

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14M_Prophecy in the Prophets_Amos_Part 4 of 5)

The basis for judgment (3:1-2) – In verses 1-2, Amos reminds Israel (and Judah) of their special status as a chosen people among all mankind. The word translated “known” in verse 2 is the Hebrew word *yada* which means “chosen.”¹ It was used in ancient treaties in the Middle East to describe the sovereign’s commitment to the vassal in the suzerain covenant or contract.² Israel was held to a higher standard than other nations precisely because of their special relationship to Yahweh through His phenomenal covenants with them.³ The word *yada* connotes more than a simple awareness or acknowledgement. It is more intimate and includes the idea of “God’s sovereign activity whereby the object of that knowledge is set apart for divine service.”⁴

Principle: God holds His own to a higher standard. See Luke 12:47-48 cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-32; Hebrews 12:4-11; 1 Peter 1:7-9; 4:17.

Application: As a member of the Royal Family of God, the Body of Christ, and the Church (all synonyms), are you aware of the higher standard to which you will be held?

Principle: God calls the weak so that human boasting might be excluded (Deut 7:7 cf. 1 Co 1:26-29).

Application: Israel had been the weakest of the nations of the world, possessing no homeland and living as slaves. Christian believers of the Church Age have nothing to commend themselves before God prior to salvation. Israel became arrogant and had false confidence in her security and strength that was rooted in her unique position in the world at that particular moment in history. However, history is fluid and the circumstances that allowed Israel to enjoy this position were about to change. Christian believers of the present Church Age dispensation within the United States have enjoyed a similar unique position in history. However, history is fluid and times are a changing.

The inevitability of judgment and an affirmation of Amos’ authority (3:3-8) – In verses 3-8, Amos uses a series of seven rhetorical questions that reminds his listeners that certain events are inseparably connected. In each case, the second event is inevitably preceded by a first event. The events become progressively more foreboding in nature and magnitude proceeding from the innocuous (v. 3) to an animal overcoming another animal (v. 4) to man overcoming an animal (v. 5) to God subduing man (v. 6).

- Two people who walk together do so after having agreed (v. 3)
- A lion roars in the brush only after having spotted his prey (v. 4)
- A lion’s contented growl in his den only occurs when he has caught prey (v. 4)
- A bird does not fall into a trap unless a snare has been set (v. 5)

¹ Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1432.

² Ibid.

³ See our earlier lessons in this series which provide an overview of God’s eschatologically oriented covenants with Israel. (See the lessons numbered “Proph_4” thru “Proph_10”).

⁴ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, electronic version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1976-1992).

- A snare does not spring unless it has been triggered by something (v. 5)
- The sound of the war trumpet in the city always produces fear (v. 6)
- Disaster does not come to a city in Israel unless Yahweh determines it to be so (v. 6)

Amos is led to draw a conclusion at this point in verses 7-8. Yahweh does nothing without first revealing it to His prophets, but once He has spoken, judgment is certain. Once the lion of Israel, Yahweh roars (speaks through His prophets), then judgment is sure. Amos' authority as a prophet is affirmed as he speaks the truth about Israel's situation.

The punishment of Israel's sins are detailed (3:9-4:5) – In chapter 3:9-10, Amos prophesies that Israel will be oppressed by foreign nations – Egypt and Philistia. God may have instructed Amos to summon these nations because of their past oppression of Israel. Thus, these nations were known for their injustice and oppression and for God to call upon these Gentile nations to witness Israel's plight indicates that they were relatively more righteous than Israel.

Israel was characterized by “great tumult” and the “oppressed” within her borders. Israel had lost her conscience (norms and standards) of what was right.

Amos refers to the “palaces” of Egypt and Philistia as well as Israel's “palaces.” Another translation of this word is “fortresses” and it refers to the residences of the ruling class and the rich – a symbol of wealth and power at the expense of others.⁵ The inhabitants of Israel's “palaces” had surpassed the Gentile nations in their greed and ability to exploit others, thus God called upon Egypt and Philistia to observe this phenomenon.

In 3:11, Amos refers to an unnamed “adversary” that would encompass the land and plunder the palaces of Israel which most theologians agree was Assyria. The palaces of the greedy plunderers of Israel would be plundered.

The shepherd was required by the Mosaic Law to produce evidence of the lamb or sheep that had been killed by a wild animal in order to prove that he did not steal it (Ex 22:13). Any deliverance that Israel hoped to experience would be like the shepherd who had only fragments, at best, to retrieve after the lion had finished.

Amos refers to the Northern Kingdom as the house of Jacob (v. 13) in reference to her patriarch which should have reminded them of God's early commitment to their ancestors. Whereas God, in the past, had been a warrior on their behalf, now He was preparing to war against them. Yahweh in His warrior-king role is described as “the Lord God, the God of hosts.” As such, He is the head of the armies of the world as well as the leader of the armies of heavenly creatures. His sovereign plan includes the use of the armies of the world to accomplish His purposes, even when those armies consist almost entirely, if not entirely of unbelievers. He is the mightiest of Suzerain kings whose power to punish non-compliant vassals is without equal. Israel had transgressed the covenant with her Suzerain-king, Yahweh. That covenant (or treaty) was embodied in the Mosaic Law, a bilateral covenant which stipulated Israel's responsibilities toward her Suzerain-king.

God would destroy the altars of Bethel (v. 14) so that even the “horns of the altar” would be cut off and fall to the ground (v. 14). Bethel was the most popular religious center in Israel and was the site where the golden calf erected by Jereboam I (1 Ki 12:26-30; Hos 10:5) symbolized Israel's rebellion and rejection of God. Jereboam I established Bethel and Dan as cult centers in order to forestall the tendency of the Israelites to attend the religious festivals in Jerusalem where they might be inclined toward national unity and reunification as well as religious unity. It is possible that Jereboam I chose Bethel because it was in effect the birthplace of Israel's faith. Jacob had met Yahweh there on at least two occasions. In addition, Bethel lay just north of the

⁵ Ibid.

border with Judah and on a principal highway between the north and the south. Dan was on the northern border of Israel and seems to be a rather strange choice considering its history. In the book of Judges, Moses notes:

In those days [Israel's early period after Egyptian captivity and wilderness trek] there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. (Judg 18:1)

Eventually, the Danites slaughtered the people of Laish, “a people quiet and secure” (Judg 18:27) and renamed the town of Laish – Dan. Then they set up a carved image – most likely the silver images they had stolen earlier from a man named Micah (Judg 18:30-31). In addition, things were so corrupt that the Levite priest that Micah had hired to be his own succumbed to the lure of the Danites to be their priest. This Levite priest sells himself to the highest bidder in effect (see Judg 18:1-31). This Levite priest was none other than Jonathan, the grandson of Moses (Judg 18:30) and he continued to serve the Levites for a number of years in spite of the fact that the Danites set up the carved images they had stolen from Micah as objects of worship (Judg 18:31).

The horns on the altar were projections from the corners of the altar and the Mosaic Law allowed fugitives to grab the “horns” to claim asylum from their pursuers. However, this protection did not extend to murderers.

Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. And it was told Solomon, saying, “Indeed Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; for look he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’” Then Solomon said, “If he proves himself a worth man, not one hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.” So King Solomon sent them to bring him down from the altar. And he came and fell down before King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.” (1 Ki 1:50-53)

Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar. (1 Ki 2:28) [*Joab had murdered and Solomon ordered him killed even while he clung to the horns of the altar*]

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, [*accidentally caused the death – not premeditated murder*] then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die. (Ex 21:12-14)

Amos refers to this provision of the Mosaic Law in chapter 3, verse 14 when he states that “the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.” In other words, God would cut off all means of the Israelites claiming any asylum from His justice to be executed in the form of the Assyrian invaders.

Jereboam I had introduced the counterfeit religious system to the nation of Israel by establishing two golden calves at the two shrines in Bethel and Dan and describing them as the gods who had brought Israel up out of Egypt. He even appointed non-Levitical priests and at Bethel, he established the fifteenth day of the eighth month as a day of special festivity. The two calves represented the footpads of Yahweh as He stood over Israel in a protective way.⁶

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests, A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987), 327.

Jereboam's words of dedication indicated that they were idols – "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Ex 32:4 cf. 1 Ki 12:28). Jereboam installed himself as the head of the cult and he evidently viewed himself as the second Aaron who had the right to establish and oversee a religious system apart from Jerusalem. He arrogated to himself the prerogative of the Davidic monarchy, "namely, the right of the king as the elect and adopted son of God to act not only as the political leader of the people, but as the priestly mediator as well."⁷ As such, Jereboam perceived himself to be the rightful continuance of the Messianic dynast of David.

Amos states in verse 15 that God would destroy the luxurious homes of Israel – "the winter house along with the summer house." Such an extravagance was at one time only affordable by kings and princes. However, the ill-gotten prosperity of the Israelites at the expense of others using practices that were totally contrary to the Law allowed them to build two homes for summer and winter use. These homes were even adorned with ivory inlay and furnishings (3:15 cf. 6:4).

The privileged women of Israel (4:1-3) – Bashan was an area just to the east of the Sea of Galilee and was known for its lush pastures and well-fed cattle. Amos uses a play on words here and calls the "upper-class" women "cows of Bashan" (4:1). He accused them of being totally self-consumed, oppressing the poor and crushing the needy in order to support their expensive tastes. They even domineered their husbands who were supposed to be their "lords" to do so. Amos uses a rare word for "husband" here that really means "master."⁸ Their lust for pleasure was so insatiable that their incessant demands drove their husbands to even greater injustices.

Amos indicates that God has staked His reputation or His integrity upon the judgment that Amos is called to announce (4:2). Amos warns that every one of these society women will be dragged from the city either to their captivity or their death through the broken down city walls (4:3) instead of the usual means of exit, the city gate. They will be connected to each other by fishhooks, "much like fish pierced together and jerked over one's shoulder to be carried to market."⁹

Amos indicates that they will be cast into "Harmon" (4:3). The actual location to which the word "Harmon" refers is uncertain; however, it may refer to Mt. Hermon in northern Israel. If so, the "cows of Bashan" would end up as carrion in Bashan.¹⁰

Amos' sarcastic invitation to sin (4:4, 5) – The usual plea of a prophet was to go to the sanctuary and worship; however, Amos displays some sarcastic wit and urges the Israelites to go to "Bethel" and "Gilgal" in order to sin (4:4) by breaking their covenant with God. As we've seen earlier, Bethel was the principal sanctuary of Israel just across the border from Judah. Gilgal is a reference to a site in the Jordan valley where Israel had encamped before and after the taking of Jericho (Josh 5:10; 9:6). Although Gilgal remained a center for pilgrimage and sacrifice, Israel had lost site of the reality behind the ritual. Gilgal should have reminded Israel of its early faith and God's establishment of them in the land of promise. However, in 4:5, Amos indicates that Israel loved the feasting that went with the festivals of sacrifice – they loved the entertainment value that the festivals provided, but they had no appreciation of God's call for justice and righteousness.

⁷ Ibid., 327-328.

⁸ Sunukjian, "Amos" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, 1435.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid

Israel's Refusal to Repent and 5 Calamities from God (4:6-15) – In these verses, Amos details examples of how Israel had already experienced portions of the cycles of discipline found in Leviticus 26. Each description of a cycle of discipline is separated by the phrase “yet you have not returned to Me” indicating that Israel had not repented in spite of God’s discipline. This section illustrates God’s permissive will in that God allowed His own to suffer with the hope that His own would be brought closer to Him (Heb 12:6). While we cannot pinpoint a specific occasion on which the judgments mentioned by Amos occurred, the important thing to note is that they did not bring about the desired repentance on the part of Israel.

Verse in Amos 4	Description	Relates Best to this Cycle of Discipline in Lev 26	Verses in Leviticus 26 (see also Deuteronomy 28-29)
Verse 6	Hunger – “cleanness of teeth” and “lack of bread”	4 th Cycle	Verses 26 & 29
Verses 7 & 8	Drought – “withheld rain from you”	2 nd Cycle	Verse 19
Verse 9	Plagues and disease upon agriculture – “blight and mildew”	2 nd Cycle & perhaps 3 rd Cycle (7 fold increase of plagues)	Verses 20 & 21
Verse 10	Plagues and military defeat – “plague after the manner of Egypt” and “your young men I killed with a sword along with your captive horses”	1 st , 3 rd , and 4 th Cycles, and portions of the 5 th Cycle	Verses 17, 20, 25, 33, 36-39
Verse 11	Devastation – “I overthrew some of you”	Portions of the 5 th Cycle, yet not complete removal and captivity from the land as illustrated by the phrase “like a firebrand plucked from the burning”	Verses 31-35

The ultimate curse that was a part of the 5th Cycle of Discipline, i.e. captivity by a foreign nation and dispersion from the land, had not yet occurred, but it was immanent. Because they had not repented in spite of all of God’s warnings through His agents (plagues, hunger, famine, military defeat, etc.), Amos held out no hope of their repentance. Therefore, Amos indicates that they should prepare to meet God (4:12). Israel would meet Him through His use of a foreign nation to effect His judgment.

Chapter 5:1-17 – A Lament for Israel and Call to Repentance – These verses present a chiasmatic structure in which the themes of the first paragraphs are repeated in reverse order in the subsequent paragraphs. The chiasmatic structure of Amos in these verses can be presented as follows:¹¹

- Description of certain judgment (vv. 1-3)

¹¹ Ibid., 1438. I include a reference to the literary style to highlight the fact that the prophets and writers of the Old Testament Scriptures were very smart men who knew how to write and express thoughts in ways we take for granted or overlook. God the Holy Spirit used this training in literary style to express the divine viewpoint of the situation that would have definitely captured the attention of the readers and hearers of the message in his day. The point – God uses men and women who have prepared themselves for service. One of the ways that men and women prepare themselves is developing the ability to clearly articulate their thoughts in writing and speech..

- Call for individual repentance (vv. 4-6)
 - Accusation of legal injustice (v. 7)
 - Portrayal of a sovereign God (vv. 8-9)
 - Accusation of legal injustice (vv. 10-13)
- Call for individual repentance (vv. 14-15)
- Description of certain judgment (vv. 16-17)

A Lament for Israel and Description of Certain Judgment (5:1-3) – In these verses, Amos laments for Israel due to her certain judgment. Israel was at the height of her prosperity and vigor (a “virgin” so to speak), so to hear these words would have been quite shocking to an Israelite – similar to reading one’s own obituary in the newspaper.¹² If 90 percent of the military of a nation is destroyed by an enemy, that nation will cease to exist (5:3).

A Call to Repentance (5:4-15) – In these verses, we find an inclusio within the greater chiasmic structure of the section (vv. 1-17) that is bounded by the theme of a call to repentance. We will examine each section of the inclusio separately.

Call for Individual Repentance (5:4-6) – Although national judgment was certain, individuals could still call upon the Lord and repent. The course of action that the repentant needed to take did not include trips to Bethel or Gilgal – both of which had become symbols of a false religion. Bethel (“house of God”) was to become “Beth Aven” (“house of nothing”). Gilgal, a symbol of entrance to the land was to become Bethel, “house of nothing.”¹³

Accusation of legal injustice (5:7) – justice had been perverted and is compared by Amos to wormwood – a plant with a bitter taste and which is used in the Bible as a metaphor for sorrow and bitterness. Court officials had turned justice into bitterness and had cast righteousness to the ground. In the context, justice referred to the proper function of judicial procedures that allowed a court to determine who was right and wrong in a case. In other words, justice referred to the fair and impartial administration of a court proceeding. Righteousness refers to the proper outcome of a court case that had been subjected to the proper judicial procedures. The less fortunate were being trampled in Israel’s judicial system and the judicial system became a source of bitterness to them.

Portrayal of a sovereign God (5:8-9) – A sovereign God Who controlled the workings of the universe could make adjustments to correct the injustices of Israel. One of Israel’s idolatries was astral worship. Pleiades and Orion were two constellations, the former rose before daybreak signaling the onset of Spring and the latter rose after sunset signaling the onset of winter.

Accusation of legal injustice (5:10-13) – Those who did try to practice fairness were rebuked and even hated (v. 10) to the point of intimidation (v. 13). They wanted to profit through the courts and weren’t concerned with the administration of just and fair procedures to preserve the integrity of the legal system and thereby honor God. As a result, the poor were abused unmercifully. The poor were forced to give up their grain to pay unfair taxes in order to remain a tenant on the land. However, an omniscient God knew the number of their transgressions.

Call for Individual Repentance (5:14-15) – Israel would shout “the Lord is with us” as a way of assuring themselves prior to battle, but by Amos’ day, this shout was just one more empty ritual in Israel. The God of Israel would only be with them if they repented and began to live their lives in a manner pleasing to Him.

The Day of the Lord (5:16-20) – During Amos’ day, Jewish people regarded their election as an guarantee of God’s continued favor toward them. In their self-centered and self-focused

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 1439.

lives, they focused upon that aspect of the “day of the Lord” that corresponded to their desires for national deliverance and exaltation. They overlooked the aspect of the “day of the Lord” that would deal with sin and spiritual apostasy. They remind us of many today who are religious and practice a “form of godliness,” but deny God’s power.

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having a form of godliness but denying its power**. And from such people turn away! (2 Tim 3:1-5)

Instead of deliverance in the “day of the Lord,” unbelieving and apostate Israel would experience only greater terror every time they thought that they had escaped from danger. In their state of emotional revolt in the soul, they did not know what they truly desired for they were spiritually clueless. In their constant desire for personal gain and satisfaction, they had become subjective in their thought processes and incapable of a true spiritual evaluation of their own lives and the status of their nation. They were disoriented spiritually, thus they did not possess a proper understanding of the function of God’s righteousness and justice (i.e. His integrity) in human history and in the lives of His elect (Israel as a nation in context). Their perception of the function of His essence was shaped by their own subjective, self-focused, self-centered and myopic world-view. As a result, like many today, they are shocked beyond words when God intervenes in human history – either directly or through His agents of change.

Principle: The believer who is properly oriented to all facets of Truth, especially the function of God’s essence, should not be shocked at God’s intervention in human history.

Application: Believers in the United States and around the world today should not be shocked at events such as 9/11, but see them as God’s permissive use of others to warn the world of the inevitable nature of the judgment they face.

Although the phrase “the day of the Lord” has eschatological implications, it also has more immediate implications to the hearers of Amos and other prophets in the Old Testament.¹⁴ Of course, in Amos’ day, it would have referred to the growing, but unperceived threat from Assyria which would invade Israel and bring culmination to the cycles of discipline (Lev 26) upon that nation by destroying their army, sacking their palaces, breaching the walls of their cities, dispersing the population and leading them into captivity. All of this occurred in 721 B.C.

Israel would have so many who died that there would not be anyone left to hire as a professional mourners. Farmers would have to be called in from the fields to serve as mourners (5:16). Vineyards, which represented wine and merriment, would be silent except for the sound of mourning (5:17). Yahweh, Who had passed over Israel in order to pass through Egypt at one time, would now “pass through” Israel in the same manner (5:17).¹⁵

Chiastic Structure of 5:16-27 – Amos repeats the use of this literary device in his description of the day of the Lord and its effect upon Israel.¹⁶

➤ Description of certain judgment (5:16-20)

¹⁴ See previous lesson in this series – “Proph14D_Prophecy in the Prophets_Joel_Part 1_The Day of the Lord” – for an overview of the use of this phrase in the Bible.

¹⁵ Sunukjian, “Amos” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, 1440. See also Gaebelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, electronic version.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1438.

- Accusation of religious hypocrisy (5:21-22)
 - Call for individual repentance (5:23-24)
- Accusation of religious hypocrisy (5:25-26)
- Description of certain judgment (5:27)

Verse 26 is a bit difficult to understand; however, once a corrected, interpretive translation is formed, it makes more sense. The difficulty lies in our lack of familiarity with the terms “Sikkuth” and “Chiun.” The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* provides some assistance here and states that:

The words "shrine" (*sikkut*) and "pedestal" (*kiyun*) need not be altered to read "Sakkut" and "Kaiwan," names of the god Saturn, though that view is attractive. It is not certain that Amos knew of this deity, and the MT [Majority Text] makes sense as it stands. The verse refers to the implements of idolatrous worship of an unknown astral deity.¹⁷

The Bible Knowledge Commentary indicates that these deities were associated with the planet Saturn.¹⁸ So an interpretive translation of verse 26 could be rendered as:

You also lifted up the shrine of your false deity [king] and the pedestal on which your idols sit and you have held high the star as a symbol of your gods.
(Interpretive translation of verse 26).

God, through Amos was reminding Israel that their sacrifices and rituals had been an affront to Him throughout their history. Their worship had been directed to aspects of His creation – golden calves, sun, moon, planets and stars. An entire system of symbols, artifacts and festivals had been constructed to replace God’s requirements specified in the Mosaic Law. The result was that the nation did not represent Yahweh to other nations; instead, they had assimilated the culture and religious practices of surrounding nations. They would be removed from the land of promise – in effect, they would be excommunicated.

Principle: One’s true spiritual character is manifest in actions and behavior. This is the reason the prophets and writers of Scripture so frequently urge their hearers to perform certain actions evidencing repentance. For example, Amos 5:15 – “establish justice in the gate.”

Principle: True repentance has a redemptive effect upon others.

Application: Are there areas of your life that you have not turned over to God and repented of your self-centered ways?

Application: Is your failure to repent of your erroneous and rationalistic thought in regard to these areas preventing you from being used in a redemptive fashion in others lives? Husbands? Wives? Christian worker? Christian employer?

Warnings to Zion and Samaria (6:1-14) – In this chapter, Amos includes Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in His warnings to Israel. The boundaries of the nation of Israel included the its capital – Samaria; therefore, this chapter has references to both areas in its content.

Israel and Judah’s Complacency (6:1-3) – Zion is a reference to Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and Mount Samaria is a reference to the capital of Israel. Israel and Judah were both enjoying a period of relative security, peace and prosperity. They had become complacent about their place in the world. Officials in both locations began to view themselves as people of

¹⁷ Gaebelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, electronic version.

¹⁸ Sunukjian, “Amos” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, 1442.

notoriety – in other words, people of importance. They had begun to boast about their nations and consider their nations superior to other nations most likely as a result of their election by God.

In 6:2, Amos mentions other cities that had already been subjugated to the foreign powers. *Calneh* was a city in northern Syria or Aram and *Hamath* was an important city in central Syria, located north of Damascus. Both of these cities in Syria had been overrun during Shalmaneser III's campaigns in 854-846 B.C. *Gath* in Philistia had been devastated in 815 B.C. by Hazael, king of Aram, and again in 760 B.C. by Uzzaiah, king of Judah.¹⁹ Amos argues that not only was Israel not better prepared to defend against an attack than these cities, these cities and the kingdoms they represented were even greater in size than Samaria. In his argument, Amos in effect echoes the boast of the people of Israel as they looked at other nations in disdain and considered themselves superior. Amos twists that perception using a bit of ironic sarcasm and calls upon them to consider some powers greater than they were that had been destroyed.

Unbelieving Israel dismissed the approaching day of doom as foolishness. The “seat of violence” (6:3) could be interpretively translated “reign of terror.” This phrase provides a good description of the last years of Israel's history before her captivity by Assyria (2 Ki 15:8-17:6).

In the 31 years after Jeroboam II, Israel had six kings, three of whom seized power by political coup and assassination. The fear and violence in this period is reflected in the atrocities of 2 Kings 15:16.²⁰

The luxurious indulgence (6:4-7) – Amos pictures a wealth and decadence that finds few parallels in history, yet this decadence was among God's own, chosen people. Their beds were wood inlaid with ivory (cf. 3:15). Amos uses a word for “lounge” here that conveys an image of drunken stupor with arms and legs hanging over the side of the bed.²¹ They were only content with the finest gourmet meals – the tastiest and tenderest of meat. In their drunkenness, they imagined themselves strumming like David as they tried to improvise music at their parties. They drank wine, not by the glass, but by the bowlful and only the finest of lotions would do for their fair skin. They were oblivious to the sufferings of their fellow Israelites at whose expense they partied. *Observation:* This sounds like many a college campus in the US today.

The Complete Devastation (6:8-14) – Again, God swears on His own integrity that destruction of this society and all of its trappings was sure (cf. 4:2; 8:7). Even if one were to potentially survive the judgment, Amos warns him not to even speak the name of the Lord (in praise or in anger) to a person performing clean up operations, for to do so might call attention to Yahweh that he had overlooked a person in judgment. Burning or cremation was not practiced in Israel except in association with a plague. Plague would be the natural result of a city that was surrounded and cut off from fresh water and food and where sanitation was non-existent. Also, it wouldn't help when enemy forces practiced early forms of bio-chemical warfare by tossing plague infested corpses over the walls of city fortresses.

Israel had done the virtually impossible of changing justice in the courts and the refreshing effect of righteousness into bitterness (6:12). Amos illustrates his point by using two examples of impossible scenarios that would be very familiar to all. Horses do not run on rocky perpendicular cliffs, nor does anyone plow there with oxen.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1443.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Under the military prowess and leadership of Jereboam II, Israel had won some military victories and Amos alludes to a couple of them in 6:13. Lo Debar was a town east of the Jordan River (and is mentioned in 2 Samuel 9:4 and 17:27). Amos subtly and intentionally mispronounced the name so that it came out in Hebrew as “Lo Dabar” which means “nothing.”²² He also mentioned the name of another subdued city – Karnaim – whose name means “horns.” “Amos scoffed that they were falsely imagining that they had seized “strength” by means of their own strength.”²³

Amos indicates that God too would do the unimaginable. He would raise up a nation against His own. The Israelites boasted of holding territory from the northern frontier of Lebo Hamath to the southern border of the Arabah – the valley that extended from the Sea of Kinnereth (Sea of Galilee) to the Dead Sea (2 Ki 14:25). Perhaps this would get their attention and then they would know whose “strength” really determined the destiny of nations.

²² Ibid., 1444.

²³ Ibid., 1444.