



Amos - Chapter Eight

III Amos 7:1-9:15 - Visions of Judgement (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Because the rich people oppress the poor, the merchants deal dishonestly and the festivals of God are profaned then Israel is likened to a basket of summer fruit that is ripe and about to become rotten. It is fruit that will then be discarded through exile following a dark time of judgement.

III.b Amos 8:1-14 - The Basket of Fruit

Amos describes the final end of Israel in powerful imagery.

¹ This is what the Lord God showed me – a basket of summer fruit.

² He said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A basket of summer fruit.’ Then the Lord said to me,

‘The end has come upon my people Israel;

I will never again pass them by.

Amos 8:1-2

A basket of summer fruit was fruit that was ripe, and would not keep long. Just as the time is short for summer fruit, so the time is short for Israel. The Hebrew terms for summer fruit (*qayits*) and end (*qets*) sound alike. In Hebrew literature this kind of wordplay is very common. Beyond this, summer fruit did signify the last of the harvest: <<*The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*>> (Jeremiah 8:20). The long summer of God’s patience has finally come to an end, and there has been no harvest of repentance.

The end has come upon my people Israel. Ripe fruit is close to being thrown out, and a similar judgement will come upon ‘rotten’ Israel.

³ The songs of the temple shall become wailings on that day,'
says the Lord God;
'the dead bodies shall be many,
cast out in every place. Be silent!'

Amos 8:3

The dead bodies. The paganised worship of Israel will end in a terrible silence: <<*Then he said to them, 'Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go!' So they went out and killed in the city*>> (Ezekiel 9:7).

⁴ Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
⁵ saying, 'When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practise deceit with false balances,
⁶ buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'

Amos 8:4-6

Hear this. The terrible irony is that the Israelites thought that ritualistic worship could excuse oppression and greed. Even a sincere worship could not have atoned for that. Refer to the comments made on Amos 4:4-5 and 5:22.

You that trample on the needy. Amos returns to his familiar theme of social justice, decrying those in Israel who make their money from the unjust treatment of the poor and vulnerable. The rich and powerful were oppressing the poor and weak rather than helping them. But those who sought to bring to ruin the poor of the land were themselves going to face a terrible end.

When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain? Israel kept the new moon and Sabbath, but only outwardly. Inside, they rejected these special days appointed by God and they could not wait until they were over in order to continue their corrupt business practices. Real worship of God in these festivals

would have created compassion for the poor and the needy: <<*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world*>> (James 1:27).

We will make the ephah small and the shekel great. There was chronic corruption and cheating in the business world and God saw it and was angry. When they sold wheat, sometimes poor quality wheat, they used a small measure. When they bought or gave change, they used a large measure for the shekel.

Throughout the OT, false balances are a symbol of injustice: <<*You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt*>> (Leviticus 19:35-36), <<*Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord*>> (Proverbs 20:10), and: <<*Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?*>> (Micah 6:10-11). The weight of goods being bought or sold was determined by hanging them on one end of a balance beam while standard weights such as a shekel were hung on the other end. If the weights were only slightly false in the merchant's favour, considerable profits could be made. The situation was similar if the measure of volume such as an ephah being used was incorrect.

Buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. Rather than helping their poor neighbours, the rich and powerful were using their money and power to put these people into effective slavery.

⁷ The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Amos 8:7

The pride of Jacob could be taken in three different ways: it could be a reference to God himself, the faithful people of God, both Jew and Christian: <<*He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves*>> (Psalm 47:4), or it could be a literal reference to Israel's insupportable pride in its strength and wealth: <<*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).

Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. This is a reminder that time can never erase sin. Christians can often feel that if they or if others forget the sins of their youth, then God must forget about them also, but that is not the case. Only the atoning work of Jesus can cover sin, not time. A contrast between this verse and Hebrews 6:10 can be made: <<*For God is not unjust; he will not overlook*

your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do>>. God does not forget the good works of his people, and he does not forget the evil works of those who reject him.

- ⁸ Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,
and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

Amos 8:8

Rise and sink like the Nile. Amos sees the coming destruction to be like the annual flooding of the Nile. The flood is absolutely inevitable, covering everything and leaving destruction in its wake: <<*The Lord, God of hosts, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt*>> (Amos 9:5).

- ⁹ On that day, says the Lord God,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
- ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day.

Amos 8:9-10

I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. Israel's destruction will be so terrible that even nature will go into mourning, with the sun hiding its face. This is reminiscent of the darkness that covered the earth when God's only Son died for the sins of Israel and, indeed, for the entire world: <<*When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon*>> (Mark 15:33). Darkening can also serve as a symbol of judgement: <<*The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining*>> (Joel 3:15), <<*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale*>> (Revelation 6:12-13), and: <<*The fourth angel*

blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night>> (Revelation 8:12).

Because of the reference to celestial catastrophe, many think Amos is now looking forward to the circumstances surrounding the ultimate Day of the Lord. Although, some think Amos is only referring to an eclipse. Two such eclipses have been calculated to have occurred in Amos' lifetime: one in 784 BC, the other in 763 BC.

I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day. Amos tries to capture the depth of the mourning with this metaphor. There is a connection here to the words of Zechariah, which describes repentant Israel's humble return to the Messiah in the last days: <<*And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn*>> (Zechariah 12:10).

¹¹ The time is surely coming, says the Lord God,
when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the Lord.

¹² They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord,
but they shall not find it.

Amos 8:11-12

The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. Israel had rejected the words of the Lord from Amos and so they would go into exile, where there would be no Word from the Lord at all. In its absence they will find that the revelation from God had been their most precious possession. Most people think the worst kind of famine is a famine of bread, but Amos' words are a reminder that the worst kind of famine is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

It is true that there may come times where there is a famine of God's Word, either through neglect or unfaithfulness. However, that is not what Amos means here. This is a problem with the hearer, not with the preacher. The

preacher may have his own problems and the hearer as well may have his. Paul describes the right way to hear the Word of God: *<<when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers>>* (1 Thessalonians 2:13b). Since it is true that: *<<One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God>>* (Matthew 4:4b), then it is true that a famine of hearing God's Word is ultimately worse than a famine of bread.

They shall not find it. People who have repeatedly rejected God's words will suddenly be unable to find God's words at all. In Amos 7:17 severe judgement came to a priest for rejecting God's words, but here severe judgement comes upon the people as a whole for the same sin. Jesus alluded to this principle in the Parable of a Lamp under a Bushel Basket: *<<And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away'>>* (Mark 4:24-25). When God is earnestly sought, it generally becomes easier to find him: *<<And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him>>* (Hebrews 11:6). When God is pushed away, it generally becomes more difficult to hear and receive his Word.

¹³ In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst.

¹⁴ Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, 'As your god lives, O Dan', and, 'As the way of Beer-sheba lives' — they shall fall, and never rise again.

Amos 8:13-14

Israel had depended on their paganised ideas of Yahweh, represented by the idols at Samaria and Dan, or on the ancestral tradition of Yahweh at Beer-sheba, but they would find that these pseudo-Yahwehs were no good at all; refer to Amos 5:5 and the associated comment.

The Guilt or Ashimah of Samaria might be a mocking wordplay on 'Asherah of Samaria,' since the Hebrew for guilt (*'ashmah*) sounds like Asherah. For a similar wordplay, see the transformation of *Esh-baal*, i.e. 'man of Baal' in 1 Chronicles 8:33, into *Ishbaal*, that is, 'man of shame' in 2 Samuel 2:8.

They shall fall, and never rise again. God promises that the idolaters of Israel shall face judgement, and lasting judgement at that.