

Introduction

God’s Word through Amos comes to a crossroads of sort in this chapter where what has been spoken of as a curse which will produce judgment gives way to an oath confirming it will most certainly take place. This combination creates the strongest possible assurance from God, who is incapable of not fulfilling and carrying out His Word, that a final judgment is coming from which He will not relent and will be nothing short of inevitable. And yet against this backdrop of the finality of God’s Word to the contrary, there are those who are not merely ignoring it, but actually living to the contrary, “those who are at ease in Zion”. We should especially note that the message through Amos is being delivered to those who are supposed to be most in tune with God’s Word and ways, and yet their lifestyle contrary to God’s Word has rendered them incapable of understanding the working of God’s Word in their own time. If you truly believe that Christ is about to return, and that prophetic fulfillments have already begun to take place, how should you live in the shadow of the onset of the ultimate fulfillment of “the day of the Lord”? But here we are presented with an inside look into the biblical definition of “apostasy” and the true meaning of what it means to permanently fall away spiritually.

Read verses 1-3

Q: What, exactly, is a “woe”?

1. Jesus pronounced a “woe” against the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Mt. 11:20-24) for not repenting in the presence of all the miracles He performed in them, stating, “*You will descend to Hades*”.
2. Jesus pronounced a series of woes against the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23:13-33; Lk. 11:37-54) for their contra-biblical behavior and teachings, rhetorically insisting, “*...how will you escape the sentence of hell?*” (Mt. 24:33)
3. Jesus said of Judas, “*...woe to that man...It would have been good for that man if he had not been born*”. (Mk. 14:21)

Point: *Jesus never employs a “woe” as a warning to repent or in the course of an offer for reconciliation, but solely to pronounce God’s judgment where all that is left is God’s wrath leading to the eternal destination of hell. A study of one’s concordance for the many scriptural uses of “woe” and nearly identical neighbor “alas” confirms this usage consistently.*

Q: Who are the two groups on whom this “woe” is pronounced and why?

A: “*...those who are at ease in Zion*”, and “*those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria*”. Scripture often employs the metaphor of a “mountain” when referring to kingdoms, so Zion (often referred to as

¹Woe to those who are at ease in Zion

And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, The distinguished men of the foremost of nations, To whom the house of Israel comes.

²Go over to Calneh and look, And go from there to Hamath the great, Then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

Are they better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater than yours?

³Do you put off the day of calamity, And would you bring near the seat of violence?

“Mt. Zion”) represents the Southern Kingdom of Judah and “the mountain of Samaria” the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Q: Why is this detail especially important for the context of this message?

A: Because at times God has been speaking through Amos (and other prophets) to just one or the other, but the context here is inclusive of all God’s people regardless of the current political/religious division between them.

Observation: *It is possible that Amos is composed of a series of messages given over a longer period of time, with gaps between each so as to allow the hearers the opportunity to process the information and act upon it. It is possible that because of the lack of a right response to what Amos previously disclosed, that this is the next step of escalation due to their unresponsiveness and refusal to change. We may read it as a contiguous whole, but it may have been parceled out to give the listener an opportunity, which when ignored, warranted the next part of the overall message.*

Q: What is meant that “the house of Israel comes” to the “distinguished men of the foremost of nations”?

A: This is a way of stating that instead of turning to God, the people have turned to their leaders.

Q: What is to be learned from the examples of Calneh, Hamath and Gath?

A: These were very close, neighboring kingdom-states who were in the path of the same empires attempting to exert control over Israel. This is a way of stating that Israel’s earthly expectations and trust in their own defenses is no better than the corresponding failures of their neighbors, for which they seem to be in denial.

Point: *Israel should have learned the right lesson from their neighbors’ example that trusting in their leaders to use political and military solutions is not going to work, but only a return to Yahweh will suffice.*

Q: What is v.3 stating rhetorically?

A: They think they’re staving off what is to come, when in reality they are actually accelerating it.

Application: *The **apostate**, in their flight from God, flee instead to **earthly** authorities. They are **deceived** into believing their spiritual falling away is working to their **benefit**, when in fact it is actually accelerating the inevitable **consequences**.*

⁴Those who recline on beds of ivory
And sprawl on their couches,
And eat lambs from the flock
And calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵Who improvise to the sound of the harp,
And like David have composed songs for themselves,
⁶Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls
While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils,
Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.
⁷Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles,
And the sprawlers' banqueting will pass away.

Read verses 4-7

Q: What are the three basic behaviors or conditions which are on display in the shadow of the onset of “the day of calamity” just mentioned in v.3?

1. Verse 4—They were indulging themselves.
2. Verse 5—They were entertaining themselves.
3. Verse 6—They were pleasuring themselves.

Q: How is the last half of v.6 set apart from the preceding list?

A: Whereas the things they **DO** are documented, this is something they do **NOT** do.

Q: To the original listeners of Amos' time, why would the previous list of DO's sharply contrast to this DO NOT?

A: There was an aspect of feasting, singing and anointing associated with their funeral practices, all of which were expressions of their grieving. Instead of recognizing God's impending judgment and engaging in the grieving process as in the example of what Nineveh did upon hearing God's message through Jonah (Jonah 3:4-10), they continue on not just “business as usual”, but into an excess of self-indulgence.

Q: What may be particularly ironic about their being placed “at the head” of the line at God's judgment?

A: The Hebrew word “re'shiyth” (pronounced “ray-sheeth”) for “foremost” in v.1 appears to be a wordplay with “ro'sh”—“head” in v.7. In other words, by making themselves first in this life above everything else, they will be made first in the course of God's judgment. The first and finest will be the first exiles.

Q: What is “the ruin of Joseph”?

A: Both “Joseph” and his son “Ephraim” are used in Scripture to describe the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They will be going into exile first at the hand of Assyria, quite a while before Judah follows at the hand of Babylon.

Point: Just as the current residents of “Joseph” should have entered into mourning so as to learn the right lesson from God's impending judgment, Judah as witnesses of what takes place should have learned the lesson and applied it to themselves, but unfortunately will not.

Application: The **apostate** become self-absorbed, living for their selves alone, even up to the very edge of **prophetic** fulfillment.

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⁸The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts has declared:

"I loathe the arrogance of Jacob,
And detest his citadels;
Therefore I will deliver up the
city and all it contains."

⁹And it will be, if ten men are left in one house, they will die.
¹⁰Then one's uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out his bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, "Is anyone else with you?"

And that one will say, "No one."
Then he will answer, "Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned."

¹¹For behold, the LORD is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.

¹²Do horses run on rocks?
Or does one plow them with oxen?
Yet you have turned justice into poison
And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,

¹³You who rejoice in Lodebar,
And say, "Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?"

¹⁴"For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD God of hosts,
"And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath
To the brook of the Arabah."

Read verses 8-11

Q: What is the major transition presented here?

A: This is where God's curse, or "woe", gives way to His personal oath.

Q: What are the major issues involved?

A: "Arrogance" speaks to their unwillingness to acknowledge anything except trust in their self, and "citadels" is their confidence in their self-serving earthly institutions. It describes a complete abandonment of both the Word of God and the things of God.

Q: How would you summarize the meaning of this illustration in v.9-10?

A: It is a very dramatic way of stating that the coming judgment is so assured to take place, that when it does, it will no longer be possible to call on the name of the Lord. This is not just speaking about complete literal and physical destruction, but the corresponding spiritual consequences.

Q: Why the dual reference to both "the great house" and "the small house" in v.11?

A: Big or small, great or diminutive, rich or poor, every apostate will suffer the same consequences.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Application: A time will come when the **apostate** will lose everything in which they misplaced their **trust**, a time when it is **too late**.

Read verses 12-14

Q: What are these three absurdities attempting to illustrate?

1. In the case of horses, that which is first being established is just good old fashioned common sense. It illustrates how absurd their own behavior and unfaithfulness have been when compared to the plain text of both God's written Word and that provided through His many prophets.
2. "Poison" and "wormwood" are an extension of the common sense illustration of the horses where "justice" and "righteousness" is concerned. They have twisted things so out of the plain context of God's Word that it has not only become bitter, but toxic.

This refers to the futility of exalting their own achievements, such as a victory over "Lodebar", which in the Hebrew literally means "no thing", and their "own strength" in taking "Karnaim", meaning "a pair of horns" or "might". In other words, it is a dual word-play to show that they have accomplished nothing at all.

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Q: What is offered as most assuredly coming?

A: “Hamath to the brook of the Arabah” describes the north and south tips of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which we know will be subdued and taken away by Assyria.

Q: Why is it significant that there is no call to repentance or any reference to striving for reconciliation?

A: God is speaking to those who have so resisted all previous such attempts that all that is left is the finality of His judgment.

Application: The final state of the **apostate** is ultimately characterized by a complete lack of **common** sense, a **twisting** of God’s Word which actually becomes **bitter and toxic**, and celebrates the very worthless **achievements** of this life leading to experiencing final judgment.

Overall Application

It is important to note that the apostate, having abandoned orthodox religious practices, are here chastised for placing their trust in political and national security, affluence, pride and even their own achievements. What they considered “success” in each of these areas was ironically accelerating the ultimate consequences of their failures. Regardless of what was taking place around them, and in spite of God’s prophetic warnings to the contrary, as long as they could sustain their lifestyle, they would not turn back even to the very end. Everything they trusted in is specifically contra-indicated in Scripture:

- Don’t trust in earthly fortresses. (Dt. 28:52)
- Don’t trust in military might. (Ps. 20:7; 33:16-17)
- Don’t trust in wealth. (Ps. 49:6; 52:7)
- Victory is a gift of God. (As taught in various previous battles such as Ex. 14:13-14; Josh. 3:10; Jg. 7:22)

Ironically, Judah was supposed to learn from Israel’s example, but their stellar failure to do so would be documented by Ezekiel:

⁴⁷“Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they.

⁴⁸“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “Sodom, your sister and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. ⁴⁹Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it. ⁵¹Furthermore, Samaria did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they. Thus you have made your sisters appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed.

Ezekiel 16:47-51

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- How would you apply this message to what is taking place in the Church at present?
- How have some congregations abandoned biblical worship in favor of their own indulgence, entertainment and personal pleasure?
- What may be especially egregious about false teachings of a second chance in the Last Days, even after “the day of the Lord” commences?

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