

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 19: “Woe To The Sinners!”
(Amos 5:18—6:14)

Introduction: Amos is still lamenting the impending doom of the nation of Israel. In this section, he pronounces “woe” upon four kinds of people in the Kingdom; the ignorant (5:18-27), the indifferent (6:1-2), the indulgent (vv. 3-7), and the impudent (vv. 8-14). The circumstances are different, but we have these same people in the professing church today. Do you recognize them?

1. “Woe To The Ignorant!” (5:18-27)

“The day of the Lord” is a period of time during which God judges His enemies and establishes His kingdom on earth. It’s the answer to our prayer “Thy kingdom come” and is described in Revelation (6—20) and many passages in the books of the prophets.

The people Amos was addressing saw “the day of the Lord” as a time of great deliverance for the Jews and terrible punishment for the Gentiles (Joel 2:28-32), but the prophets had a clearer vision of this momentous event. They realized that “the day of the Lord” was also a time of testing and purifying for Israel (see Isa. 2:10-21; 13:16-13; Jer. 46:10; Joel 3:9-17; Zeph. 2:1-2), when God’s people would go through tribulation before entering the kingdom of God.

Amos looked ahead and gave three descriptions of “the day of the Lord”.

- a. First, it would be a day of despair and mourning. “Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord!” (Amos 5:18a NIV). Good theology can lead to hope, but bad theology leads to false hope.
 - i. Since these hypocrites were sure that God would spare Israel but condemn their enemies, they longed for the day of the Lord to come.
- b. Second, it would be a day of darkness (vv. 18b, 20). God had warned that He was about to pass through their midst (v. 17), but not “pass over” as he had in Egypt.
 - i. This time He was coming to judge His own people, and as there was darkness for three days prior to that first Passover (Ex. 12:12), so “the day of the Lord” would bring darkness.
 - ii. In addition, what Israel experienced at the hands of the Assyrians was a small sampling of what would happen in the end times when the whole world will see “the day of the Lord.”
- c. Third, it would be a day of doom (Amos 5:19). There would be no escaping God’s wrath because there were no hiding places! Run from the lion, and you meet the bear; run for safety into your house, and a serpent bites you. We would say “Out of the frying pan, into the fire!” Remember God’s judgments are thorough and accurate.

These Israelites were eagerly expecting “the day of the Lord” without realizing what that day would bring them. They were like some Christians today who want Jesus to come so they can escape painful situations and not because they “love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

- a. They forget that Christ’s return means judgment as well as blessing. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; ...” (2 Cor. 5:10-11a).

- b. Next in his message, Amos looked around (Amos 5:21-24) and pointed out the sins of the people that made them totally unprepared to experience the day of the Lord. He began with their hypocritical worship (vv. 21-22), something he had mentioned earlier (4:4-5).
- c. The prophet's second indictment was against their unconcern for others (Amos 5:11-12, 24). Amos 5:24 is a key verse in the book, for it reveals God's concern that His people be righteous in their character and just in their conduct. No matter how much "religious activity" we participate in, if we don't love our brothers and our neighbors, we can't honestly worship and serve the Lord.
- d. Finally, Amos looked back (5:25-27) and reminded them of their relationship to Jehovah after He had delivered them from Egypt. God asked the Jews to give Him faith, obedience, and love; but at Mount Sinai, after vowing to serve God, the people worshipped a golden calf (Ex. 32).
 - a. Their forefathers sinned further by offering sacrifices to false gods even while Jehovah was leading the nation through the wilderness (Stephen quotes this in Acts 7:42-43).
- e. After the Jews settled in the Promise Land, two generations of leaders guided them in the way of the Lord. But by the time the third generation came along, the people had turned to the idols of the nations around them (Judg. 2:10-15).
- f. The poet, Thomas Gray wrote, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." He was writing about the naïve innocence of childhood, not to spoil the joys of children by telling them about the burdens of adulthood. However, in the Christian life, ignorance of God's truth keeps us in darkness (Isa. 8:20); so, we must understand His "word of prophecy" that shines as a light in this world's darkness (2 Peter 1:19).

2. "Woe To The Indifferent!" (6:1-2)

This "woe" was addressed to both Judah ("Zion") and Israel ("Samaria") because both kingdoms were indifferent toward God's Word and the judgment that hung over them. They called themselves "the foremost nation" (v. 1 NIV) and enjoyed an unwarranted false confidence for several reasons.

- a. The first cause of their complacency, was their geography. Situated on Mount Zion, Jerusalem was considered impregnable (Ps. 78:68-69; 132:13-18); and Samaria also had a seemingly secure position. But, when God decided to deal with these cities, nothing could stop the enemy.
- b. As for their prosperity, government, and military strength, Amos had already exposed the folly of depending on them for the heart of each nation was corrupt to the core. Their political experts gave their opinion that the nation was safe and secure, and the people believed them, just like people today. False confidence that's based on expert advice, statistics, and material resources and that ignores the spiritual dimension of life is sure to lead to shameful defeat.
- c. Amos had already mentioned areas in Syria and Philistia that had already fallen to the Assyrian army and then asked two questions: "Are you better than they? Is your territory bigger than theirs?" If the enemy had already destroyed places bigger and stronger than Samaria and Israel, what hope was there for the Jewish people, especially when the Jews were living like Gentiles and were disobeying the Lord?
- d. Complacency is an insidious sin, because it's based on lies, motivated by pride, and leads to trusting something other than God (Zeph. 1:12). Like the people in the church of Laodicea, complacent people consider themselves "rich and increased with goods" and in need of

nothing (Rev. 3:17). In reality, however, they have lost everything that's important in the spiritual life.

When the Lord sees His people becoming complacent and self-satisfied, He sometimes sends trials to wake them up.

3. "Woe To The Indulgent!" (6:3-7)

"It can't happen here!" was the motto of the complacent leaders. "If a day of judgment is coming, it's surely a long way off." When anybody mentioned the possibility of natural disaster, the leaders laughed at the idea and disregarded it. But God had a different viewpoint. He said, "All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, 'the calamity shall not overtake nor confront us'" (Amos 9:10 NKJV). Yet, by their very indifference, they were bringing the day of judgment that much nearer.

Amos described their indulgent way of life—a way of life that left no place for the disciplines of the spiritual life.

- a. They were living for pleasure and not for the glory of God.
- b. The common people generally slept on mats placed on the ground, but the wealthy enjoyed the luxury of beds of ivory and luxurious couches. They also used ivory to decorate their mansions (3:15).
- c. The wealthy also enjoyed elegant feasts, eating lamb and veal, drinking wine in abundance, enjoying beautiful music, and wearing expensive perfumes. The poor people, whom they exploited, couldn't afford to kill tender lambs and calves, but had to settle for occasional mutton and beef, perhaps from a sacrifice.
- d. There is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying good food or good music, provided the things of the Lord are uppermost in your heart. David designed and made musical instruments, but he used them to praise the Lord.
- e. The sin in Amos's day was that these luxuries distracted the people from the real problems of the nation, and "they [were] not grieved for the affliction of Joseph [Samaria]" (Amos 6:6).
- f. When nations get pleasure-mad, it's a sign that the end is near. Belshazzar and his leaders were enjoying a sumptuous feast when the city of Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 7).
- g. It is difficult to find people who are truly burdened about the sins of the nations and the sins of the church. Too many Christians are laughing when they should be weeping (James 4:8-10) and tolerating sin when they should be opposing it (1 Cor. 5:2).
- h. Since these wealthy exploiters of the poor considered themselves to be the first in the land, God said they would be the first to go into captivity (Amos 6:7); for theirs was the greater responsibility.

4. "Woe To The Impudent!" (6:8-14)

"I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore, I will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (v. 8 NKJV). The Lord not only said this, but He also swore by Himself to fulfill it, which makes it a most solemn statement. The phrase "pride of Jacob" (KJV says "excellency of Jacob") is used in Psalm 47:4 to mean "the Promised land." God abhorred the very land of Israel, the land He had given to His people for their inheritance.

Jesus said, “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). The people boasted of their fortresses, their mansions, and their elegant way of life, all of which God abhorred, and would one day destroy. People who live without God, whose god is really personal pleasure, will one day hear Him say, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will these things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20 NKJV).

These impudent people who rejected God’s warning would one day face three judgments.

- a. **Death (vv. 9-10).** Amos describes a hypothetical situation to emphasize the terrors that will come when the Assyrians invade Samaria. Ten men, perhaps the remnants of a hundred soldiers (5:3), would be hiding in a house, but pestilence would catch up with them, and they would die.
 - I. If a relative came to burn the bodies (the safest thing to do in war when disease is rampant), anyone in the house guarding the bodies would deny there was others there who also might die in the plague.
 - II. But the disposal of the dead bodies wouldn’t be a “religious” occasion, for the people would be afraid to even mention the name of the Lord lest He become angry and send more judgment.

- b. **Destruction (vv. 11-13).** Pride always goes before destruction (Prov.16:18). The summer houses and winter houses that the wealthy enjoyed and boasted about would one day be nothing but ashes and fragments. The Babylonians would even burn Judah’s beautiful temple. This would occur because the Lord commanded it, His commands are always obeyed.
 - I. In Amos 6:12, the prophet argues from the order of nature. Horses are too wise to gallop on slick rocks, where they might slip and fall. Farmers are too wise to try to plow the rocks or sea, because the plow won’t accomplish anything on rocks or water (Remember, Amos was a farmer.)
 - II. Plain common sense convinces us of the truth of these statements. Then why would God’s people poison their own judicial system? What they did just didn’t make sense!
 - III. Their pride came to the fore when they boasted of their military victories at Lo Debar and Karnaim. We aren’t certain when Israel took these cities, and it’s not important. What is important is that they were proud of their achievements and confident that nobody could defeat them. Lo Debar means “nothing,” and that’s what God thought of their victory! They boasted that the victory came because of their own strength, and their false confidence would lead to their destruction.

- c. **Disgrace and defeat (v. 14).** If a nation rehearses the victories of the past and gives the glory to God, that’s one thing, but if they claim the victory for themselves, they are asking for future defeat. Humble dependence on God is the only guarantee of His help and blessing.
 - I. Assyria’s invasion of Israel wouldn’t take place because of the accidents or incidents of international politics. God would bring the army into the land and give Assyria the responsibility of chastening His people. “Behold I will bring a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,’ says the Lord” (Jer. 5:15 NKJV).
 - II. Hammath is in the north of Israel, and the river of Arabah is in the south. Thus, this means that Assyria would devastate the entire land.

- III. At the time Amos spoke those words, Assyria was a rather weak nation; and King Jeroboam was able to keep Assyria, Egypt, and Syria at bay. But that would change, and Assyria would become a threatening world empire.

After all, it is God who controls the nations and assigns them their lands (Acts 17:26).

The prophet Amos had finished preaching his three messages to the proud and complacent kingdom of Israel. He has looked within their hearts and exposed the corruption there. Now, the Lord will give His servant six visions—five visions of judgment and one of the glorious kingdom that will be established after the day of the Lord. With the record of these visions, Amos will close his book.

Questions For Personal Reflection Or Group Discussion

1. What is something that leads you to lament?
2. What are the definitions of *ignorant*, *indifferent*, *indulgent* and *impudent*?
3. If someone were to ask you, “What is the day of the Lord?” how would you answer?
4. Where do you see local churches expressing their concern for the needy and those who don’t attend church?
5. What is complacency? Where do you see it at work in the church? In your nation?
6. What is the relationship between spiritual disciplines and indulgence?
7. What are some signs that a person is a lover of pleasure instead of a lover of God?

Homework: Read Amos 7—9. Stop—Look—Listen!