

AMOS—WEEK 8

FAMINE



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's taking advantage of the poor is so extreme that they suspend it on holidays, as if that somehow makes it okay. They deserve what's coming.

But, instead of the usual punishments, such as war, exile, plague, famine, God will give them something much worse—silence. Of course, that sets up the ultimate blessing—Christ.

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.

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Thank you.

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Amos, Week 8 — Famine
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1 Amos 7:14–17 (ESV)

Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.

*“You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’*

Therefore thus says the LORD:

*“Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”*

When I picture this conversation, I can’t help but laugh. Previously, Amaziah had ordered Amos not to prophesy against Israel. So he knows that Amos is a prophet. He can’t just ignore Amos’s words. He respects Amos, even if he doesn’t like what he’s been saying.

So, picture the look on Amaziah’s face when Amos hits him with, “*Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword ...*” His attempt at “persuasion” has backfired. Now that respect has turned to dread. What was he thinking?

He couldn’t have been thinking much. Prophets are unpredictable. They speak God’s mind, and we don’t know what that’s going to be until we hear it. If we’re trying to follow Him, we might get close though.

Amaziah had ordered Amos to not prophesy. His expectations weren’t going to be close.

Everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord tries to follow Him. This can get challenging. We want to go our own way, and that deafens us to His leading.

This passage begins with an interesting example of following Him—Amos’s call. He didn’t try to become a prophet and didn’t expect to be one either. Yet when God called, He obeyed.

The key takeaway is that being open to an unexpected call is essential to hearing it. My own call to write the DEEP came in unexpected ways. Every step was triggered by a negative event. Things went wrong.

I didn’t originate the DEEP, but the original author was pulled away by a ministry catastrophe and asked for someone to take it over. Later, a total website wipeout erased the DEEP from its original publishing venue, but Ailbe offered to host it. The rest is, as they say, history.

2 Amos 8:1–3 (ESV)

This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. And 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 by them.
The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,”
declares the Lord GOD.
“So many dead bodies!”
“They are thrown everywhere!”
“Silence!”*

The Hebrew literally says, “A basket of summer.” This means a basket of summer’s yield, thus the translation, “summer fruit.”

The point is that they’re about to harvest a basket of what their actions have yielded. They “produced” what’s coming.

And it will be a dreadful yield. There’s some ambiguity in what follows but not in the words, “*The end has come.*”

The nation will be completely conquered.

Christians can overstate the impact of God’s grace. Cause and effect still exists. Don’t do your homework, and you won’t do well in school, and you may not do well in life.

Reckless driving yields wrecks. Wrecks yield injuries. Injuries yield limps. God grants grace, but His agenda is eternal. Limping can be what someone needs to as a means of instruction or to open blind eyes.

There was a clever description of God’s judgement published in the science humor magazine, *The Journal of Irreproducible Results*. Since reproducibility is the standard for whether an experimental result is genuine, this name means the magazine is tongue-in-cheek.

Long ago, it published a letter to the editor from God, complaining about a previous article about Him and noting that there might be consequences. It contained this profound description of His pique.

“As it is well attested, my patience is infinite, but it’s not that infinite.”

God created a universe of cause and effect.

His grace stands on top of that, not instead of it.

3 Amos 8:4–6 (ESV)

*Hear this, you who trample on the needy
and bring the poor of the land to an end,
saying, “When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?
And the Sabbath,
that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals
and sell the chaff of the wheat?”*

This passage doesn't describe any punishment. It is all about the wrongs committed that will lead to the punishment. They *trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end*. They're taking advantage of vulnerable people.

While the double-dealings listed are obviously wrong, even to include buying the poor (that is enslaving them), it's the timing that's most wicked.

These things are suspended for the sabbath and the new moon festivals. They know that they can't do them during these times. This means they are not ignorant of the law, and they know these things are crossing a line. So, they wait for the green light, when they assume that they're okay.

That's ridiculous. It's wrong to cheat people on some days, but it's okay on others?? Where did they come up with a screwball idea like that?

Sinful thinking, of course.

This is a deep dive into the nature of sin. Sin isn't just about deceiving others; we deceive ourselves.

While today's passage gives a clear example of self-deception, the take-away here is more about the less obvious cases. Those are the garbage we need to look for in ourselves.

We're all geniuses at making excuses. Whether it's like today's passage, where timing is the issue, or it's about which sins are more serious, we tend to see our own actions through rose-colored glasses.

Our sins aren't heinous; they're kinda cute, right? No harm, really. We pay lip-service to recognizing that we're sinful, but could you say (just to yourself) what your worst sin this week was?

I like to say, “Denial isn't just a river in Mississippi.” That's goofy because sin is goofy.

Seeing our own sin is as difficult as it is important. A real friend is indispensable in this.

4 Amos 8:7–10

*The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
“Surely I will never forget any of their works.
Shall the land not tremble for this,
And everyone mourn who dwells in it?
All of it shall swell like the River,
Heave and subside
Like the River of Egypt.*

*“And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord GOD,
“That I will make the sun go down at noon,
And I will darken the earth in broad daylight;
I will turn your feasts into mourning,
And all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on every waist,
And baldness on every head;
I will make it like mourning for an only son,
And its end like a bitter day.*

As depressing as the book of Amos has been, suddenly we get a passage that’s a collection of images of the crucifixion of Christ.

The earthquake is referenced with, “*Shall the land not tremble for this.*”

The falling darkness matches, “*That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight.*”

“*I will turn your feasts into mourning,*” coincides with the Passover feast.

God’s only begotten is the “*only son.*”

One can find other, less precise fits like, “*the pride of Jacob,*” which can mean many things, including Christ.

Prophesy has a “bomb-dropping” style to it. It’s full of surprises, even surprising surprises.

Those surprises are by design. They are part of God’s style. He does glorious things that we don’t expect, in glorious ways that we don’t expect.

The whole course of Old Testament history is one tragedy after another. It’s sin, upon sin, upon sin.

It’s a total disaster—except that it’s not. All those negatives are to set the stage for redemption.

Christ is coming.

5 Amos 8:11–14 (ESV)

*“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD,
“when I will send a famine on the land—
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.*

*They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD,
but they shall not find it.*

*“In that day the lovely virgins and the young men
shall faint for thirst.*

*Those who swear by the Guilt of Samaria,
and say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’
and, ‘As the Way of Beersheba lives,’
they shall fall, and never rise again.”*

This passage continues the Christ theme from yesterday. This time, Amos is prophesying the long silence that will set the stage for the Messiah. He doesn’t say that it will last 400 years, but he does say it will last long enough to wear everyone out, even the strongest and fairest.

It’s long enough to wipe them out too, but the only ones that will be wiped out are the ones worshipping other gods. *Those who swear by the Guilt of Samaria*, is a deliberate mispronunciation in Hebrew. The Hebrew word for guilt (Ashmah) sounds like Asherah, the name of the Samaritan god whom they were worshipping (swearing by). It’s mispronounced as an insult.

But everyone is going to have four centuries without any word from the LORD. That’s 20 generations.

Anything more than three generations ago is ancient history to me. Four hundred years is inconceivable. I don’t know which continent my ancestors were living on then, probably some of each. Twenty generations ago would be my great¹⁷-grand-parents. That’s over a million people.

Amos rightly calls this period of silence a famine. It’ll be uniquely discouraging. The pain of living under the thumb of Rome will be bad enough, but the total lack of prophesy will make it worse. They’ll be able to practice their religion, but only because the emperor allows it. Rome will be alpha.

They’ll wonder, “Where is God?” There won’t be given any sign that Rome’s power is limited, in either time or magnitude.

Their belief that Yahweh is the Lord of all creation will be mocked, and He won’t do or say anything to prove them wrong—to show that their faith is anything more than superstition.

Seventy years in exile is peanuts compared to this.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you seen a bizarre, unexpected call from God?
2. When have you see grace withheld, and it worked out?
3. Yes or No? Can you name your worst recent sin?
4. Have you seen a sequence of bad things set up something good?
5. What was the biggest attack on your faith?

Items for prayer: