

AMOS—WEEK 6

WOE



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is by James Tissot (1836–1902)

Amos was the owner of a flock of sheep. Tissot shows him with a stick and a dog.

Israel is in denial; they are so oblivious to their sin that they look forward to the day of the LORD.

Only the most severe punishment will get their attention.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

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Amos, Week 6 — Woe
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1 Amos 5:16–20 (ESV)

Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord:

*“In all the squares there shall be wailing,
and in all the streets they shall say, ‘Alas! Alas!’
They shall call the farmers to mourning
and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation,
and in all vineyards there shall be wailing,
for I will pass through your midst,”
says the LORD.*

*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!
Why would you have the day of the LORD?
It is darkness, and not light,
as if a man fled from a lion,
and a bear met him,
or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,
and a serpent bit him.
Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it? (ESV)*

This passage teaches a key point that many Christians miss—the day of the LORD won’t be a picnic.

We have hints of this all over scripture. The shepherds were terrified of the angel announcing the good news of the savior. Being in the presence of the LORD causes Isaiah to start to disintegrate.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. — Luke 2:9–10 (ESV)

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” — Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

So, there’s obviously something not fun about being in the presence of holiness. Here Amos spells it out, in terrifying detail. We see similar descriptions in Ezekiel 30:2 and Joel 1:15. God showing up will be far more intense than what folks expect. This passage even describes it as, *“It is darkness, and not light.”*

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

But how does this apply to us? Are “saved” Christians immune to the terror of the day of the Lord?

Not exactly. Grace does not prevent embarrassment, even terror. Being forgiven does not mean we don’t get to see, with newly opened eyes, the full extent of what we’re forgiven of.

2 Amos 5:21–27

*“I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.
Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.
Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.
But let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream.*

*“Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings
In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?
You also carried Sikkuth your king
And Chiun, your idols,
The star of your gods,
Which you made for yourselves.
Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus,”
Says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.*

Israel commits all the wicked things listed previously, but they think that their sacrifices, offerings, and feasts still atone for them.

They don't. God is offended by the hypocrisy of all this and says so here. *“I hate, I despise your feast days. ... Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.”* This is reminiscent of God rejecting Cain's sacrifice.

Except that it isn't. The problem with Cain's sacrifice was the sacrifice. It wasn't the best, as Abel's was.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. — Genesis 4:3–5

That's not the problem here. These sacrifices are okay. It's the heart behind them that's lacking.

I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

Just as Israel's sacrifice is negated by their actions, a Christian confession can be insincere and worthless.

Confessing Jesus as Lord is just announcing an inner reality. Only servants truly have Jesus as their Lord.

3 Amos 6:1–3 (ESV)

*“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,
the notable men of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel comes!
Pass 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,
O you who put far away the day of disaster
and bring near the seat of violence?”*

For a moment here, Amos includes Judea in his prophesy. “Zion” is a reference to the mount on which Jerusalem sits.

As we’ve seen before, walled cities on hills are not easily conquered. But *Calneh, Hamath, and Gath* were similarly secure, and they’ve already fallen to the Assyrians.

But the question, “*Are you better than these kingdoms?*” has got to sting. Of course they’re better, right? They’re the chosen people of God.

Actually, they are. That’s why Amos is holding them to a higher standard.

So, being the chosen doesn’t mean they’re immune to punishment; it means they get more of it.

This is the key takeaway from the whole book, especially for Christians. As sons of God, we’re under His constant watch. That means discipline. Going easy on us is not part of the plan. He never said it would be.

But, for some strange reason, we all seem to want boring lives. Work, pain, and especially risk are all abhorrent to us. Yet gambling is addictive. How can that be?

The cold truth is that sin is a more complex beast than we like to admit. It isn’t just being bad or selfish; it’s also being stupid and inconsistent. Sin doesn’t make sense.

We tend to take our sin lightly, as if it’s cute or something. We notice the dreadful consequences of sin in others, and we’re honest about what’s going on, but our own sin doesn’t get the same look. This makes our sin invisible.

Sin depend on being hidden. If we could see the ugliness of our own sin, we’d stop in an instant.

God’s discipline is often designed to help us see. Find this wavelength and peace will come of it.

4 Amos 6:4–7 (ESV)

*“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the midst of the stall,
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,
who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile,
and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”*

This passage can be summarized in one sentence. “The rich will be the first to go into exile.” In other words, the most confident should be the least confident.

Joel spells out the decadence of the rich, just as he did in chapters four and five. This time, Amos notes that they dine on *lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall*—young, tender animals that would feed many more people if allowed to mature.

But one new element is especially bad—they *are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!* The Hebrew literally says, “They are not sick over the brokenness of Joseph.” They shouldn’t just be grieved over how bad things have gotten; they should be sickened by it.

(Note: Joseph is a reference to the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh—Joseph’s descendants. While the northern kingdom of Israel included other tribes, these two dominate. Thus, Joseph is a synecdoche for all of the northern kingdom.)

Their lack of concern over the ruin of the whole nation means that their decadence has rotted their soul. They only care about themselves.

Are you sickened by the rot all around us (not just annoyed or saddened—sickened)?

This is the heart Amos had. It’s the heart God has. It’s the heart we should have. But how? Is there a way to change our hearts?

Part of being sickened by the rot all around us is being informed about it. Christian publications like breakpoint serve this purpose well.

<https://www.breakpoint.org/>

But better information only takes us so far. Deep change is the work of the Holy Spirit. Pray.

5 Amos 6:8–10 (ESV)

The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares 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.”*

And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. And when one’s relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, “Is there still anyone with you?” he shall say, “No”; and he shall say, “Silence! We must not mention the name of the LORD.”

This begins dreadfully with the words, “*The Lord GOD has sworn by himself.*”

As Richard Pratt explains in his invaluable video series, *He Gave Us Prophets*, many prophecies are not final. Jonah’s prophesy against Nineveh wasn’t fulfilled because the people of Nineveh repented. David prayed that God would relent from the prophesy proclaimed by Nathan. That made sense because Nathan didn’t use the words that make a prophesy final and irreversible.

Those are the words used here, “*The Lord GOD has sworn by himself.*” There is no higher thing to swear by. That means this is final. He *will deliver up the city and all that is in it.*

The last paragraph is dreadful. Every man in a household with ten men, *they shall die.* With no one left to bury them, a relative must bring their bones out of the house. Yuk.

Then this passage ends with a cryptic conversation. The Hebrew in the last sentence literally says, “Do not cause to be remembered, the name of the LORD.” This could be condensed down to, “Do not invoke, the name of the LORD.” That still leaves us with the question, “Why not?”

Experts disagree on why, but we know that “Silence!” (“hass” חָסַ) is translated exactly. Being shushed adds to the sense of hiding and fear that one gets from trying to communicate with *him who is in the innermost parts of the house.* Given his next words, he doesn’t seem to be hiding from the Assyrians.

He’s hiding from God.

That reaction may not be rational, but at least the LORD has his attention. Adam’s hiding from God didn’t make sense either, but at least he was aware that there was a problem.

Sometimes, that’s all you get—at first. When denial collapses, and someone awakens to their dreadful situation, the first reaction can be pretty nutty. If, for example, someone becomes aware that an addiction is not under control, the person may propose yet another ridiculous “fix.” Don’t be discouraged if you see that happen, and definitely don’t laugh at it. At least the person is open to good advice. Give it to them.

On the other hand, if you’re the one emerging from denial, don’t trust yourself. Seek good advice.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Are you scared of the prospect of standing before the throne of grace?
2. What is God calling you to do that makes you flinch?
3. What is the most bizarre aspect of human nature?
4. What thing in our culture sickens you most?
5. Have you seen nonsense reactions like this?

Items for prayer: