

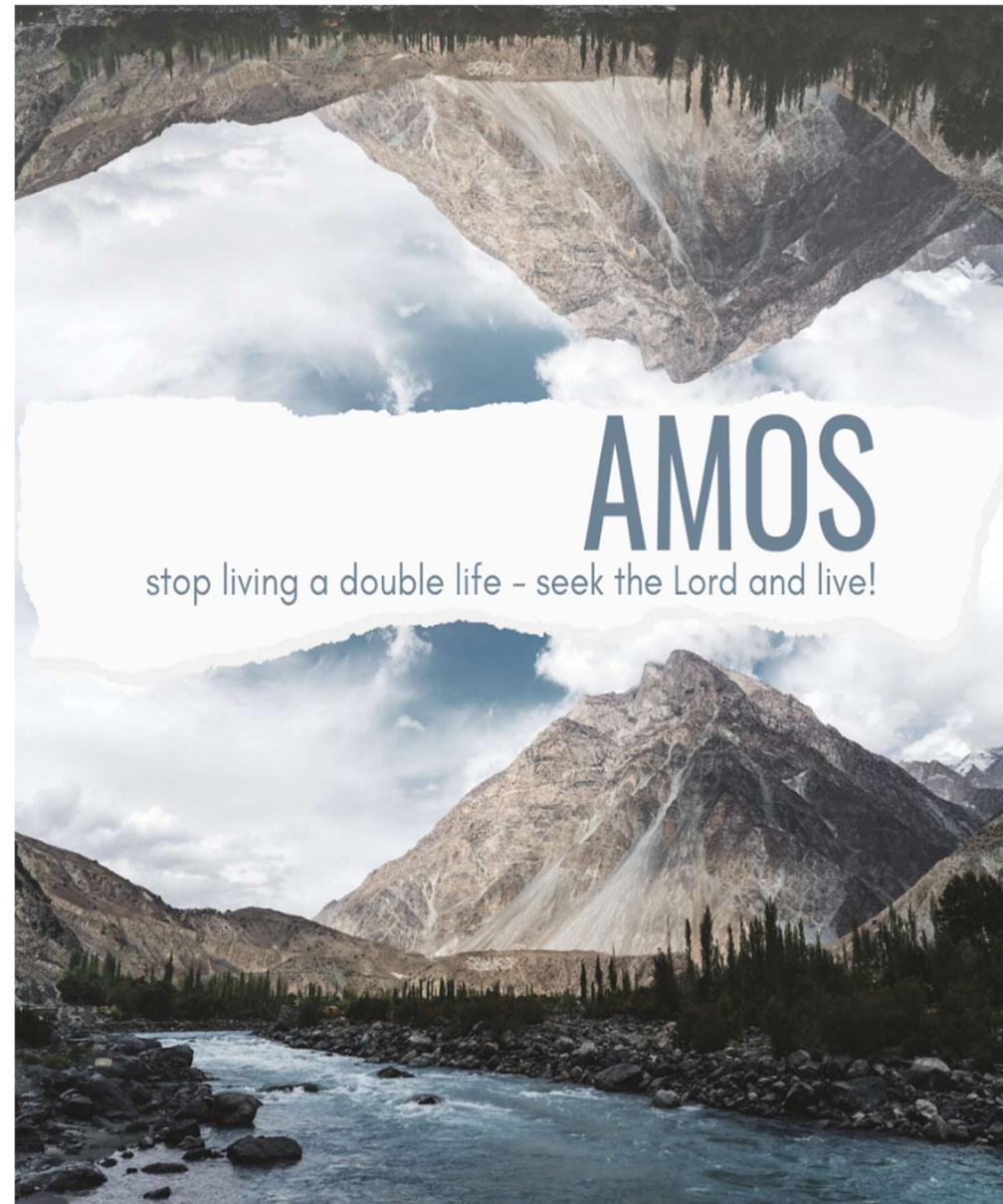
entire prophecy, “woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria” (6:1). Today’s passage unfolds in three distinct phases.

1. God challenges their complacency (6:1-3): It’s notable that God is not just speaking to the Northern Kingdom here. Judah is also rebuked for their love of ease and comfort. God directs their attention to other kingdoms that are even smaller with less military might than Israel. This is akin to us when we compare our sanctification with those around us: “Well I know I am not perfect, but at least I’m better than...”. As one commentator writes, “Israel is just a big fish in a small puddle”. If Israel feels secure by comparison to these small city states, then they need to think again. Their complacency has been counterproductive. It has only brought the day of exile and reckoning closer (6:3).
2. God puts an end to their wealth (6:4-7): As has been already mentioned, Israel lived lavishly. And that has resulted in the injustice and oppression of those in need. Israel became completely inward focused. Their own pleasure and entertainment mattered more than anything else. But their “revelry... shall pass away” (6:7). They should have grieved over the ruins of Joseph their forefather, and the spiritual welfare of their nation. But their God was no longer Yahweh, it was mammon.
3. God puts an end to their power (6:8-14): Pride proceeds the fall (v.8). Israel had trusted in its own resources and military might. But as Psalm 20:7 warns, it is foolish to put your trust in princes and chariots, rather than the Lord. This is a needed word for our own day as well. Regardless of who controls the government in our nation, it is still the Lord who rules and reigns overall. Israel boasted in their past success, failing to recognize it was the Lord who gave victory (6:13).

In 1 Samuel 4, after the Ark had been captured by the Philistines, the wife of Phineas was pregnant and called the boy, “Ichabod”, for the glory had departed from Israel. Ichabod may have been written over Israel by Amos once again in redemptive history, but over the true Israel of God’s people, the church, is written “Jesus Christ”, who is the glory of God and Saviour of sinners! What a glorious reality and hope!

Q1. Where are we putting our trust? Material possessions? Numerical success?

Q2. Does Christ truly satisfy the longings of our hearts? Or are we like Israel of old, seeking fulfillment in more places?



FAMILY WORSHIP BOOKLET

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law, day after day, and that the people of God were filled with joy!

The Old Testament prophets speak of this day as both the culmination of God's judgement, but also of his divine visitations of his providence throughout redemptive history. Simply put, the day of the Lord brings justice, and is not a trivial matter. But, as we've already mentioned in this series in Amos, Israel was more concerned with God's judgement of their enemies than they were awakened to the reality of their own spiritual condition. They were expectant that God would judge others and vindicate themselves. They falsely believed God would always be on their side, no matter how they lived. Like a volcano that was building up towards a dramatic eruption, so is God's wrath against sin being stored up for that great day.

Amos confronts Israel that this day, rather than being looked forward to, should be met with fear since it will bring "darkness, not light." (5:18). The prophet illustrates this with a story. It's as if a man escapes the prowling of a lion, and then luckily also evades the threat of a bear, and then, feeling himself safe and secure in his own home, is fatally bitten by a venomous snake (5:19). Israel presumed upon God's favour. They assumed their enemies were without and not within. A sinner's real enemy, of course, is always themselves.

The Lord then rehearses what he despises about their hypocrisy in worship, their false offerings and entertainment driven music - aimed not at honouring the Lord, but pleasing themselves. The only alternative is righteousness and justice. Instead of living a double-life, God's people are to live in covenant faithfulness to the pattern of holiness God has prescribed in His word.

Despite all their empty words and haughty prayers, Israel has essentially become a pagan nation. And God will send them into exile. May we never become so presumptuous or complacent that it would likewise be true of us, that we would be sent away from His presence, instead of being welcomed in His mercy.

Q1. What is the danger of presuming upon God's grace and favour?

Q2. Is the Day of the Lord to be welcomed or feared? Why or why not?

Friday - Amos 6:1-14 - Beware a life of ease!

The false gospel of "health, wealth, and prosperity" is popular in today's North American Christianity. But, here in the book of Amos, we see what God really thinks about our desire to live for ourselves and our own comfort.

The shepherd prophet from Tekoa speaks to a people who believe they are safe and blessed, but are, in reality, living in a fantasy. To them and their complacency comes perhaps the most famous words of his

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church there, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” (Rev. 3:1).

Israel seemed alive and thriving. But things are not always what they seem. It’s often said, “not everything that glitters is gold”. Many churches in our own day enjoy great numerical success, and offer numerous programs and activities for their congregants. Their budgets are big, and from all outward appearances God seems to be blessing them. But from God’s point of view, who sees things we do not, a church can be dead from apostasy and idolatry. One preacher suggests, “Apostasy, however magnificent its panoply and power, will perish for lack of a real soul.”

God then challenges, through His prophet, the church in the Old Testament. All of these problems have been referred to or alluded to already in Amos. Problems of false worship, moral debauchery, and social injustice, among others. Two quick thoughts of application:

1. Man-pleasing and manufactured religion ultimately leads to death: Jesus himself warns against such a lifestyle when he casts away those who claim to be religiously successful, but they never truly were in a saving relationship (Matt. 7:22-23). God promises at the end of v. 16-17 that unrepented sin will be judged. Just like the angel of death passed through Egypt, now the Lord will pass through Israel.
2. The offer of the Gospel is our only hope: In the midst of all the doom mentioned in this passage, v.6 jumps off the page of the text as a shining beacon of hope! Regardless of who we are or what we’ve done. Our only hope is to seek the Lord in order to have eternal life. And Jesus is the only way to that blessed salvation (John 14:6).

Q1. What similarities are there between the Northern Kingdom during the time of Amos, and King David in Psalm 23? What are the dissimilarities?

Q2. What needs to change in our own hearts, attitudes, and actions to avoid “man-made religion” and to be sure we are seeking the Lord?

Thursday - Amos 5: 18-27 - The Day of the Lord.

I remember how excited my wife and I were for the birth of our son. We counted down the days until that moment finally arrived (June 7, 2013). We expected that day to be filled only with celebration and rejoicing, but it soon turned into a day also of great worry and anxiety. Thankfully, our son is healthy and well now, but on the day of his birth, due to an unforeseen medical condition, we didn’t know if he would survive.

Israel, in the eighth century, was looking forward to a special day as well. This is the earliest expression in the Scriptures of the phrase, “the Day of the Lord”. In the New Testament it is often a reference to the second coming of Christ, wherein the day of judgment shall take place.

Monday – Amos 4:1-5 - What’s in a name?

The classic children’s rhyme, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is well-meaning, but everyone who has ever been called a name knows how powerful words can be. God himself uses “name-calling” throughout the Bible, though not in the way we think of bullies on the playground. Think of the “sons of thunder” (Mk.3:17) or “I will call you Peter” (Matt. 16:18). God uses names to describe and illustrate a reality about the person identified. In our passage today, God, through Amos, intends to make a very serious point about the women in Israel when he addresses them as, “Cows of Bashan”. While this description is not very flattering, God is not intending to hurl insults about their appearance. It was a wake-up call to convict them of their sin. “Cows of Bashan” is a reference to the fine cattle from the rich pastures of the land. God is condemning the women of Israel for being utterly materialistic. They have no second thoughts about oppressing the poor or crushing the needy to satisfy their desires. No different are they than their husbands, who seek a life of ease and comfort at the expense of righteousness and justice. Saying, in v. 1, “Bring, that we may drink!” is an indictment against their excessive abuse of alcohol and their drunken lifestyle.

The descriptions listed in the text are not to give us the false impression that the Israelites are outwardly coarse and gross in their wickedness. In a very real sense, these were normal people living in an affluent and high-cultured society. These people are even church-goers! They go to Bethel and Gilgal (as Amos taunts their lifeless formalism) which were the golden-calf sites of Israel’s worship that were set up by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:26-33). They brought tithes and offerings every three days, even though God only commanded the tithe on an annual basis, as well as a yearly sacrifice. But these people are very religious! However, their religion is devoid of obedience to God’s commands, which is a foul stench to the Lord. As one commentator writes, “to approach God with your lips, while your heart is far from him, is a most basic manifestation of contempt for God.”

Israel’s lack of concern for God, and pride-filled obsession with its own publicity and security, serves as a reminder that sin is always a matter of the heart rather than the hand. These covenant people of God have destroyed any inward integrity, despite their outward and shallow show of piety. And God has seen enough. The cows of Bashan are pictured as fish about to be “hooked” by God’s judgement and the invasion of their enemy, the Assyrians (v. 2-3).

And yet, we as readers today are invited, even in the middle of a prophecy of judgment, to cling to the offer and hope of redemption. We

are challenged to choose life instead of spiritual death. As we will read on Wednesday, Amos will call us all to “seek the Lord and live”! (5:6).

Q1. What is the significance of a name in the Bible?

Q2. What does God’s challenge to Israel to do “what you so love to do” (v.5) tell us what God thinks of worship? Are we free to do what feels right, even if God hasn’t commanded it?

Tuesday – Amos 4:6-13 - Clear Warnings.

When the Assyrian empire invaded the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C., whatever else could be said by the children of Israel, one thing they could not claim was that they were never warned. God’s people were supposed to have known better. They were not heathens or pagan nations, who only had creation and providence to teach them about their creator - they had God’s law and commands, His special revelation. The fact that they disregarded His revealed will and law, and remained unmoved by Amos’ message, is all the more justification for God’s righteous anger against them. In our passage today five clear warnings from past judgments are mentioned:

1. God sent famine to the land (4:6) - Despite the lack of bread and food, and their “cleanness of teeth” - which today sounds positive, but not in this context - Israel remained obstinate and did not turn to the Lord.
2. God withheld the rain for harvest (4:7) - There were great droughts experienced in various parts of the kingdom. Still then, despite traveling to other cities just to drink water, they remained unrepentant.
3. God sent a plague of locusts (4:9) - This should have alerted Israel to what the Lord was doing. This was not the first time God sent locusts in the bible. Previously it was in Egypt in order to deliver His covenant people. Now He is sending them as judgment for their sin.
4. God sent other varieties of plagues (4:10) - God now points out explicitly to trigger their memories - He has done this before in the face of oppression and idolatry! Remember Egypt? You are not in good company, Israel.
5. God overthrew some in Israel as He did Sodom and Gomorrah (4:11) - Here the reference is to earthquakes that destroyed towns and villages. Israel was to hear directly that their recent natural disasters were no mere happenstance of weather. God is telling them He is behind it all! That can be a great comfort or terrifying! And despite these clear warnings, the people paid no attention. They continued in their double-life and refused to follow the Lord. God’s grace was evident in the past. There was still time to turn. Yet no positive response is recorded. And so, what will God now do? v. 12 is the shift. God says emphatically, “therefore”, because of

Israel’s lack of repentance and obedience, He will now challenge them. We are never told what “this” and “thus” are in v.12, but its result is a summons to appear before Yahweh himself. Like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, Israel thought they were right with God. But now they will discover how far off they truly are. It is time to meet God. And that’s true for all people, everywhere. All men and women must appear before God eventually (Rom. 14:10).

These warnings are opportunities for us today, who still yet have time (though how much time none of us is assured). Let us, as God’s people, examine our lives. Is there something in our lives that God may be using to challenge or convict us? Are we neglecting His word? Are we disobeying it or adding to it? Do we love our own rituals and traditions more than we love God himself? Are we walking in light or darkness, not just in our outward actions but in our hearts? Let us, in and through Jesus Christ, walk in newness of life!

Q1. Who is behind all the judgement coming upon Israel?

Q2. How did the people respond to God’s warnings to them? How did the people respond to the clear warnings?

Q3. What lessons are there in this for us today?

Wednesday - Amos 5:1-17 - Seek the Lord and live!

Despite the warnings of impending judgment, there remains in Amos a hint of the possibility of coming to the Lord afresh. These warnings were intended to put the fear of God into Israel. And we know from Proverbs that reverence and fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom and spiritual life. In our passage today we read of Amos’ lament for fallen Israel (5:1-3), as well as a passionate plea for God’s covenant people, even at the 11th hour of their national existence, to “seek the Lord and live!”

One commentator says the Northern kingdom, like the Psalmist, is now walking through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23). But, unlike David, Israel is not trusting the Lord for deliverance. She is heading towards destruction with no signs of stopping or slowing down. This opening section of chapter 5 reads almost like an obituary of the ten tribes of the north. They are “fallen”, never to rise again (v.2). Israel is called a virgin, not because she is pure and undefiled, but because she has remained independent and self-sustained up until now. She has not been “taken” by anyone else. She is her own nation. But this will soon end. Never to rise again! So will perish a part of the Old Testament church, what some might call a denomination. These words of lament are a faint foreshadowing of the church in Sardis from Revelation 3. Jesus says to the