



Amos - Chapter Six

II Amos 1:2-6:14 - Oracles of Judgement (continues/concludes)

II.c Amos 2:6-6:14 - Judgements on Israel (continues/concludes)

II.c.v Amos 5:18-6:14 - An Oracle of Woe (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Six

Amos calls on the complacent, i.e. those who believe they have no cause for concern, to consider the other kingdoms stronger than they that had already fallen to Assyria. Instead of mourning and grieving over their sins and those of their nation, the Israelites were treating themselves to the very best of life's pleasures. It was these people, the cream of Israelite society, whom the Assyrians would take first into exile. Israel's paganised religion, their strong fortresses, and their decadent culture would be helpless against the enemy that God was raising up.

II.c.v.2 Amos 6:1-14 - Complacent Self-Indulgence Will Be Punished

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- ¹ Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,
the notables of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel resorts!

Amos 6:1

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion. In their pride and indulgence, all Israel sought was ease: <<*At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will*

punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm'>> (Zephaniah 1:12). This indulgent lust for comfort and luxury is a sin, and God will judge Israel for it. The idea of rest is not all bad. Jesus wants to give people rest: *<<Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls>> (Matthew 11:28-29).* There is a rest waiting for the people of God: *<<So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labours as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs>> (Hebrews 4:9-11).* There is rest for believers in heaven through eternal worship: *<<And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created'>> (Revelation 4:9-11).* Then there is another kind of rest, a sinful kind of rest, connected to indifference, laziness, and indulgence.

According to Charles Spurgeon the prophet Amos speaks of, “a carnal ease, a fleshly security, it is not the confidence of a man who is pardoned, but the ease of a hardened wretch who has learned to despise the gibbet. It is not the assurance of one who is on the rock, but the ease of a senseless drunkard, whose house is tottering from its sandy foundations, and yet he riots at full speed; it is not the calm of soul at peace with God, but the ease of a madman, who, because he has hidden his sin from his own eyes, thinks he has concealed it from God. It is the ease and peace of one who has grown callous, hardened, brutalised, stupid, sullen, and careless, who has begun a sleep which God grant may soon be broken, or else it will surely bring him where he shall make his bed in hell.”

How did this sinful ease of God's people show itself? Israel's sinful ease was shown in:

- Presumption, because they trusted in the might of Mount Samaria.
- Procrastination, because they put far off the day of doom.
- Cruelty to men, because they caused the seat of violence to come near.
- Love of self, through all the self-indulgence described in vv.4-6.
- Carelessness, in the wilful, drunken ignorance of v.6.

King David had an ungodly ease when he stayed behind when it was time for kings to go out to war, and he slipped into sin with Bathsheba, eventually murdering her husband to cover up his immorality (2 Samuel Chapter 11).

The prophet did not leave the Judæans out of his diatribe: <<*Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem*>> (Amos 2:4-5). Both Zion, i.e. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and Samaria, the capital of Israel, were strong fortresses, easily defended. However, pride and self-confidence are never fitting for God's cherished people.

- ² Cross over to Calneh, and see;
from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is your territory greater than their territory,
- ³ O you that put far away the evil day,
and bring near a reign of violence?

Amos 6:2-3

Stronger cities than either Jerusalem or Samaria had already fallen. Among these were Calneh, in south-central Mesopotamia: <<*Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?*>> (Isaiah 10:9); Hamath, in Syria to the north of Israel; and Gath, a Philistine city southwest of Israel. Since the three locations reflect the entire extent of the so-called 'Fertile Crescent,' they may have been chosen for their representative value. No city in the whole region could claim immunity to destruction.

Are you better than these kingdoms? God wants to rebuke the pride of Israel by making them compare themselves to some of their pagan neighbours. Perhaps they are not so great after all. Perhaps these cities already suffered the judgement of God, and God wanted Israel to know they would be next because they were no better.

O you that put far away the evil day, and bring near a reign of violence? The only hope for either Israel or Judah was in the power of God made available through repentance, but Israel, at least, saw no need for such a thing.

- ⁴ Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,

and calves from the stall;
5 who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
6 who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
7 Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Amos 6:4-7

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory. Ivory was then, as now, a luxury. These people indulged in tender lamb and veal, not the tougher mutton and beef. On ivory, refer also to the comment made on Amos 3:15. Amos prophesied during a time of economic prosperity in Israel, and the successful in Israel used that prosperity for pure self-indulgence. When God makes his people prosperous, they have an absolute obligation to use what he gives them in a way that glorifies him, and not purely in ways to pamper themselves.

Although the Israelite elite emulated David in making music, and perhaps congratulated themselves on that, it is clear that they had no real awareness of the deep meaning of the Hebrew psalms with their passion for God and his ways. Christians, too, are reminded that song worship is not just a good ‘sing-song’ intended to entertain or lift their own spirits; it is intended solely to bring glory to God and to turn hearts to him alone.

Wine from bowls and finest oils are further indications that any trace of moderation or restraint was gone from this complacent upper echelon of society. They cared extravagantly for their own bodies but cared nothing for the needs of others. The two main tribes in Israel were Ephraim and Manasseh, descended from and named after the sons of Joseph.

Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away. God warns the leading men of Israel that they will lead in the train of captives when the Assyrians conquer Israel. There will be no joy in their hearts or in their land: <<*For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride*>> (Jeremiah 16:9), and: <<*Those who feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple cling to ash heaps*>> (Lamentations 4:5).

⁸ The Lord God has sworn by himself
(says the Lord, the God of hosts):
I abhor the pride of Jacob
and hate his strongholds;
and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.

Amos 6:8

The Lord God has sworn by himself. Hebrews 6:13 explains this on the grounds that: <<*he had no one greater by whom to swear*>>. This is borne out in other scriptures, such as: <<*The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son'*>> (Genesis 22:15-16), <<*By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear'*>> (Isaiah 45:23), <<*But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation*>> (Jeremiah 22:5), and: <<*The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself: Surely I will fill you with troops like a swarm of locusts, and they shall raise a shout of victory over you*>> (Jeremiah 51:14).

I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds. As much as their sinful conduct, God hated the pride of Jacob. In their season of prosperity and success they lifted their hearts high in pride, and God will send a destroying army to bring them low, as he would also do against Judah: <<*Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own*>> (Habakkuk 1:5-6 NIV). This principle of humility rather than pride is so important to the Lord that he repeats it three times: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble: <<*Towards the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favour*>> (Proverbs 3:34), and: <<*But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (James 4:6) <<*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (1 Peter 5:5). Refer also to Amos 3:9-11 and the associated comment.

⁹ If ten people remain in one house, they shall die. ¹⁰ And if a relative, one who burns the dead, shall take up the body to bring it out of the house, and shall say to someone in the innermost parts of the house,

‘Is anyone else with you?’ the answer will come, ‘No.’ Then the relative shall say, ‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.’

Amos 6:9-10

While the general sense of this vignette is clear – nothing would be left of the great houses and families – the specific sense is not as clear. Perhaps it describes a time when the survivors would be so traumatised that they would be afraid of any mention of the name of the Lord lest it be done inappropriately and bring yet more disaster upon them.

- ¹¹ See, the Lord commands,
and the great house shall be shattered to bits,
and the little house to pieces.
- ¹² Do horses run on rocks?
Does one plough the sea with oxen?
But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood –
- ¹³ you who rejoice in Lo-debar,
who say, ‘Have we not by our own strength
taken Karnaim for ourselves?’

Amos 6:11-13

Do horses run on rocks? Even the least educated farmer understands that there are laws of nature that must be obeyed if life and health are to be preserved. However, Israel’s leaders have no such understanding. No one can expect a good result if they run a horse over rough rocks, because they will wreck the horse. In the same way, Israel cannot expect a good result when they turn justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

Here, Amos puts together two proverbs which were commonly used to signify that men do not, as a rule, continue to labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought. Wise men do not send their horses to run upon the rocks; and they do not send their oxen to plough where all their toil would be wasted.

Perverting justice and righteousness is ultimately as destructive as trying to get a crop from a rock pile.

On both justice and wormwood refer to the comments made on Amos 5:7.

Lo-debar and Karnaim were two cities on the east side of the Jordan. Lo-debar may be the same as Debir in Joshua 13:26. If so, it was located on the northern border of Gad, near Mahanaim; refer also to 2 Samuel 9:4-5 and 17:27. Karnaim was farther north, in the territory of Bashan (Amos 4:1). Both cities were in areas that were in constant dispute with Syria. It is likely that Israel had succeeded in recapturing them from Syria during the Assyrian weakness just before Amos' time, and that this was a cause for Israelite self-confidence.

¹⁴ Indeed, I am raising up against you a nation,
O house of Israel, says the Lord, the God of hosts,
and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath
to the Wadi Arabah.

Amos 6:14

Indeed, I am raising up against you a nation, O house of Israel. Amos comes back to this constant theme: because of Israel's great and deep sin, judgement is coming through a conquering nation: *<<I am going to bring upon you a nation from far away, O house of Israel, says the Lord. It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say>>* (Jeremiah 5:15).

Amos says the little victories of the previous verse will be nothing compared to the destruction that is to come. Lebo-hamath was in the far north, in the valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.

The Wadi Arabah is in the valley in the far south between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. The Assyrian conquest and oppression would cover the whole land, not just a few isolated cities.