The Book of Amos

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Chapter 6**

* **6:1-14– *“Woe to those at ease”***
* In v. 1 a woe is pronounced seemingly against two distinguished groups of people. The first is Zion which is referenced in 1:2. The reference ties in to Judah and Jerusalem where the temple is and the LORD dwells (Psa. 48:2, 11-12; 87:2-3). This verse, like several we have mentioned before including 4:4, is used by scholars to oppose the authenticity of Amos.
* Why is Zion mentioned here right in the middle of all this pronunciation and funeral talk of Israel? Undoubtedly, Amos’ audience is in fact the Israelites who are reveling in their sin; however, he has previously mentioned other nations including Judah in chapter 2. The idea is that while Israel is being singled out for their evil and wicked deeds, those who are in Jerusalem and Judah (who would have been very aware of the destruction to befall their sister) must not feel at ease as if they are untouchable and free of such judgment. Rather, they must observe its chastening and move with fear to do what God says.
* There may be other ways of interpreting this text because of the abrupt mention of Zion. The LXX (Septuagint) translates verse 1 as saying the Israelites despise Zion.
* Continuing in v.1, Amos continues the woe to a 2nd group. These are those mentioned in 4:1 and those who are the wealthy class of Israel living in Samaria who also make judgment for others.
* They are the cream of the crop, choicest of all men. People come to them for advice and judgment and all is right in the world for them; therefore, they feel secure. Nothing will go wrong and God’s on their side (Isa. 32:9-11; Jer. 7:4). The idea of the woe speaks concerning everything they will soon encounter.
* In v. 2, 3 cities are mentioned as a form of comparison. Calneh, Calno or Canneh (Gen. 10:8-10; Isa. 10:9) was a city built by Nimrod and it was located in the land of Babylonia and it was a prosperous city. Hamath (2 Kings 14:25, 28; 17:24) was located to the north of Israel (Num. 34:7-8; 1 Kings 8:65) and it too was known for its prosperity. Gath (1 Sam. 17:4; 2 Chron. 26:6) was a prominent city of the Philistines located to the south of Israel and it was well known for wine and its winepresses.
* Notice in the mention of these 3 cities, they all compare to the prosperity being enjoyed by Israel. However, all these cities would fall and be conquered by the Assyrians. Amos asks them to consider if they are better than them or if their territory is greater. The answer is that they are not! As they fell so too will Israel fall.
* In v. 3, these who feel at ease and secure do not want to face the reality that a day of calamity is coming (Amos 5:18; 9:10; Isa. 56:12). They “put it off” with the emphasis of their incessant and luxurious lifestyles ravaged with sin and wickedness. Paradoxically, banishing thought of calamity brings the violence upon them even more so.
* In vv. 4-6, Amos emphasizes the affluent and indulgent lifestyle of the people. In v. 4, they recline on ivory beds (3:12) and sprawl on couches (3:12). Notice the use of the words ‘recline’ and ‘sprawl’ that Amos uses to convey the demeanor if the people. These words point us back to the beginning of the chapter speaking of those that are at ease. One who reclines and sprawls is one that is not concerned with the calamity to come.
* They consume only the choicest of meats in v. 4. Lambs and calves were well known for their high value in terms of food and sacrifices and were commonly served to guests and high-ranking personnel (Gen. 18:7-8). The stalls were where the animals were kept in order to be fattened (1 Sam. 28:24; Ezek. 34:1-3; Mal. 4:2).
* In v. 5, their elaborate feasting and affluent lifestyle is accompanied by entertainment (Isa. 5:12). They *“improvise to the sound of the harp”* may be referring to their readiness to sing and celebrate at a moment’s notice (chanting). They are quick to rejoice in themselves and what they have but slow to repent and return to God. They also liken their entertainment to the great Psalmist of Israel: David. David introduced many musical instruments into the temple worship of God (1 Chron. 15:16; 23:5; 2 Chron. 29:25-26).
* These people here have made new instruments for themselves or tweaked previous ones and are proud of their accomplishment. They truly believe they are being blessed and doing God’s will. Equating their actions to David’s parallels this thought. The musical instruments themselves isn’t the problem but it is the presumptuous behavior of the Israelites.
* In v. 6 further description of their indulgent lifestyle is touched upon with the consumption of wine from sacrificial bowls. These bowls seem to be the sprinkling bowls used for the sprinkling of blood on sacrifices (Ex. 24:4-8). This is not the first time we have seen something associated with worship of God turned around into sin.
* Amos continues in the verse by saying they anoint themselves with the finest of oils. Notice this section is emphasizing the best of the best. Anointing with oil is associated with health and cosmetic purposes in the Ancient Near East. In the OT, oil and wine frequently occur together to demonstrate pleasures of life (Psa. 104:15; Ecc. 9:7-8). Oil was also key in terms of anointing prophets and kings (1 Sam. 9:16; 10:1).
* They are so involved in their self-pleasing rituals, yet they do not grieve over the coming destruction (Jer. 30:7). The dirge that has been sounded has fallen on deaf ears.
* In v. 7, the *“choicest”* who have treated themselves with the best will be exiled and ironically, they will be the head of the exiles. They will be taken first and will experience absolutely calamity and disaster. They love to be first and so in judgment they will be the first to fall. Their elaborate feasts and celebrations will come to an end. It will become a time of mourning and weeping.
* In v. 8, the LORD once again takes an oath (4:2) this time swearing by Himself. God cannot swear by anything greater than Himself for He is the greatest! Such an oath is done so as to emphasize the irrefutable and irrevocable impending doom of the nation.
* In v. 8b, the LORD hates the pride (*gaon* – excellency) of Jacob (Psa. 47:4; Ezek. 24:21; Prov. 16:18) and detest its citadels (3:10-11). Their affluence and indulgent living produced a pride that they wore like a cloak. They considered themselves favored among men (3:2; 6:1) and thus pride overcame them as well as their evil. The city and all its possessions will be delivered up for judgment (Lam. 2:5; 1 Tim. 6:7).
* In v. 9 the ominous onslaught of the enemy that is coming will be inescapable and devastating. If it should be ten survive (5:3) and they gather together they too will perish. None will escape the judgment of God.
* In. v. 10, a man’s kinsman (uncle) serves as his undertaker (burner) to remove his bones from the very house mentioned in v. 9. The kinsman encounters another person in the house and asks if anyone else is alive to which the answer is no.
* As Amos describes this horrific scene in v. 10 which expands the thought of v. 9, we get a vivid picture of the destruction that has overtaken the people. There is such disaster that perhaps the kinsman has had to burn the body instead of burying it (1 Sam. 31:11-13). The burning may be to prevent contagion and/or simply because there is no time for a burial. This was done only during times of extreme emergencies such as is seen here in Amos. Burning a corpse was a form of punishment in the OT for immorality and wickedness (Lev. 20:14).
* After the ensuing dialogue between the two, the former commands the latter to be quiet and not to invoke the name of the LORD (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13). The kinsman recognizes God is very much present in the midst of this devastation and urges the other to remain silent lest they too be consumed by God’s wrath (Jer. 44:26; Ezek. 20:39).
* In v. 11 the fate of the structures themselves is pronounced. The great and small houses alike will crumble into fragments according to the word of the LORD (2 Kings 25:9; Amos 3:15). This merism demonstrates none will be spared and everything will perish.
* In v. 12, the use of two rhetorical questions solicits the audience’s attention to the perversion of what is right. Horses cannot run on rocks for it would damage their hoofs and the animals themselves preventing them from accomplishing their purpose. Oxen do not plow on rocks (or on the sea– some translations read this way).
* For either of these animals to do such things would be ludicrous in the mind of the Israelites. Even so, Amos says, they have done these very things with righteousness and justice. They have perverted it into poison and wormwood (5:7). They have upset the natural order of God’s will and such actions will not go unpunished.
* In v. 13, Amos calls attention to Lo-debar and Karnaim. Lo-debar (2 Sam. 9:4-5; 17:27) was a place in Gilead, near to, and apparently east from, Mahanaim. The word itself literally means *“nothing.”* It may also mean a place of no pasture.
* The people say by their own strength they have taken Karnaim (located in central Bashan; horns= Strength) and they rejoice in that. Amos is saying that for them to rejoice in that is one and the same as rejoicing in nothing (Lo-debar). Man’s strength is indeed nothing compared to the LORD’S.
* In v. 14, God shows His strength by telling the people He will *“raise up”* (used to speak of judgment) a nation to afflict them (2 Kings 15:29; 17:6; Jer. 5:15-17*). “LORD God of Hosts”* emphasizes His sovereignty and power.
* They will be afflicted from the north to the south of their borders (Num. 34:7-8; 1Kings 8:65 2 Kings 14:25; Ezek. 47:15-17). A time of peace and prosperity enjoyed in earlier days will be reversed into affliction and suffering because of their sin.