers tend to do. This is a formal declaration of the Lord (YHWH), who is the God of Hosts, controlling all things, even unseen armies of angels and celestial creatures, who can also control the armies of humanity and the nations. Then we see in His speech the emphasis. Usually in Hebrew, like in Spanish, the order of a sentence goes verb first, subject, then predicate. However, any deviation from this would be emphasis. Here, the first word of the sentence is the word “I.” The Lord is emphasizing that He abhors Israel’s pride. It is a personal affront and offense to the Living God.

The emphasis upon God as the subject of the action of abhor coupled with the extreme use of the verb abhor show just how upset God is about Israel’s pride. James said that God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Human pride always grates against God because it is how humans take the place of God, usurp His authority over all of creation and over humanity. It is a power-play for control by a being that can’t even tie his own shoelaces! It is the reversing of God’s order, and it is neither humanity’s place nor right.

Along with Jacob’s pride God hates the strongholds, the devices that seek to provide the security the nation should be looking to God to provide. As a result of offending God’s place, despite the mighty fortresses of protection that bring Israel it’s prideful sense of self-sufficiency, God will strike down the nation even though they have excellent defenses. It won’t make sense to them when they fall by His hand.

The cities of Israel belong to the Lord because everything belongs to Him. So just as the nation is God’s nation, He will give up the city because it is His alone to surrender. This is much the same idea as Jesus giving up His life. No one can take it from Him. He must surrender it. Same with the cities here. Everything in the cities, which the Lord also owns, will be given over to the hoards of the enemy because God is humbling the proud nation.

6:9 “And it will be if ten men remain in one house, they will die.

When this happens by the hand of the Lord, anyone who sticks around in the city will die. He will allow life to be taken. He will allow a total loss for the sake of showing Israel who its security truly lies in. He will allow it all to show that He is the Lord. People may stay in their houses to feel secure during the sacking of their city. Many times in our own culture, people are told by authorities to stay in their homes when disasters of many kinds happen. But even the safety of the home will not be enough when God pours out His wrath on Israel.

6:10 “Then when one’s relative brings the bones from the house, the one who burns will say to him who is in the far part of the house, ‘Is anyone still with you?’ and he will reply, ‘No one.’ Then he will say, ‘Hush! For the name of the Lord is not to be mentioned.’”

Amos as he speaks for the Lord presents a vivid image of what it would be like in that city of destruction. He shows a person going through the house after the destruction has come down from the hand of the Lord. He has a cremator with him to properly dispose of the remains of dead loved ones. As he is searching the far reaches of the house, the cremator asks if anyone is alive and he answers that no one is alive.

What is most interesting, and perhaps perplexing is the reply of the cremator to the searcher. He tells him that they must not mention the name of the Lord. Some commentators suggest this would mean to not invoke the Lord’s protection in prayer because the Lord has caused the destruction and will not answer or will come and finish the job. Others suggest that this means that there is no need to invoke the Lord’s help because He has caused the destruction. Either way the message is clear. Through this image we see that there will be no hope when the God of Hosts sends His armies and surrenders the cities.

6:11 For behold, the Lord commands and the large house will be struck down into rubble, and the small house into bits.

The reason Amos uses an image of a person walking through the house to find people still alive or just to find their remains rests in the fact that God will crush every house. The emphasis once again comes through in the phrase, “the Lord commands.” The subject comes before the verb, suggesting that only the Lord could do such devastating and complete destruction.

Two types of houses are mentioned, usually in Hebrew thought connoting the idea that everything in between will suffer the same fate, so from the large houses to the small houses, every house in other words, will be laid waste completely. Another image shows that the big houses will be crushed as with a hammer, fractured into big, yet useless pieces of rubble. The smaller house suffers the same fate but has smaller rubble bits because it was a smaller house. The result is the same no matter the size of the house. Both are now rendered unusable.

6:12 “Do horses run on rocks? Or does a person plow there with oxen? But you have turned to poison justice, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—

The Lord asks some rhetorical questions now with the answer of no. Horses do not run on the rocks and crags in the rocky regions of northern Israel because they will hurt their hooves. Rams and other types of animals fair better than horses. Neither can a farmer put a plow in rocky land because he needs soil to see a harvest.

These places were not designed for those uses. So too the Lord will now condemn the nation with a former complaint against them. The Lord gave them the right environment so that justice and righteousness would flourish, but they have taken that same environment and turned the justice to poison that kills rather than brings life to those who need justice. They have taken that same environment meant to bring righteous deeds to the forefront of society and turned it into bitter wormwood. Wormwood was a kind of wood that produced a bitter taste, an almost acidic substance. They have destroyed the opportunity for justice and righteousness.

6:13 “you who rejoice in Lo-Debar, who say, ‘Have we not by our strength seized for ourselves Karnaim?’

He is talking to the whole nation, but will point out a few examples of individuals and specific cities. This is a principle that some pastors use, speaking to an entire group, yet in talking to one person in that group, the group’s attention is maintained with interest. The Lord points out the inhabitants of a city called Lo-Debar, which consequently in Hebrew can be translated “No word.” Lo-Debar was a city in northern Transjordan that Joshua had conquered. Karnaim is also a city in the Transjordan. After the fall of the city of Ashtaroth, it became the leading city in the area. The people of Lo-Debar prided themselves upon seizing that city. Their sin was in proclaiming that their strength had won the battle, the city and its spoils, instead of the Lord’s strength. They are fat cats sitting pretty, but the Lord has news for them!

6:14 “For behold! I will raise up against you, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord God of Hosts, “a nation, and they will oppress you from Lebo-Hamath until the Brook of Arabah.”

As has been proclaimed before, now with immediacy the Lord proclaims that He is raising up a nation that will go against Israel, a nation that will do all that has been prophesied, that will seize their land and cities, have the Lord’s power behind its armies, take all the spoils, exile the people and live in their nation. Once again we see the compounding of God’s names, here the tetragrammaton YHWH with God of Hosts. All of these combine to show that the sovereign Lord, also their covenantal King, will bring that nation against them for His purposes. The nation will oppress their entire kingdom from its northernmost point to its southernmost point. The whole kingdom will be defeated.

Chapter 7

7:1 Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, He formed locusts in the beginning of the sprouting of the aftergrowth, and behold, the aftergrowth following the king's mowing.

This chapter starts with three visions the Lord gave to Amos to show what He was planning to do as punishment to Israel for their pride and insolence. The first is started with the same formula that all except the last will contain. First, Amos presents the vision's contents by the phrase, "Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold." Then the prophet responds to the vision. Finally, the Lord responds to the prophet's response.

Here, we get the start of the first vision. The vision is of locusts that the Lord makes himself, creates for the purpose of eating the rest of the foliage of the crops after harvest. This was dangerous because it would destroy the planting of the next season's crops. Such a thing Joel had already witnessed. But Amos knows the Israelites cannot handle this destruction.

7:2 And it was when they stopped eating the grass of the land, and I said, "O Lord God, please forgive! How can Jacob stand up because he is small?"

After the destruction is complete, Amos responds in desperation to the Lord. He cries out in hopes that the Lord will not bring such a destructive judgment, which would surely end Israel for good. It would wipe out any hope, as it did in the time of Joel. It would take away the hope of a future of crops. It would break their backbones.

So the prophet responds by pleading and begging the Lord to not carry through on this vision of judgment. Like the priests, Amos stands between what God is desiring to do to His wayward people and between a people that are ignoring God to the brink of destruction. He stands between two warring factions. He begs the Lord to forgive. But the command is quickly followed with "please!" It is a desperate exclamation that still holds respect.

Then Amos asks the Lord a common question we will hear again. He asks the Lord how little Jacob can stand amidst such a harsh and impossible devastating judgment. In the midst of such a great and large judgment, Israel will not even see it coming. It will utterly destroy any sense of moral and crush their spirits completely. Jacob of course is used in Amos as a title for Northern Israel specifically. The verb for standing up is the idea of being able to rise from one's bed or from a chair. Israel cannot rise to the occasion of such a harsh judgment.

7:3 The Lord relented concerning this, "It shall not be," said the Lord.

God responds to the prophet's pleading by relenting from the result of the vision. Although many people cannot wrap their theological frameworks around this, God relents from disasters He has presented several times in the Old Testament. We usually see intercessory prayer as a large part of God's relenting.

Relent is the most proper way to translate and understand the verb found here for God's action. Some translations would say that God changed his mind or even use the verb repent! God does not repent, for He does not commit sin. There is no need for Him to repent! Nor does He change His mind. This would present to us a fickle God who cannot control His own thoughts and desires, let alone intelligibly respond to humanity. The overall story of the Bible shows us that God has one plan that He has never changed.

However, the idea of relenting means to tell someone what you would do in a certain situation as a last resort, in other words to make several scenarios, and then to choose the best based on what would produce the desired effects. God wants the Israelites to return to Him as their source of all prosperity, to humble themselves and seek Him instead of other gods. Ravaging their land is one way of putting them in their place and letting them know where their source of sustenance comes from.

But when Amos responds with such desperation, the Lord relents. He doesn't choose to go that route. This would remind me of a board meeting of sorts. God does this amongst the members of the Trinity from time to time, asking each member what would be the best course of action. It is not that God does not know the best course of action, rather I would see it as God enacting wisdom as an example to humanity of how wisdom works. Another example of such an idea is Jesus being baptized. He didn't need to be baptized, but He did it as an example to the people, to fulfill all righteousness.

So the Lord presents this possibility of judgment to Amos and Amos reacts as the people would have. The Lord decides against that course of action and presents another. We should not be surprised that a human being would be in such a council with God. He loves to be in communion and fellowship with us, for that is why He made us. We are not worms who cannot even dare offer up to the Lord wisdom that comes from Him. He loves to hear what we think! He loves to interact with His children!

7:4 Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, the Lord God called for judgment by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the land.

The second vision now comes because the Lord has decided not to use the first method of judgment. This time, the judgment is a harsh judgment of fire! We see that He keeps His promise to Noah not to judge by flood any longer. But fire is not off the table. Sodom and Gomorrah know this, and so do some other cities, I'm sure.

Once again we see the same formula. The interesting point of this judgment is that the fire is hot enough to burn up even the depths of the sea! We have seen this before as the fire from heaven in the days of Elijah on Mount Carmel consumes the water and the drenched sacrifice. Anyone who has started a campfire knows that if the wood is wet, the fire will not burn.

But here, the deepest of oceans is consumed by the fire. That's one hot and divinely inspired fire! It devours everything from water to land. This word for land is a hard word to track

down, an unusual one that denotes farmland or just land itself. Either way, nothing escapes the fire of God's judgment.

7:5 Then I said, O Lord God, please stop! How can Jacob stand up because He is small?"

Once again, Amos reacts with horror at the sight of this second vision God shows him. We see the same terse and yet respectful command to stop the judgment in this method. He adds the word please again to show deep respect and honor. But the prophet once again is terrified at the judgment that Israel deserves. It is just, and yet too much for the people. They will not be molded but destroyed under such judgment. They will not bend; they will break. Once again we see the same exact question from the prophet. He cannot imagine the aftermath of such a devastating judgment.

7:6 The Lord relented concerning this, "Even this will not happen," said the Lord God.

Once again we see the Lord relent and choose another path. I want to say here at this point as we see the second option fly out the window in this little conference that God's end goal is not ever questioned. Israel will endure a judgment, and it will be harsh, because that is what they deserve for the way they have treated God Almighty!

That is why we can say that God does not change His mind. He does not try these two judgments with the prophet and the say, "Oh well. I guess I won't judge them and let them get away with it." No! He will judge them and they will learn! That is God's plan and it has never changed. What He is working out now is the method of delivery for this judgment and punishment. In a way, God is preparing the prophet by presenting the worst case scenarios first, so that the last option will pale in comparison of devastation to the others. It is not bargaining on either God's or Amos' part. God is preparing the prophet to vocalize what He plans to do so the people will be ashamed and return to Him or endure the judgment their actions demand.

7:7 Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, the Lord stood against a plumb-lined wall and in his hand was a plumb-line.

Finally we see the third vision of judgment. This vision contains the idea of a plumb-line. A plumb-line is a carpenter's tool that makes sure all the walls are flush or plumb, straight at 90 degree angles and built to specifications. For the third time, the prophet does not waiver in His presentation of the visions, using the same formula once again.

Now the Lord in this vision is going to check the wall that He stands against. He will use His plumb-line to check the quality of the carpentry of the wall. The wall represents Israel and the plumb-line is the law of God, the covenant that He has made. If they don't measure up and He finds them wanting, He may do as a carpenter must, take out the wall and rebuild with a more

accurate specification. The Lord stands before the wall with His own plumb-line ready to measure.

7:8 Then the Lord said to me, “What do you see, Amos?” Then I said, “A plumb-line.” Then the Lord said, “Behold! I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of My people Israel. Never will I still continue passing by them.

The Lord now involves the prophet in His judgments and measurements. He asks what Amos sees in His hand. Amos quickly responds that he sees a plumb-line. Amos knows the use of such an object as well. The Lord uses the surprise exclamation, “Behold!” or “Look!” This grabs the attention of the prophet and the listener. It calls them to a warning attention.

The Lord sets the plumb-line, measuring Israel by the standards set long ago. He puts the plumb-line in the midst of His people. He sets His rule up in their midst and finds them wanting. They are not built to the proper specifications. The judgment for such a problem is the absence of the Lord’s presence among them. This judgment, in my opinion, is worse than the other two. Without the Lord’s presence, who can survive anything? He will leave them for good, never to pass by them again!

7:9 “and the high places of Isaac will be uninhabited, even the sanctuary of Israel will be laid waste and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword.”

The Lord continues to depict the new situation the plumb-line causes. There will be a leaving not just of God’s presence, but of the presence of the people. The high places where they offer their sacrifices, which were set up by Isaac, their forefather, will be devoid of life. No one will be offering the sacrifices. The people will be in exile.

This will not be a peaceful exile. Remember it is punishment and judgment upon Israel that they have brought on themselves with great pride and sin. It will be a violent exile that renders the sanctuaries desolate through war and siege. This is a destruction through war that the prophet refers to here. It is the result of having cities surrendered to an enemy and then deportation as a result of surrender.

But who is the one leading the armies with the sword? It is the Lord God! He will use the enemy’s armies to serve His purposes. Notice here that the Lord refers to Northern Israel with one of its king’s names instead of one of its forefather’s names. This is not done by accident. Israel’s character and identity before the Lord has changed not from the beneficial relationship between the forefathers, but to the loss of relationship between all of the evil kings of Israel. And Jeroboam, though generally a godly king, is the king of the day in Amos’ time.

7:10 Then Amaziah, priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, “Amos conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all his words.

Perhaps it was finally evidence that the priest of Bethel, where Amos was prophesying, could use against him, or maybe it was because Amos prophesied that the temple would be empty. Either way, it is after Amos preaches about his three visions that Amaziah rises up against him. Amaziah will do what most religious leaders do. He will use His religious authority much like a politician uses political capital to get rid of the man of God in his midst.

It is at this time that the priest warns the king. He sends a message to the king, to gain his support to get rid of Amos. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. He wants to use Amos' prophecies to jolt the king into helping provide the needed authority to get Amos out of Bethel. So he sends word containing some of the prophecies the people have been listening to and hearing from this rogue man of God.

Amaziah includes in this communiqué the last words of the prophet that will personally affect the king. He includes the words that speak of king Jeroboam dying by the sword. This would probably be viewed as a threat from the prophet, who is from a different country in Judah, than a prophecy from the Lord. Amos has just spoken this word in verse 9. He calls Amos' preaching to the people conspiring and inciting a rebellion against the king, although it was probably nothing of the sort.

And then he adds his own personal and religious point that the land, the people, cannot bear the weight of such prophecies. The people don't deserve to hear this man continue to prophecy such unkind things. He's really quite a nuisance. There is a long history of Israel ignoring the true prophet and listening to the false prophets. This may have been one of those times. Also, we must remember that Israel is enjoying itself on the last dregs of God's blessing. For the prophet to come now was inconvenient for the nation. So in favor of convenience, they wanted to get rid of the one voice of truth in their midst.

7:11 “For thus Amos said, ‘By the sword Jeroboam will die and Israel will surely be exiled from his land.’”

Now we hear some of the message between priest and king. Amaziah would have been sort of the chief priest of northern Israel because Bethel was the chief location for a temple or high place of worship. So the king more than likely would heed his words. The priest quotes the prophet, sort of. But it is not a direct quote. He makes the prophecy about Jeroboam's house personal to Jeroboam.

Essentially, such a prophecy would have been perceived as treason. But Amos is not from Israel. To suggest the king would die by the sword usually referred to battle. And then to say that Israel would most definitely go into exile was to say that the king would lose not just his life, but his kingdom to an enemy he could not defeat. The king would not have appreciated the prophet's words. We know that he did not like the prophet enough to make sure he was removed from Israel and could not prophecy there.

7:12 Then Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, walk away, flee for yourself away from the land to Judah, and eat bread there and prophesy there.

After sending the communiqué to the king, probably in secret, the priest finally gets up to shut the mouth of the prophet. He calls Amos on the carpet using all of his religious authority to get rid of him before the people begin to accept his prophecy. The word “seer” here is actually one of two technical terms for prophets. When the prophetic office and ministry became evident to Israel in the time after the judges, the prophets were called seers because they could see the future and prophesy about the problems in society that led to Israel’s demise.

Now Amaziah calls Amos by this professional title of seer. Then he commands with religious authority, “Walk away!” The literal meaning here is “Walk yourself away!” Then he follows that with a command to flee for his own safety back to his homeland of Judah. It’s quite possible this was a threat, but not necessarily taken as one. Then comes a complaint that this prophet has been eating the bread of the Israelites, but he wasn’t worth feeding.

He essentially hands Amos a pink slip, telling him that he’s not good at his job, he eats of the people’s resources (as if they were starving...) and then tells him to try his prophecy tricks on the Judeans rather than the Israelites. With every phrase, the priest is even making fun of the man of God. The disrespect is astounding and reminds me of how some Christians treat other Christians. This should never be! Every person should be treated with respect even when they are off base. We must never use popularity or political capitol to get rid of people, even if they are heretics. We must always be representing Christ to everyone.

7:13 “but at Bethel do not continue to prophecy still because it is the king’s sanctuary and it is a royal house.”

The priest continues to berate the prophet by telling him to never come back to Bethel. He demands that the prophecies stop flowing immediately. The reason that he gives for these orders is that the place of Bethel is a special sanctuary, a place of relaxation and stress relieving, for the king, and that it is the place where one of his royal palaces has been placed. The king cannot handle after a hard day’s work coming and hearing such negative prophecy. Neither of these are good excuses to get rid of the prophet, and neither is religious. Both are political. Prophets don’t do well catering to politics. They never have, and true prophets never will.

7:14 Then Amos replied to Amaziah, “I am not a prophet, and I am not the son of a prophet, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore fig trees!

After the priest’s tirade is over, Amos responds in kind to the priest’s points. First, he finally gives us a bit of background about himself. You will notice in the original language, but less in English, that Amos is using the emphatic pronouns for himself, which is very unusual. He

is emphasizing that he is not the issue, but the prophecies are from the Lord. It's not as if he can do anything about what God gives him to say.

After all, Amos says, he was just a herdsman tending sheep and cattle. He had a second job just to make ends meet taking care of sycamore fig trees, picking the figs and tending to the trees. He's just a simple shepherd and gardener. He doesn't know anything about the professional prophetic ministry. He didn't receive any training as a prophet, nor did he learn as the son of a prophet. He's almost returning in kind the words that have made fun of him by saying, "Look, you're so bad and so going downhill that God wouldn't even send a real prophet your way. Instead he sent a lowly shepherd and gardener!"

7:15 "But the Lord seized me from behind the flock and to me the Lord said, 'Go you! Prophesy to my people Israel.'

As Amos continues telling his story, his testimony of how God raise him up, he uses a word of forcefulness, not that he would not disobey the Lord, but that the Lord called him specifically. He says the Lord seized him from his place behind the flocks. Instead of doing what he knew as a professional, God was going to thrust him into ministry as a prophet, something he was not qualified for nor knew anything about.

Many of the people in God's church have had similar experiences. They come from completely different backgrounds than ministry or have just recently been saved out of a life very far away from the ministry. They are fearful of what God wants them to do or how to do it. They don't know what to expect and they may shrink away from their calling. I love when the Lord calls people as priests to their secular jobs and it overflows into the church from there.

Would it surprise you to know that most ministers feel the same inadequacies? And if they don't, then they are not being honest with you. Ministry is hard and it is not ever completely mapped out. Just when you think you have it down, God will make changes. This must have been how Amos felt, and it didn't help that he faced such strong opposition and rejection to the message God commanded him to broadcast.

You can see by the way he words his testimony that he was just as surprised as the people of Israel to be called to prophecy. He used the emphatic pronoun in the last verse and in this verse, he uses strong action verbs like "seized" and then uses an emphatic pronoun referring to himself again. The command to go is strong and personal. Then He commands Amos to do something he's never done before, to prophesy, including the place of the northern kingdom of Israel. God is clear in Amos' calling. And he provides all that is needed!

7:16 "And now, hear the word of the Lord! You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel and do not foam at the mouth against the house of Isaac.'

Amos now addresses Amaziah personally in prophetic utterance right from the Lord. He will receive special gifts from the Lord for his insolence and false religious leadership. The

second person pronouns “you” are all singular, singling out the priest for these prophecies, not the people. But if this is the kind of personal prophecy from the Lord, I’m not so sure I would want to be Amaziah right now.

Amos declares through the word of the Lord against Amaziah that he who demanded the ceasing of prophecy, the one who called Amos’ reliance upon God’s word and Spirit to preach God’s message to God’s people “foaming at the mouth.” Foaming at the mouth is the literal understanding of this word, but it is usually translated either “preaching” or “ecstatic prophecy.” The idea is that Amos had no control and foamed at the mouth. It is a derogatory way of speaking of the office of prophecy.

7:17 “Therefore, thus says the Lord, ‘Your wife will be a prostitute in the city and your sons and your daughters by the sword will fall and your land with a measuring cord will be divided up, and you in an unclean land will die, and Israel will surely be exiled from his land.’”

Because of his insolence and lack of respect in addressing the man of God that prophesied the true word of God to the people, Amaziah’s whole family and himself will suffer the judgment of the Lord. First, his wife will become a prostitute in the city. The words for wife and prostitute show an opposite effect. That which is holy, the wife, will be profaned through prostitution. While a marriage is holy and intimate, every man will intimately know his wife. Amos is not winning any brownie points here, but he is prophesying as the Lord commanded him.

Amaziah’s children, both sons and daughters will also suffer. They will fall by the sword just like Jeroboam. They will suffer the fate of dying at the hands of the same army that takes the city of Bethel. This would be the Assyrians in about 30 years. Also, the land that the priest owns, which goes against the Law of Moses, for priests did not own any land, will be measured out with a measuring cord and will be divided up between Israel’s captors. They will live in the land he now enjoys because he did not allow the prophet to preach for the change of the nation.

Not only will he not get to dwell as a mere slave in his own land that will be owned by his captors, but he will also be taken away as Amos has already prophesied about the rest of Israel. His place of privilege as priest would not keep him from suffering the same fate of judgment as everyone else. And his show of authority here would get him nowhere on that day. He could no longer hide behind spiritual complacency.

He will die there in that unclean Gentile land of his captors. The worst way for a Jewish priest to die, as most might admit. Worse even than all of this is the finality with which Amos once again prophesies that Israel will indeed be carted off as captives to a land they do not know, exiled from their homes and the place that is familiar to them. God’s judgments and justice is final. The stop-gap measure of sending the prophet to change people’s hearts before judgment has yielded negative results – for the land of Israel. The judgment is coming!

Chapter 8

8:1 Thus the Lord God showed me and behold, a basket of summer fruit.

From this point on, we cannot be certain if Amos was kicked out of northern Israel officially or if he stayed on and continued to prophesy. Either he stayed in Bethel or another city in the northern kingdom, or he returned to his home country of Judah and finished writing and proclaiming these prophecies about the northern kingdom.

After his ordeal with the priest of Bethel, Amos receives a fourth vision, much like the three visions that open chapter 7. We have the same type of language as before with other visions, but this one is about a basket of summer fruit. As with before, the prophet converses with the Lord, answering His questions and hearing His words through images.

Hebrews have chosen as one of their main communication devices throughout the Old Testament vivid imagery. They excel in bringing the abstract into concrete images, using this talent to their benefit. They are a people of poetry and story, concrete images and description. This basket of summer fruit would have been almost too ripe. The image presented to the prophet is one of fruit that is almost at the point turning from ripe and sweet to bitter and decaying. This basket of summer fruit was right on the cusp of ripeness turned to decay.

8:2 Then he said, “What do you see, Amos?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” And the Lord said to me, “The end has come upon My people Israel. I will not still continue to pass by them.

Understanding that the basket was almost overly ripe and about to turn the tide to decay, the Lord asks Amos what he sees, and the prophet replies with the answer of a basket of summer fruit. Immediately linked with the state of the fruit is the prophetic word of the Lord for the people of Israel. In His eyes, they have outlasted their ripeness to Him, their pleasure and sweetness. Now, they are becoming a bitter taste to Him.

This is the connection between the fruit and the Lord’s words. The fruit is the people of Israel, who used to be His love, His sweet delight. But through their constant destruction and willful disobedience to the Lord, through their treacherous sins during a period of God’s grace, instead of turning back they boldly marched on in sin. This has caused the Lord to do with Israel what we do with a bitter piece of fruit. It’s end draws near as we dislike the taste and throw it away.

For the second time in Amos, from another vision, God repeats that He will no longer pass by Israel. The last was in the third vision, where God settles on the method of measuring Israel to see if it has its foundations in Him alone. He says there that He will not pass by Israel anymore.

The word here in Hebrew is the same basis for the Passover, where God’s angel of death passed by the Israelite encampment in Goshen of Egypt to lay waste to the firstborn of Egypt, to

bring God's wrath and destruction upon Egypt. The Lord here promises the opposite of what He had promised then. As His wrath fell upon Egypt, so now He will not pass by them in His anger. Israel has become the target of the Lord's vengeance for its great and many sins. The grace period is over!

8:3 “Even the temple songs will be wailing on that day,” declares the Lord God, “Numerous are dead bodies in every place, they are thrown down. Hush!”

This Day of the Lord will bring sorrow and grief rather than rejoicing. The songs that have been sung to the Lord in perfect harmony with the outside look of a vibrant community, although completely dead and decayed in inner spirituality, will no longer be sung. Finally the truth of the destruction of the Lord will bring wailing, not false worship.

As He comes in His wrath and pours it out upon the land, the people will no longer offer up what they think the Lord wants to get Him off their backs. They will wail because He has come down and given them what they have deserved for so long. I wonder how many of us will from time to time not offer up true worship to God. How many of us at one point or another worshipped the Lord with what we thought He wanted to hear merely out of duty?

This hopefully once in a long while occurrence that we tend to fall into had become the only method of worship in Israel. None of it was genuine and vibrant. All of it was choreographed! But when the Lord brings judgment, for the first time in a long while, the Israelites will respond genuinely to His presence, but it will not be the presence they wanted.

Here we see from the prophet more compounding of God's name, the covenantal name and the word we would use for “Mister” or “Sir,” adonai. We see this in passages in Amos where the prophet refers to God's destructive and wrathful judgment. It is often coupled with the title God of Hosts in Amos, but not this time. However, the compounding shows God's transcendence and His anger. It reminds the people of what God is capable of in His wrath.

Then we see the results of God's destructive vengeance upon the people. Why are they wailing instead of singing? Because when God came through just like in the Passover with the angel of death, many died and the bodies began to pile up. When this happened to Egypt, Israel was saved. But God is now coming for Israel. The result will not be the same for the people of God on this Day.

The bodies can be found anywhere piled up. There is no place that there are not dead bodies. Every place in Israel is affected, showing the theme we have seen over and over in this book, that God's judgment and justice, even when against the people He loves, is complete and final. No one escapes! The bodies being thrown down show the utter decay and the Lord's complete vengeance. This is where we get the idea that the bodies are just piled up. Being thrown down also speaks of the high position this people once had with the Lord ending. Satan was cast down from heaven, as another example.

Also for the second time in the book, we have the idea of the word “Hush!” or “Silence!” The last time this was introduced by Amos was when the cremator came to the house of dead to

find if any had survived, and when he heard the reply “No one,” he sought to keep the person inside from praying that God would come and visit, because God was the one who had killed the people in the house. Here, it may have some of the same connotations.

The idea is probably that of the people crying out to God without effect because God is the one bringing the judgment. While the people are crying out and wailing in the temple, “Oh God! Help us!” God is saying, “I am the reason you are needing help! It is your sin that you have not turned from that is bringing My wrath! Stop asking for help, for it will not come as part of your punishment.”

8:4 “Hear this, you who trample on the poor, you who bring to an end the poor of the land!”

The command of God is to hear what He is about to say, the verdict He renders as He destroys the people for their sins. He will list the thoughts of their heart, their innermost attitude that has drawn His wrath. He starts with one of the biggest injustices of the people. In their wealth, they have trampled the poor and brought them to an end.

Back in Amos 2:8, we have seen this verb for trample before. There, the Lord uses even stronger imagery, talking about how they had trampled the head of the poor into the dust. Here, he reminds them with the same word of their trampling. The verb shares the imagery of striving against, pestering. It contains the idea of surviving on the fuel of draining the poor, stealing their very livelihood, even though it was not needed by the wealthy. In our culture we have a phrase that would have been apropos for the poor to say to the rich, “Don’t tread on me.”

The greed of the rich left the poor with nothing, starving out a meager existence while they lived in the lap of luxury and ignored the poor. They made sure that their strangle hold on the poor would mean the death and demise of the whole class, one life after another. Such insolence against the decrees and heart of God angered Him enough to destroy the society the wealthy had set up through exile.

That would be the instrument of God’s changing the plight of the poor. It came down to destroying what was there and starting over, because the wealthy refused to repent and change the system. God would change it instead. But the wealthy could have chosen the lesser painful road of repentance over exile.

8:5 “You who say, ‘When will the new moon pass by so that we can sell grain? And the Sabbath so that we can offer wheat, to make small the ephah and to make large the shekel and bend the balances for fraud,’

The prophet takes on the merchants who were using unlawful and immoral practices of selling and buying. Foremost in their attitude is the true heart for the god of profit rather than the God of Israel. Their base sin is not their wicked dealings, which are a byproduct of the root issue of idolatry. They hate all the events that surround the Jewish religious calendar. They hate the New Moon festivals because they cut into the time they could be selling and buying. They hate

that every six days they lose a day of profits. They care more about the god of money and wealth than the God of Israel.

In Jewish law, no one could work on the Sabbath or during the festivals. And Israel truly had many festivals and celebration, not to mention the Sabbath, which occurred every week. These merchants are fed up with having to close up shop and pass up opportunities to make money. But that is not God's only issue with these merchants.

Their methods of business also grieve the Lord's heart. They are cheating and cutting corners everywhere they possibly can. Whether their clients are rich or poor, it makes no difference. They will cheat anyone! Cheating in itself goes against the ways of the righteous Lord. But cheating the poor and others who do not have a way to provide for their families or to know that they are being unjustly served, that is beyond angering the Lord. That is asking for His vengeance. And so shall they have it!

It wasn't just the matter of wanting to buy and sell on the holy days. There were specific ways to cheat the system. First, Amos mentions making the ephah small. An ephah was a measurement for crops. It was half a bushel, but they would use new containers that were a little less than half a bushel and not completely fill them, so as to skimp a little off the top.

At the same time, they would make great the shekel. The shekel was the standard measurement of weight before silver. They would use the shekel, which did not have a one-on-one correlation to the currency of the silver. So someone would be cheated out of a little bit of silver when they converted their money over to the shekel. This was happening in the temple in Jesus' day as well.

Another common practice not just for Israeli merchants but for many different nations of merchants was to bend the scales. When weighing someone's purchase, the merchants would put on the scale one false weight, wrongly marked on purpose and then the amount of whatever was being purchased on the other side of the scale. They could bend the balance beam so that it did not rest in the center as well. It was an ancient form of fraud, getting more silver through using the shekel system, and then skimping on the quantity of merchandise the client should have received. They're fraudulent in both the amount of money and the quantity of what's purchased!

8:6 “to buy for silver the poor and the needy with sandals and sell refuse for wheat?”

Beyond these standard wicked business practices, the merchants are also buying the poor as slaves and the needy, those who have no help. And they are selling the worst parts of the grain instead of the best parts. First, they were buying the poor and the needy to use as slaves. This violates the spirit in which the Lord granted the law.

They are buying the poor and needy, practically synonymous terms, with silver and with shoes. They are assigning a value to a human being, which is egregious in the Lord's eyes. They are forgetting that they themselves were once slaves in Egypt. The Lord often makes mention of this throughout the Law. In fact, starting with the Ten Commandments, the rationale for giving

them is that the Lord is God over heaven and earth and that they were slaves but are now a free nation!

Slavery is a taboo in the Lord's eyes for this nation that was literally born out of slavery and brought into freedom by Him. They are sometimes using silver, the leading currency of their day. But other times, they are buying human slaves with shoes. They're paying the mere price of a pair of sandals to gain a human life! The Lord does not look kindly upon any of these practices at all! And these are the same merchants who are using the money they steal through trade to buy the finest wines and let their wives sit around on couches all day watching the poor muddle through the streets!

Finally, the Lord explicitly mentions the injustice of not just cheating through skimping on quantity, but also on the quality of their products. They are selling the refuse parts of the wheat and grain, usually referred to as the chaff, for the same profit as the very best parts of the grain. This is like when the butcher cuts the prime beef and then the stuff that is at the lower end that he usually makes into ground beef or hotdogs. The people are unknowingly paying for a hotdog thinking they're getting and paying the same price as a steak!

8:7 The Lord swore by Jacob's pride, "I will surely not forget all of their deeds!"

As with several other outbursts of anger by the Lord, the imagery becomes more and more foreboding and violent against Israel for its systematic wickedness and moral deterioration. First came false worship given to God and following that false worship came injustices bearing great reproaches and igniting the fury of the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament, the literal meaning of the anger of the Lord is "His nostrils flared." The Lord's anger can barely be contained.

In His anger the Lord actually declares an oath based on Jacob's pride. Jacob's pride, or the arrogance of Israel, is a sure thing. But is the sure thing that is upsetting the Lord, the catalyst for His wrath to be poured upon the people of Israel. In His anger, the Lord makes this oath of vengeance. He says that He will remember the injustices the people willfully and daily commit against the poor and the other injustices in their society.

In Hebrew, to make one's action stronger, they use a doubling up of the verb, following the lead verb with an infinitive. Here is no different. This adds an emotional facet to the already emphatic words of the Lord. The fact that He is using an oath against the people is heightened enough, but He also uses an intensive form of action that guarantees His intentions and His will to act. He will follow through if it's the last thing He ever does to Israel!

God hates sin and injustice. He will not forget what is done to those whom He has provided for in His law specially, those who are poor, the widow, the sojourner and the orphan. These have special places in God's heart. Violation of that law and injustice bring out the very deepest of God's rage.

8:8 “On this account, will the land not tremble and all who dwell in it, and all of it will rise like the Nile and it will sink like the Nile of Egypt.

Because it is His own chosen people, Israel, who have done this, He is within His bounds in the covenant to enforce the punishments that were written into the covenant. When He says, “On this account,” it almost sounds like a banker checking the balance, which God said He would do when He had the plumb line in His hand. He is seeing if Israel measures up. They have not!

Because they have continued willfully in their injustices and idol worship, God now reminds them that they should not be surprised when He responds as He has promised. We must not forget that God is faithful not just to fulfill His grace and goodness to us, but also faithful to judge and punish us when we do not listen and obey. His faithfulness plays on both sides of the covenant.

He asks rhetorically expecting and affirmative answer, “Will the land not tremble?” Did the Israelites think God wouldn’t respond to their wickedness? They had to have known that He would not be gracious forever. They had been sent so many prophets and so many warnings. But they ignored every one, and now they are surprised?

The land will tremble in its fear of the Lord’s vengeance. He will lay waste to the land using armies in the immediate fulfillment of these prophecies. But keep in mind that we are also talking about a larger fulfillment in the Day of the Lord at the end of time. These words are not dead to us, for they will be fulfilled permanently and perfectly at the eschaton.

Not only will the land tremble before the Lord’s fury, but the people in it who live in it will also tremble. The prophet turns to an image of the Nile that would purposefully flood in its flood stage and be dangerously low the rest of the time. It was perfect for crops in Egypt, but it could also overflow more than usual and get much less strong and cause drought. Those who lived by the Nile could easily die by the Nile. The prophet is describing also the fear of the people, it’s ebb and flow in the fulfilling wrath of God being poured out upon the earth like the Nile in flood stage.

8:9 “And it will be in that day,” declares the Lord God, “Then I will make the sun go down at midday and I will make dark upon the earth the light of day.

Once again on the day of the Lord, God will make darkness come upon the earth. We’re starting to see some apocalyptic imagery surface that will lay the foundations for New Testament references. This will be a time of darkness and horror for the people, a dark terror. Why do we experience nightmares? Because the darkness has a natural inherent image of evil, the wicked unknown. This will terrorize the people not in the usual darkness, but in the daytime!

The other terrorizing thing is not just the fears that come alive during the darkness, but the fact that the God who controls cosmic forces we don’t even understand is angry and willing to cause destructive danger to them and their whole world because of the wickedness they had

done. It's one thing to be on the receiving end of a human's wrath, but it's an entirely different matter to be on the receiving end of God's wrath! God will confuse the day and night, striking horror into those who have willfully ignored His grace. They will experience what they were calling for in chapter 5 when God brings the day of the Lord and the day is not a day of light. It is a day of darkness.

A most interesting side note is the fact that upon the cross, God caused there to be darkness upon the land from the noon hour to the third hour of the afternoon. The literal darkness symbolized the people's lostness and separation from God. It demonstrated that they could not see Jesus for who He is. The day of the Lord will bring that same lostness, that same aloneness.

8:10 “Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into funeral dirges, and I will bring upon every waist sackcloth, and upon every head baldness, and I will arrange it like mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.

After God begins to mess with the cosmos in His anger, He will turn to their fake festivals that they don't want to have anyway. He will turn them into mourning, overturn the joy of the festivals. Their worship songs and their songs of celebration will become songs sang in memory of fallen loved ones. God's vengeance will become a backdrop of their normal and religious activity as a society.

Not only will they be using festivals and songs to mourn the dead, but God's wrath will bring them to their knees. They will end up sitting in sackcloth and ashes, physically showing signs of mourning. Their heads will become bald with the stress and distress of depression and mourning, the continual state of loss. It will be as in losing one's only son or daughter and no one will want to endure the whole of God's wrath and judgment. There will be no solace, not even in their worship or their families.

8:11 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine upon the earth—not a bread famine and not thirst for water, but rather hearing the words of the Lord.

One more declaration of the Lord, which we can also take as a small separation in the section, finishes this chapter. The prophet once again gathers his might to speak against his fellow nation of Israel for the Lord. He uses that common warning sign of “Behold!” It is an attention-getting exclamation meant to grab attention. He then refers to this era yet one more time and describes another round of audiences that may think they would not be involved in that era as a weak sector of the population.

Once again we see the clear warning of the Lord that the day of vengeance is coming. It is drawing near. It is a warning to beware of what God is about to do. The people had at least 30 years of fair warning, and actually more! Yet they stopped their ears with their fingers and sang

their idol-worshipping and ignorant disingenuous songs to the Lord. Once again the compound of God's name creates the authority needed for the harsh word about to be delivered.

The era, not just a season or two, but an entire era of undetermined time will come when a famine will sweep across the whole land! But it will not be a famine like the famines of old. No, this is a famine of a whole different nature. It is not being starved from the necessity of food from bread. It is not even the dryness of being kept from the necessity of water. In this famine, people will not hunger or be parched for lack of food or water.

The people will instead shrivel up not as a medical condition, but as a spiritual condition. They will know the famine of not hearing or being in the presence of the Lord. No longer will the Lord speak to them through prophets! No longer will the people receive His personal words of wisdom! No more will God rest among His people and warn them and encourage them. They will receive the silent treatment! The worst punishment beyond all the destruction is the lack of God's presence and word! In the wake of such a spiritual inadequacy, the people will surely die not just physically, but spiritually!

Surely enough, we know that the around 430 years passed between the completion of the Old and the beginning of the New Testaments. This was the drought of the Lord's word, the time of no prophetic voice where the people of Israel operated on their own sight and their own wisdom. They did not have the word of the Lord to guide them. They wandered not in the wilderness of Sinai but in the wilderness of darkness and indecision.

It is the Word of God that brings life to us when we read it! It is the Spirit of God that brings life to our dead souls! It is Jesus, the Living Word, that brings guidance and joy and gladness all of our days! As Pentecostals, we would have such a hard time even imagining this kind of environment, where you had no connection with God. That is where you thrive, when you are connected to the Vine Jesus! May it never be said of us that God has left us on our own! May we never experience the words of Jesus to the church of Sardis, "You have the reputation of a church that lives, but you are dead!" We need the Word, the Presence, and the Spirit of the Living God, not the death of our own flesh!

8:12 "When they wander from sea to sea, and from north even to the east, and they will roam about to seek the word of the Lord, yet they will not find it.

The people because they are so desperate for their basic need of hearing from the Lord will search Him out. They will look all over upon the earth without success. They will seek Him everywhere, but they will not find Him because He has chosen to hide as part of their judgment. This is not as much punishment as it is showing them that they need the Lord's interaction!

They will wander the whole earth, the seas, from north to the east, and the rest of the directions. They will go everywhere humanly possible, devoted to finding a place where God's presence still dwells and where they may drink from the Living Water, hear from the Living Word, and see the Living God. But they will not find another place like the temple. God will

abandon them because they did not want Him! When they had Him among them, they shunned Him. When they lose Him, they will search for Him, but they have chased Him away.

8:13 “In that day the beautiful virgins and young men will faint because of thirst.

Remember that this is an image of the loss of God’s presence and guidance through His words, not a physical famine. The virgins and young men will have plenty of water and food, but they will not have that even deeper need of their souls quenched. They will wander in the wilderness of folly and fear because God is not with them.

It must be mentioned that this is the next generation the prophet refers to in this verse. Both of these groups are young. The virgins are the women who are young and unmarried and the young men are the strong and up-and-coming men of the society. There will be entire generations pass before they hear the words of the Lord again!

But for lack of the quenching of a deep spiritual thirst from the Living Water, these young people will faint. They will not have the ability to be sustained. They will grow weary and not be strong. They will learn to live on less vitality than before. This is a horrible judgment to endure! To learn to live on less will be painful, but most of all, will slowly kill the whole of Israel! To be away from God is to know death.

Eventually, they will lose the ability to be hungry or thirsty. They will lose the desire and the need for God as He is not present. They will slowly die off without hope. May we never get to a place where we don’t desire to hear from God daily! May we never see in our lives a nonchalant attitude, a cavalier approach to the altar, or the loss of passion and desire for God! For then, the fight can no longer be fought.

8:14 “Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria and say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ and ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ even they will fall and never rise again.”

Finally there were those who would swear by things when they knew that they did not have the personal character capitol to back up their word. Often, you will see in the Bible people swearing by a dear object, like their gods or by the heavens. It is still done today: “I swear on my mother’s grave...” Or in our own court system, people make an oath while their hand rests on the Bible! But oaths are not good when you speak knowing you can’t back it up with character! And when you do have character, you have no need for an oath.

So of course in Israel, there were so many men without reputable character that oath taking became extremely commonplace. Some would swear by the atonement of Samaria. This word translated guilt is also the word for the making of ritual sacrifices. They would say as the god of Dan lives. Dan was one of the northern tribes, a people who had turned to idols. The idol of Dan, not the God of Israel is the subject of this oath.

And then there’s those who would swear by the Way of Beersheba. Remember that Beersheba is another popular location for offering sacrifices that has a high place to offer them at

an altar. They were taking oaths on the “truth” that these false gods and ways existed! But we know that God’s do not exist!

More than this, the Way of Beersheba was most likely some sort of demanding system of belief. Christianity in its beginning was called “The Way” from Jesus saying, “I AM the way, the truth, and the life.” The word for way means road, means, path. It was probably a system devoted to false gods and worldly wisdom and practices.

But these people who would even make oaths that would strengthen their resolve would also fall in the Day of the Lord. There was nothing that would give anyone the strength or the speed to stand or escape. All are exposed to God’s judgment and all receive the full cup of wrath. Even these would fall in the Day of the Lord and their fall would be complete. They would not rise again. The wrath of God would be total.

Chapter 9

9:1 I saw the Lord standing beside the altar and He said, “Strike the capitals and the thresholds will quake. Then shatter them on the heads of all them. Then the rest of them I will kill with the sword. None of them will flee; not even the refugee among them will escape.

For the final time Amos has a vision of the Lord. This time, the Lord is standing beside the altar. Now this altar would be in Bethel, the main city of worship for Northern Israel. Whether the prophet is physically in Israel or has returned to Judah would not matter in a vision. We know this is a vision because he uses the verb “I saw” just as in the three visions of chapter seven and the vision in chapter eight.

While the people would expect the Lord to show up near the altar, they would not expect to hear what He commanded. The word “strike” continues the intense language of God’s responding to an Israel that refuses to turn to Him and instead willfully continues in utter sin. The sharp contrast between God’s wooing in the first couple of chapters and now His stark stranglehold on the nation are evident to any reader.

God’s plan is to begin destruction in the place where the people have increased His anger the most, in the temple where the altar is. Worship was the first and last straw. God starts by destroying the place of worship, because they have not worshipped Him in purity for a long time. So He commands someone to strike the capitals of the pillars. These are the tops of the sanctuary, the temple they had built there.

When the tops are struck, the whole building will feel the tumult even to the thresholds of the doors. If people run to the doors, they will be crushed. And then the pain is not over for the people who have half-heartedly and impurely worshipped God along with idols, or just worshipped idols altogether. God’s next command is to allow the roof to cave in and the pillars to fall upon the heads of the people!

As is the case in Amos time and time again, no one escapes the pouring out of God’s wrath. All are guilty and will experience His wrath. If it were possible to escape, those who are made refugees through the ordeal and those who escape will be killed by the sword. The Lord personally takes responsibility so that all those who are guilty of false worship receive His judgment.

9:2 “If they dig into Sheol, from there My hand will take them and if they ascend to the heavens, from there I will bring them down.

These next couple of verses will reinforce the prophet’s message that when God’s wrath is poured out, first, it will be justly poured out on all who are guilty, and second, it will be inescapable no matter what place of solitude and security the person seeks. The next section of verses will present with images places people think they can run and hide.

The first possibility is for people to escape God's wrath through death or through digging a hole. The word Sheol in the Hebrew Bible is the word for the underworld. It has been translated "pit" or just left transliterated as it is seen in Hebrew. Unlike some would suppose, it is not a one-on-one correlation with the Greek idea of Hades or Hell. It is more like a place that all souls go, almost like the idea of Purgatory, a holding place. The biggest difference is that it is not a place of torment. Merely a holding place, as far as we can understand.

We must be very careful when seeing things like Sheol in a text. The clear reference here is that God's presence is still available in Sheol, which means it is not Hell, which is a place absent of God's presence, as part of the agony. Even if His presence is there, the sinner in Hell cannot feel Him. The Jews did not have a well-defined understanding of afterlife matters. We must not put in their mouths what they would not commit to say.

The point of this message from this prophet is that the people can't hide in death. They can't even get away if they were put in Sheol. God's hand, also sometimes used as an image of His power, will take them even there. The idea of take here signals God's grabbing them from getting away from His wrath. We will see this verb a lot in the next couple of verses.

Here, the phrasing of the verse makes it sound like the people long for death. They are digging into the underworld, clawing their way into death! God's wrath will be so unbearable that the people will long to die. But they will find that they cannot get away from wrath even in death. It will find them. They will pay the full price of God's judgment. There are no deals being cut on the Day of the Lord.

Even if they try to fly away, or ascend into heaven, God will pull them away from there. No matter where they run or hide, they cannot escape. In this verse and the ones which follow, the prophet points to two extremes to explain that everything in between is the same. If in death they either go high or low, they will still see wrath. So all places vertically in between will also be no match for God's wrath. Escaping is not an option.

9:3 "Even if they hide on the peak of Carmel, from there I will track them down and take them. Even if they conceal themselves from My eyes on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them."

Now instead of places in the afterlife to go, the prophet keeps the same vertical parameters, but also leaves them upon the earth. Mount Carmel was the highest peak in Israel's land. And the depths of the sea were considered a great place to hide, underwater where no one can breathe very long. The people of Amos' time would hide in the caves and crevices of the mountains. They were easily defensible as we have seen in Obadiah.

Mountains for these reasons were considered the safest places in the nation in times of war. They were hard to take from the ground up. Also, the height of the mountain, it being the tallest, shows that the people would go beyond the norm to feel safe in God's wrath, but God would track them down in the mountain hiding places as well, probably using the armies of their

enemy nations in about 30 years. Assyria was coming for them, and God was on the side of the Assyrians this time!

The language here is of a search and siege method for the military. Right now, our military in Iraq and Afghanistan are seeing this same tactic. The enemy runs up in the mountains and waits out the military because they know they can defend the mountains and they know all the caves. Our soldiers are on their turf. They feel secure, and this is how the people would react to Assyria, but it would do them no good.

The lowest region they could go would be to hide in the depths of the sea. The only problem with this was that they could only breathe so long. Another issue was that God would command the serpents that live in the sea to bite them and kill them. The idea was that God could not see into the depths of the sea to find them. But God is not like humans. While humans can only see so far down in water, God not only can see but has command over the creatures in the sea. His sovereignty is everywhere and they will not escape His grasp.

The image here is of playing cosmic hide and seek with the God of the universe. The people may try to play, but they will not win. God will make them responsible for their treatment of Him. Where He had offered tons of mercy and grace, they had only offered idolatry and unfaithfulness. They did not even try to worship Him or listen to Him. For their hard response to His soft words, God will not bring a hard response to their hard hearts. And they will not stand in the day of His judgment.

9:4 “Even if they walk into captivity in front of their enemies, from there I will command the sword. Then it will slay them, and I will set My eyes against them for calamity and not good.”

The Lord continues to offer other places of hiding that will not work for the people trying to flee His wrath. Perhaps, and this for the Israelites would be worse than the previous propositions, the people would willingly and readily go into captivity and exile so that they could escape God’s wrath. First of all, captivity is part of God’s wrath, so even in the exile they are experiencing at least part of the ramifications of God’s wrath.

Second, they would not escape even in the exile. If they thought they had it easy in the foreign land, their lives would always be hanging in the balance. They would be treated like slaves in foreign lands. At any time their lives could be taken because no one cared about their citizenship, because they were not citizens. They would be treated like mere animals. In some cultures, the captives are led by the victors. But in others, the captives are pushed throughout the city and the spoils of war go first so that the people of the city can mock the slaves and then applaud the victorious soldiers. In this prophecy, the spoils would go before the victors.

We see this in the captives walking before or in front of their enemies. But even if they think they are safe in exile, God will command the sword to take their lives. He will slay them even in the foreign lands. There would be nothing worse, no greater shame, than dying by the sword in a land that is not their home. God personifies the serpent and the sword in the past two

verses, commanding them to do His bidding. Even the created things obey the Lord more than the Israelites have obeyed Him.

Finally, God makes the promise that He will look upon the Israelites differently than He has in the past. Instead of looking upon them as His chosen people and His children, He will look upon them as those who need to be punished. He will allow calamity to happen instead of good. He will not stop it from happening as He had in the past. He will not defend Israel any longer. God's throwing in the towel! The word for calamity here is the word for evil, but not moral evil. It is an evil that exists in creation since the Fall, inaugurated by humanity's rebellion, but affecting the natural world around us as well. Calamity is the idea here, not moral depravity.

9:5 Then the Lord God of Hosts who strikes the land so it wavers. Then all who dwell in it will mourn while all of it rises up like the Nile and it sinks like the Nile of Egypt,

The prophet will once again provide a description of God that should put some fear into the people who are willfully sinning against Him. I have noticed as a translator that when these descriptive sections appear in the Bible, they are hard to translate and fully grasp, sometimes having unusual constructions and unfamiliar words, because it is heightened speech trying to describe the indescribable God of the universe.

The first image of God that Amos uses is the image of a God who is the God of Hosts. This title compounds God's names once again so that the people of Israel see that God is not just one who festers in His anger but has no power to carry out His threats. He is the God who controls all the armies of the universe. He will come against them in battle and have His vengeance!

This is the God who holds the whole earth in His hands and can do as He wishes. It reminds me of the image of a human holding a fish bowl. If the person wants to shake the fish bowl, then all the stuff inside will swish around under the control and power of the human. God in the same way beats the land, strikes it with His might, and it wavers back and forth like the waves. Can you imagine land acting like waves? Earthquakes and the like are nothing like what God will bring in His vengeance.

In fact, that is exactly what the prophet likens the movement of the earth in its wavering or melting. He speaks of the Nile's explosive flood and famine stages. While this sea-like action is happening, those who live upon the earth are living in fear and probably mourning the deaths of others who have been affected by the rumblings and waverings of the land, the shaking.

The Nile had two main stages. One of them was a flood stage in which people who lived too close to the river would find their homes destroyed. It would come up into the fertile farm land and flood it with water in the middle of the desert. But then it would sink back down to normal size and even get smaller than usual. This would leave the land to be farmed with the proper rich soil made by the water. But the earth will be like this unpredictable river in Egypt. And these world travelers who enjoyed the very finest wares of all the nations would have been familiar with Egypt.

9:6 who builds in the heavens His upper chamber, and His vault over the earth He established, who calls to the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth – The Lord is His name!

The description of the Lord continues into this next verse as Amos describes God as the one who builds His dwelling place out of the reach of humanity in the skies or in the heavens. We can't even get to the place where God lives, let alone defend the land against His wrath. The word for upper chamber is very hard to translate here. It doesn't seem to fit, but in descriptive passages of God, this will be a common occurrence. It resembles the stairs or the high place.

The next word is also hard to translate as well, not used very often in all of the Hebrew Scriptures. Most translate it as "vault." We don't know what this is, other than another building of the Lord. He builds it upon the earth, or encompassing the earth. It could refer to the atmosphere or something else. We don't really know. But that is the point of this passage, that we don't even understand the very basics of God's dwelling or His buildings, let alone are we able to defend ourselves or even go on the offensive against Him.

This is the same God who not only made the earth and made things we don't understand, but He also is the one who commands all things, showing His absolute sovereignty over creation. God is not a God who creates and then goes and hides or watches from afar. He is the one who controls the waters, making them come upon the land in floods and through rivers and seas. God is the one who decides where a lake goes or what happens in a stream. He is so great that we can't even fathom Him. His reputation precedes Him as the covenant-keeping Lord. And His name is as strong as His works and abilities. He is completely transcendent!

9:7 "Are you not like the sons of Ethiopia to Me, O sons of Israel?" declares the Lord, "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt? And the Philistines from Crete? And the Arameans from Kir?"

Not only is God the God who moves the seas where He wishes and does whatever He wants with all of creation, but He is the God who changes human history. He moves nations wherever He wants and decides how history will also play out. He can move the nation of Israel out of Egypt, the Philistines from Crete across the Mediterranean to Canaan, the Aramites or Arameans to Kir. God moves whole nations around!

The Philistines, it is believed upon fairly solid evidence, were a pirate like sea-faring people that probably originated on the island of Crete in the midst of the Mediterranean. The Ethiopians lived in the land of Cush and possibly at one time in the Negev. God could manipulate their place of living at any time He wished, which is His point in asking these questions of Himself, reminding the Israelites that He can involve Himself in any nation's history or makeup, including Israel's.

Once more, this final chapter is bringing full circle the opening chapters in which the prophet gained an audience by declaring oracles against the nations, of which the Philistines and Aramites are mentioned. These declarations in chapter nine take into account those decisions on where they would be. God controlled much more than the Israelites thought, and He would also do whatever He willed with the nation of Israel. Although chosen as God's people, it would not escape His wrath when it did not fulfill the covenant.

9:8 “Behold! The eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will exterminate it from upon the face of the land. Nevertheless, I will not completely exterminate the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord.

Once again, the common exclamation to grab attention is used as the prophet speaks God's words to His people. Earlier God said that His eyes would allow for calamity to come to Israel. Now, He says that His eyes are on the sinful kingdom. Where He allowed calamity to come their way, now He will personally judge all of the sinners in the land of the people. He will “separate the wheat from the chaff,” as Jesus would later put it about the Day of the Lord being prophesied here.

God's desire is to rescue those who need rescued and to exterminate those who are sinners. He wishes to, as from the beginning, live amongst His people. But a holy God must remove the unholiness and wickedness from among His people before He can fully dwell with them. While this sounds like pure vengeance, God is making a distinction. He wants to be with His true people, but they are mixed up with the sinners in the nation.

God says that He will exterminate the sinful kingdom, not the whole kingdom. He will remove the kingdom of sinners, not the whole kingdom. This is an important distinction to see. The Day of the Lord has two sides to it, and it is not a matter of physical or human nations but of two kingdoms. One kingdom is the Kingdom of God, made up of God's people who have accepted and obey His Son. The other kingdom is the kingdom of darkness and sin. That is what God will weed out or sift out.

This is why God follows the first sentence by saying that He will not completely exterminate Israel, the house of Jacob. There are multiple fulfillments in this prophecy. First, if you take it historically, God left a remnant in the Exile. Some of the people stayed in the land of Israel. But more than this, on the Day of Judgment, those who are holy, God's people, will not endure the wrath of God against sinners. They will be saved out of God's wrath. The sinners, on the other hand, will fully endure His vengeance for their sin which has been angering Him since the Fall.

9:9 “Therefore, behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among the nations just as it is shaken in a sieve, yet not a pebble will fall to the ground.

This would have been a surprise, a new thought, for the Israelites to have their own national God come against them. That is how they viewed God all too often, their God, the God of their nation. Every nation had national gods that they worshipped specifically out of the pantheons. Israel saw God this way instead of Him being the sovereign God over all the universe, as we have noticed throughout the prophets. Most of the time, He is reminding them of this fact.

Because God is indeed transcendent and will punish those in the nation who are sinners, He once again warns them with the exclamatory “Behold!” He’s the one in charge, commanding His will into human history and reality. He’s going to shake their nation like never before. Amos uses the image of a sieve, an instrument to sift the sands from pebbles, used to find metals in sand, and that type of thing. It would have a small screen and a frame. One would pick it up and sift out the smaller materials, leaving the desired precious materials.

God was going to shake the house of Jacob because national Israel was not necessarily completely the pure people of God. National Israel was not a one-on-one correlation with the Kingdom of God. Some Israelites in the nation were sinners that God would sift out through wrath and vengeance.

Even in the Church today, not everyone is a born again bonifide member of the people of God, the Kingdom of God. There are false teachers and prophets in the Church, nominal Christians and other groups like cults that think they are Christian, but are not. This is not to raise a banner of suspicion but to remind us that nothing is completely known by us. It is up to God to judge in His houses.

9:10 “By the sword all the sinners of My people will die, those who say, ‘Calamity will not come near or meet us.’

The reason we know for sure that God is not just speaking of the sojourners and guests, Gentiles living among the Israelites, that were the target of God’s vengeance, look at how He describes these sinners who will mourn on the Day of Judgment rather than rejoice with the people of God.

He says that all the “sinners of My people will die.” This can be taken as meaning that the sinners are among the people, but it is more likely that the sinners are part of the whole of the nation of Israel. In other words, these are Israelites that have the outward appearances of the people of God, such as circumcision, and yet at the same time are not part of God’s people. They will experience judgment, dying by the sword, not salvation.

These sinners are further described as those who mock God’s warnings. They say that His Word is not true. They say He will not allow calamity to touch them. They think they’re indestructible, that they can hide behind His protection, as if He does not know their true nature. But this is not so. They mock God, calling Him a liar, specifically and categorically standing up against the word He has brought, saying it is not so.

This reminds me of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say?” Questioning God is rebellion. And rebellion’s punishment comes in the Day of the Lord. People like the priest of Bethel are leading a different way than God is. They will pay a high price in the pouring out of His wrath, as we have already seen at the end of chapter seven.

9:11 “In that day, I will raise up the fallen booth of David and repair its breaches. Even its ruins I will raise up and fortify it as in the days of old.

This is the day of the Lord being referred to in which God sets right the fortunes and destinies of all people. After weeding out the wicked, God turns to the righteous. The first promise for that day is that He will raise up the fallen booth of David. This is probably a reference to Israel as a whole nation. Historically, David’s booth or house or people had fallen from God’s grace, splintering into the northern and southern kingdoms, committing evil against the Lord.

Now He will pick them up from the depths to which they had fallen and dust them off. He will bring them back into the place of prominence that they once had. Whether you take this as the literal nation of Israel, or if you would say it is the whole people of God, God is going to do some restorative work in His people. The imagery here is the same as raising and repairing the walls of Jerusalem after the exile in the time of Nehemiah. But it is not just a historical promise. It is also a promise of redemption for the Day of the Lord in the eschaton.

The breaches in the wall are being repaired by rebuilding the wall. The idea here is that where the wall is missing, it will be rebuilt. Where it simply has breaches, it will be repaired. There is a complete restoration of God here. Not one part of the ruins will be left in the dust. The whole of the city will be raised once again.

The whole of the godly nation will be restored completely. God will leave nothing in ruins, just as no one could escape His wrath who deserved it. The fortifying of the cities and the nation brings back the security the Lord took away. We can only find our security, our sense of safety, in God alone! It will be like it used to be when the people walked with God in their golden age as a nation. It will be for us like when Adam walked in the cool of the day with the Lord.

9:12 “So that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations which are called by My name,” declares the Lord who does this.

God has a purpose for restoring the people to their land and restoring their walls and defenses was for their ability to once again take control of the complete land He had promised them. They were not just to possess the land, but the people of Edom’s land that had belonged to them. As we have seen before, Edom tended to steal land away from Israel and Judah, especially Judah.

This will not just be about one nation, Edom, but about all the nations that God redeems. Notice that this is in the Old Testament, not the New! It is there as well, but it has its roots in the promises of God for the nations. The nations are God's inheritance. He is going to possess them through His people at the proper time. They belong to Him. That's what it means when they are called by His name.

Throughout history, victors would rename cities after themselves. God will possess what He has given His name. These nations have God's name on them. Name means ownership. And the Lord is the one who makes them possessions. He is the one rebuilding and restoring. He is the one who is doing all of these wonderful things that bring harmony and peace to Israel.

9:13 “Behold the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the plow will overtake the reaper and the treader upon grapes the sower of seed, when the mountains will drip sweet wine and all the hills will dance.

Unlike most of the other prophecies that call for the people's attention, “Behold!” here is not a warning but rather a calling to come and see. It is an exclamation of happiness, not despair. God now speaks of a time in Israel's history and in the future for all of His people where the abundance of their labor will exceed their labor.

This will be a time where the people cannot even plant fast enough before the blessing of harvest is upon them. God will make them very fruitful in every work. Those who plow will overtake those who are trying to gather the harvest. Those who prepare the wine by using the wine press will not be able to produce fast enough before more grapes are ready. Abundance will reign throughout the land. All will be once again right with the world. Destiny will not be hindered for creation or for humans!

The mountains will pour out sweet wine and all of the wonderful things that come from them. Everything will have its abundance and the hills will dance as unto the Lord! This word I have translated “dance” is the same word used earlier in the wavering of the land, the tossing of the land like the sea in God's judgment, just like the Nile. This word has been translated by most “melt” but it is not the idea of melting in this context. It is the idea of happiness. Just as the land responded to God's wrath, the land and all of creation will respond to God's joy and abundance.

9:14 “I will also bring back the captives of My people Israel. Then they will rebuild the ruined cities and dwell *in them*. Then they will plant vineyards and drink their wine. They will also make gardens and eat their fruit.

Not only will God restore the land and the cities and the land will once again flow with blessing for the remnant that never left, but God is also going to bring back those who were led into captivity. They will have a homecoming to return to Israel and Judah. Even those who were led into captivity are still God's people. And the restoration is happening in this Day of the Lord.

The captives will return from exile and rebuild. They will make for themselves a home again in their homeland. Then they will plant vineyards for food and drink and also enjoy the fruits of their harvesting. They will find that everything they put their hands to will be blessed and will prosper naturally. God is going to let the blessings of the land flow for the people who inherited the land. Even in the exile, the people of God were given the hope that they could return.

9:15 “Then I will also plant them in their land and they will not be uprooted again from in their land which I gave to them,” says the Lord our God.

Just like the people would plant their crops, their gardens, their vineyards, and live off of the produce of the land, the people themselves would be like flowers and plants that God would plant in the land He had promised to them. Just like the plants, they would flourish in their homeland once again.

All of this imagery is of new life and planting of new harvests. It is the message of hope and abundance, of prosperity. God will grant it to those who have suffered through the exile, learning that when God is their source instead of wealth, wealth comes as a blessing from the Source! Instead of worshipping wealth, they would worship God and wealth would be a byproduct of God’s joy in their worship.

God promised that the people of the land would not be uprooted again. They could lay down roots for good. They were not refugees who come into a land and don’t lay down roots because they are transient nomads who may have to move again. God promised prosperity, security, and growth. He promised that they would not be taken from their inheritance again. This will ultimately be fulfilled in the end times.

The inheritance for national Israel was the land. The inheritance for us is to live with God forever. It is coming in the end of time. God will grant it all. To assure these promises, God stamps His approval by calling Himself not just the Lord God but the Lord our God. For almost all of this prophecy, God stood aloof and ignored the people, but now He once again is willing to be called their God rather than just the Lord God. The personal relationship with His people is also restored. Let the days of restoration come quickly!