

### The Conclusion of the Third Sermon

#### Amos 6

**Amos 6:1-7** – *“Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria; notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes! <sup>2</sup> Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?*

<sup>3</sup> *Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near;*

<sup>4</sup> *who lie on beds of ivory - stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall.*

<sup>5</sup> *Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; <sup>6</sup> who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.”*

#### Background Notes

Amos began his third sermon of judgment in chapter 5, and he concluded that sermon in chapter 6. Amos preached these prophetic sermons at Bethel, in the northern kingdom of Israel. Bethel means *“house of God,”* and Bethel had great memories of blessing in the past, going all the way back to patriarchal times.

But in Amos' time, Bethel was a far cry from being the *“house of God.”* Bethel had become a center of idolatry. In fact, Amos may have given his prophecies and sermons of judgment right on the premises of the idolatrous golden calf shrine at Bethel.

In any case, recognize that Amos was not preaching to a receptive audience! He was risking his life to preach against the sins of the northern kingdom - especially at Bethel, where the leaders of the nation came to worship their pagan deities. But Amos was not afraid to boldly speak out against the sins of the nation and pronounce the judgment of God on the northern kingdom of Israel.

*“Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria; notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!” (v1).* Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. At the time of Amos' prophecy, Jeroboam II was king. The northern kingdom was quite prosperous during his reign, both economically and militarily. Notice – Amos referred to them as the *“chief nation” (v1).* And *“the whole house of Israel”* would include even the people of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Everyone in the whole house of Israel looked to the northern kingdom as a tower of strength, and they looked to the leaders of the north for guidance. But the northern kingdom was morally and spiritually corrupt, and for that reason they

would be judged by the God they had forsaken.

Notice that the “woe” of verse 1 was also pronounced on those who were “*at ease in Zion.*” Zion was another name for Jerusalem, the capital city of the southern kingdom of Judah. So while the ministry of Amos was primarily focused on the northern kingdom, it did extend down to the south, where idolatry had already begun to make inroads.

The three cities mentioned in verse 2 were not located in the northern kingdom, but they were as large as Samaria, and yet all of them were conquered. Did the leaders of the northern kingdom think they were somehow better or stronger than those city-states? No way! They were not better or stronger. They would be toppled from their pedestal of pride. They would be judged.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God holds accountable those who live in the lap of luxury.

Notice that the “**woe**” (v1) was pronounced upon those “*who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls and anoint yourselves with the best ointments*” (v1).

“Woe!” was pronounced upon the people who were living idly and luxuriously. Why? Not because of their wealth, but because they were living only for themselves. They were not concerned for the needs of the poor and the oppressed, and they were “*not grieved for the ruin of Joseph*” (v6). “Joseph” was used here to describe the northern kingdom of Israel. Remember, Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph’s sons, and they were the largest tribes in the northern kingdom. These people were not concerned that the idolatrous northern kingdom was rapidly heading towards judgment.

Look back at Amos 4:1, in the previous sermon: “*Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, “Bring wine, let us drink!”*” Their sin was not the fact that they had money, but that they were using their money only for their own selfish, pampered and luxurious lifestyles. Meanwhile, the needs of the poor and oppressed cried out all around them - but they did not care. For this, they would be judged. God holds people accountable when they live selfishly in the lap of luxury, while others are in need.

Verse 7: “*Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed*” (v7). What a change from their luxurious lifestyle in verse 1. The notable person in the chief nation would be the first to go into captivity! All this took place at the hands of the Assyrian empire, when it invaded Israel not many years after Amos gave this sermon. Those who had lived in luxury were dragged away from their beautiful homes and lands, and were taken into captivity in foreign lands.

God still holds people accountable if they are living in the lap of luxury, and are not concerned about the needs of people who are hurting. Listen to the words of 1 Timothy 6:17-18: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.”*

Notice - it is not wrong to be rich, and it is not wrong to enjoy what God gives us. But it **is** wrong to selfishly hoard our money, or to spend it selfishly and live in luxury when other people are in desperate need. God calls us to be *“rich in good works, ready to give and willing to share”* freely with those who are in need. God holds people accountable when they are living selfishly, in the lap of luxury.

## **2. God brings down those who boast in their own “arm of strength.”**

**Amos 6:8-14** - *The Lord God has sworn by Himself; the Lord God of hosts says: “I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces. Therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.”* <sup>9</sup> *Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.* <sup>10</sup> *And when a relative of the dead, with one who will burn the bodies, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, “Are there any more with you?” Then someone will say, “None.” And he will say, “Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the Lord.”* <sup>11</sup> *For behold, the Lord gives a command: He will break the great house into bits, and the little house into pieces.*

<sup>12</sup> *Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.* <sup>13</sup> *You who rejoice over Lo Debar, who say, “Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves by our own strength?”* <sup>14</sup> *“But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel,” says the Lord God of hosts. “And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah.”*

The people of northern kingdom of Israel thought they were strong and secure. Indeed, under King Jeroboam II, the northern kingdom had won a string of military victories, including conquering the two cities that Amos mentioned in verse 13. But notice that the people were boasting in their own *“arm of strength.”* Well, the Lord brings down those who boast in their own strength, and don't give glory to God. *“Behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel,” says the Lord God of hosts” (v14).*

The nation that overran the northern kingdom of Israel was the Assyrian Empire. Notice the contrast between the end of verse 14, and 2 Kings 14:23-25. These verses contrast King Jeroboam's military victories and the fall of the very area where the northern kingdom had conquered and recovered territory. And they thought they were so strong? God will bring down those who boast in their own *“arm of strength.”*

Verses 9-10 need some explanation. Starting at the end of verse 8: *“Therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.”* <sup>9</sup> *Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.* <sup>10</sup> *And when a relative of the dead, with one who will burn the bodies, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, “Are*

*there any more with you?" Then someone will say, "None." And he will say, "Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the Lord."*

The point of these verses is that, when the Assyrians overran Samaria and the northern kingdom, conditions would be so bad that if ten men hid in the house to escape the sword, they would die from the plague or pestilence that would result from the carnage (v9). When the many bodies of the dead were carried out of the houses to be buried, the survivors wouldn't mention the name of the Lord. Why? For fear of God's judgment zapping them as well (v10)! The conquering of the northern kingdom would be a complete smashing and defeat of the once proud nation (v11).

Then and today, God brings down those people who boast in their own strength. Whenever humans boast about their own strength and accomplishments, watch out! Remember the Titanic. The builder boasted that even God could not sink such a strong ship! Well, you know the rest of the story.

Luke 1:51-52 says that God *"has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones."* God's arm of strength is far greater than man's puny arm of strength. God brings down those who boast in their own arm of strength.

## **Practical Application**

### **How stupid can you be?**

*"Do horses run on rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen?"* The point of verse 12 is really, "How stupid can you be?" Horses are smart enough not to run on rocky crags. It's dangerous. That would be stupid. And farmers don't plow with oxen on rocky plateaus. Whoever heard of such a foolish idea? They are smart enough to plow in places where there is the good fertile earth.

And yet Israel was that foolish. They had *"turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness"* (v12) - and they didn't bother themselves to consider the danger or the inevitable consequences of their foolish actions. They were not only hurting themselves and making their lives bitter, but they were destroying themselves as a nation.

How true of us and of our own nation! We take God and His Word out of the classroom. We ignore God's standards, and make moral standards relative – or insignificant. We live selfishly when others are in desperate need. And even Christians rely on and glorify man over God. How foolish can we be? As a result, we're not only hurting ourselves, but we are destroying ourselves as a nation. And judgment will come.

Amos 6:12 was not only a question for ancient Israel. It is God's question to nations and individuals today. Think it through. How stupid can you be?