

# The Bible Notebook

## AMOS

“Prepare to meet thy God”

A Verse by Verse Study

By

Johnny L. Sanders, D. Min

DEDICATION

To

Gene Jeffries

President

Cambridge Graduate School

*I thank God  
upon every remembrance of you*

# THE BOOK OF AMOS

## *THE BURDEN OF THE LORD*

### INTRODUCTION

The setting for the message of the prophet Amos is in the eighth century B.C., but the principles are as current and up to date as the morning newspaper. The timeless axioms are more relevant than a college text book. The application of the message is practical and the eternal truths are more significant and beneficial than the latest news release. How does one know when a text book in the field of science or history is out of date? Has it been published? By the time it reaches the consumer it has already become out of date. New discoveries are being made every day and history needs updating with every breaking story. The Book of Amos is timeless.

Divine principles of righteousness and justice, of sin and punishment have never changed. Certainly, fallen human nature has not changed; both individuals and nations are in a state of rebellion against God. As never before in the history of America there are elements in our society that are trying to purge Christian ideas, values, and standards from the marketplace. Modern and postmodern historians and social scientists have systematically and persistently expunged from history textbooks references to the contribution of Christianity to the foundation and superstructure of our nation and our society.

Every time there is a cry for decency and morality some individual or group tries to identify it with “right-wing” religious fundamentalists. Both political and religious leaders have sought to discredit the “Moral Majority” and the “Christian Coalition” by coupling these conservative Christian groups with a political movement.

The first time I prepared a study guide for the Book of Amos, I pointed out the fact throughout history the church had shown some of its most phenomenal growth during times of persecution. I lamented the fact that during the decade of the sixties and until sometime after 1970 the church was not being persecuted in America - it was simply being ignored. That is no longer the case. Humanists of the

seventies and early eighties began to fire their heavy cannons at the church, evangelical Christians in particular. In late eighties and nineties the most vicious attacks have come from those who subscribe to some form of New Age religious belief, or postmodern ideology, philosophy, or social agenda. Furthermore, many of those attacking traditional Judeo-Christian values identify themselves as Christians.

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (*Postmodern Times, A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*) makes a valid point that modernism (which was opposed to God) has now yielded to postmodernism (which is also opposed to God). He discusses premodern times (which I prefer to think of as a theistic world view), modernism (which I identify with humanism) and postmodernism (which I identify with New Age, or the new spirituality which may be seen in eastern mysticism, the occult and various other movements). Veith says

Today as we enter the twenty-first century, a new world view is emerging. The “modern,” strange as it is to say, has become old-fashioned. The twentieth century, for all of its achievements and catastrophes, is passing into history. The “modern ideas” that characterized the twentieth century no longer seem relevant. We are entering the “postmodern” age.

The term “postmodern” primarily refers to time rather than to a distinct ideology. If the “modern” age is really over, Christians have every reason to be glad. Ever since the battle between “moderates” and “fundamentalists” (and before), Biblical Christianity has been bludgeoned by forces of modernism, with its scientific rationalism, humanism, and bias against the past. Today the assumptions of modernism, including those that have bedeviled the church in this century, are being abandoned. Christians can rejoice at the dawn of a postmodern age [14: 19].

While the modernist’s attack on Christianity seems to be losing steam, the postmodernists are attacking on different grounds (and with different presuppositions).

For example, modernists would argue in various ways that Christianity is not true. One hardly hears this objection anymore. Today the most common critique is that ‘Christians think they have the only truth.’ The claims of Christianity are not denied; they are rejected because they purport to be true [14: 19].

The postmodernist rejects absolutes (he rejects them absolutely!). They label anyone who rejects relativism as intolerant because they are trying to force their views on others.

Postmodernists reject Christianity on the same grounds that they reject modernism, with its scientific rationalism. Both Christians and modernists believe in truth. Postmodernists do not. Whether modernism or postmodernism will prove the more hospitable to Christianity remains to be seen [14: 20].

It is important that we understand this. Amos preached to a theistic audience in a theistic age. Everyone believed in God - or *gods*. Paul wrote to people whose world view was premodern (theistic), but his message is applicable in any age. In Romans and Ephesians, for example, we find the answers to the modernists (atheists, humanists) who claim there is no God. But we also find that the Lord has prepared us through His Word to offer a defense against the postmodernists who are helping to squelch modernism. They readily admit there is a god, or a god-force, but vehemently reject the idea that the God of the Bible is the one and only God. They may believe in gods (polytheism), or they may believe all is one and one is all (monism). Francis Shaeffer made the profound observation that the most insignificant word in the English language is the word god spelled with a small "g."

Scripture tells us of the importance of "understanding the present time" (Romans 13:11) "Most Christians," observes George Barna, "do not perceive the Church to be in the midst of the most severe struggle it has faced in centuries." Many Christians, including theologians, are still battling modernism, unaware that the issues have changed. If Christians are to minister effectively in the postmodern world and avoid its temptations, they must understand the spirit of the age [14: 20].

The study of Scripture should never be considered optional by Christians. It is never optional to one who really loves the Lord. But the times in which we live today demands a commitment to Bible study, prayer and meditation directed by the Holy Spirit. That is one reason the Book of Amos is still important after twenty-eight centuries. God's Word is relevant, whether the issue is false gods made by man's hands or invisible false gods created in one's mind and heart.

We need to learn well the message of Amos and apply it to our situation today. God founded America on Christian principles to protect His church and His people. He has preserved America and used her for His purpose. For nearly two centuries, America has been the center for the spread of the Gospel around the world. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, celebrated its one hundred-fiftieth anniversary in 1995. At a time when other mainline denominations were declining in membership Southern Baptists have grown consistently. Is it possible that one of the reasons for that growth is their commitment to world missions? That is not to say that members or leaders of others denominations are not committed to missions, but to highlight the emphasis Southern Baptists have placed on missions and the success of the Cooperative Program in support of missions at home and abroad.

There are some strong denominations and many great churches in America, but morally and spiritually we are losing ground. We are moving deeper and deeper into the post-Christian era and it is imperative that we ask what God has in store for America today if she persists in turning her back on the God Who has blessed and preserved her. Before we answer that question, we should be reminded that Jesus Christ did not come to found America and when He returns He is not coming back for America or for Americans. He is coming back for His bride (the true church) and He will be looking for a bride without spot or blemish. Unfortunately, His bride today is both spotted and blemished. How long will he let us go without judging us? Or, is it possible that He is judging us today and we are blind to His activities?

Can America, like ancient Israel, reach the point of no return? I predicted once a number of years ago that I believe we are on a collision course with our destiny: we are headed for an encounter with God, either in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, or in divine judgment. As a Christian, I pray that it will be in the return of our Lord, for His wrath is an awesome thing to contemplate. So, before it is too late, Christians must join together in prayer for a spiritual awakening in America that will spread around the world. While human beings will never create a utopia on earth, we are commissioned to reach out to the lost with a message of salvation.

A ship carrying hundreds of passengers across the Atlantic Ocean is leaking badly and a survey of the problem reveals that the hull is rusting through and the ship will sink before arriving at the nearest port. An SOS goes out and a nearby vessel responds immediately. With a sense of urgency, sailors, trained and equipped, are sent across to the sinking ship with instructions to dive down and see if they can patch the vessel - do anything to keep it afloat. After all, it belongs to the same shipping company and it will cost hundreds of millions of dollars to replace it. If they can save the ship, the owners will surely reward them, so they are determined to fight to save the ship as long as any little part of it is visible above the surface of the water. But what about the passengers?

At the time of this writing there is a cruise vessel with some four hundred people aboard floating out of control in the Caribbean Sea following a fire that knocked out all power. There is another ship stuck on a sand bar on one of the Great Lakes with three hundred people on board. Rescue vessels are on the scenes. What is their number one priority, the ship or the people on board the ships? The ship is not the first concern of the people who have gone out to help, whether they are with the Coast Guard, the company that owns the vessels, or people from competing cruise lines. Their primary concern is for the safety of the passengers and crews.

The world is a sinking ship, sinking in a sea of sin and iniquity, and we cannot save the ship. But with a sense of urgency we must do everything we can to rescue as many people as possible before it is too late. That does not mean that we are to neglect or abuse the earth. What it means is that we must be

about the business of “Rescuing the Perishing.” Christians should always be responsible citizens, but in the end we are not going to be able to save the ship. We must do what the Lord has commissioned us to do to reach the perishing and provide an atmosphere in which they might live and serve for the glory of God.

## THE MESSAGE OF AMOS

### *GENERAL OUTLINE*

(Kyle M. Yates)

1:1-2:16 - The Preamble  
3:1-6:17 - The Charges  
7:-9:10 - The Visions  
9:11-15 - The Epilogue

### ALTERNATE OUTLINE

(Holman Bible Dictionary)

- I. The Sermons: God Confronts His People's Sin (1:1-6:14).
  - A. God's Word is revealed in human words (1:1-2).
  - B. God identifies and condemns all human sin (1:3-2:16).
    1. Acts against common human decency are sinful (1:3-2:3).
    2. The rejection of God's law by substituting one's own wisdom is sin (2:4-5).
    3. Rejecting God's love is sin (2:6-16).
  - C. God condemns empty religion (3:1-15).
    1. The privilege of being loved by God brings responsibility (3:1-2).
    2. God reveals His purposes to His people (3:3-8).
    3. God uses historical agents in His judgment (3:9-12).
    4. Centers of empty religion and ill-gotten prosperity will all fall (3:13-15).
  - D. God's love confronts His disobedient people in judgment (4:1-13).
    1. Insatiable desire leads to sin (4:1-3).
    2. Empty and meaningless worship is sin (4:4-5).

- 3. Temporal judgment is intended to lead God's people to repentance (4:6-11).
  - 4. God's rebellious people face an ultimate confrontation with Him (4:12-13).
  - E. God calls His people to practice justice and righteousness (5:1-27).
    - 1. God sees the end of His sinful people (5:1-3).
    - 2. God's rebellious people are invited to seek Him (5:4-9,14-15).
    - 3. God's inescapable judgment is on His people (5:10-13,16-20).
    - 4. Practical righteousness is God's ultimate demand of His people (5:21-27).
  - F. False security in national strength leads to ultimate downfall (6:1-14).
- II. The Visions: Seeing God Properly Reveals Both His Judgment and His Mercy (7:1-9:15).
- A. God extends mercy in response to serious intercession (7:1-6).
  - B. Ultimate confrontation with God can never be escaped (7:7-9).
  - C. A proper view of God brings everything else into perspective (7:10-17).
    - 1. A false view of the nature of God's message leads to wrong decisions (7:10-13).
    - 2. A person transformed by a vision of God sees people and things as they really are (7:14-17).
  - D. The final consequences of sin offers judgment without hope (8:1-9:4).
    - 1. An overripe, rotten religion is worthless (8:1-3).
    - 2. The empty observance of meaningless ritual leaves our morality unaffected (8:4-6).
    - 3. God's final judgment is a horrible sight (8:7-9:4).
  - E. God's mercy can be seen beyond His judgment (9:5-15).
    - 1. God is Sovereign over all the universe (9:5-6).
    - 2. God's mercy still offers hope beyond temporal judgment (9:7-10).
    - 3. God's ultimate purpose of good for His people will be fulfilled (9:11-15).

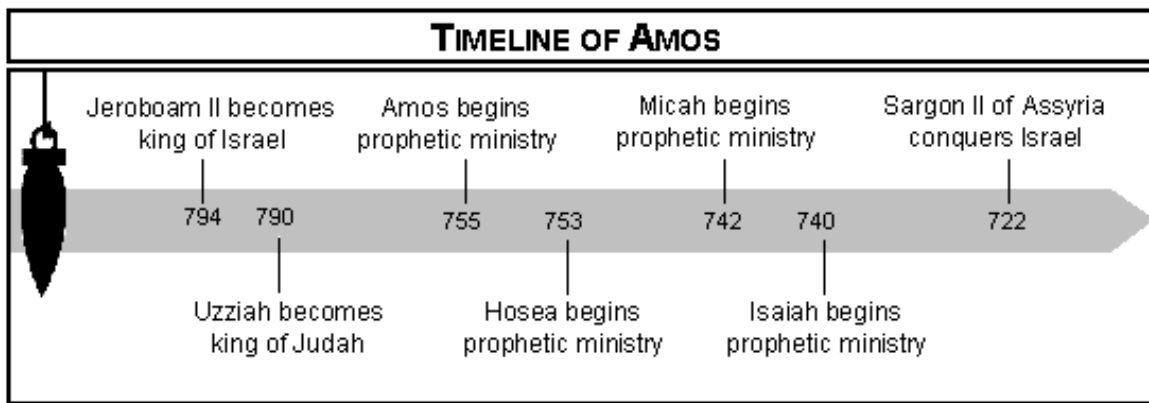
## BACKGROUND

**AUTHOR.** The Book of Amos was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the eighth century



B.C. prophet Amos. Amos was a shepherd and fruit gatherer from the small town of Tekoa, which was located about twelve miles south of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah. It was a small village about 3000 feet above sea level. Tekoa was known for its short legged, ugly, but highly prized sheep which were famous for their ability to produce an abundance of wool. The sycamore fruit was a small fig-like fruit which some scholars believe was a fruit fed primarily to animals. It was also eaten by the very poor.

**THE MAN.** The personal name Amos means "a load." Amos was a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah who ministered in the northern kingdom of Israel. His name graphically describes the prophet as a "burden bearer." He carried a heavy burden for his people, and in a sense, the people of Israel were a burden he carried.



Amos was a rugged out-of-doors man in the character of Elijah. He was bold and courageous, with a keen insight into the social and spiritual problems of his day. He was stern and harsh, yet a man of faith, compassion, and prayer.

**DATE.** The Book of Amos was written and the message preached during the reign of Uzziah in Judah (783-742 B.C.) and Jeroboam in Israel (786-746 B.C.) Amos, it is agreed, preached from around 765-750 B.C. The Holman Bible Dictionary gives 765 B.C. as the date. Ryrie says he began his ministry in 755 (see Time line below). He was the first of four great eighth century B.C. prophets who proclaimed the Word of the Lord during what has come to be known as the "Golden Age of Prophecy." Amos and Hosea prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel and Isaiah and Micah in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Honeycutt points out that the prophet dated his call "two years before the earthquake." "It appears that such an earthquake may have accompanied a total eclipse of the sun on June 15, 763 B.C." [5: 4]. If this is the case, Amos must have been called in 765 B.C.

*Ryrie Study Bible*

**PROPHET.** There are three Hebrew words that are translated prophet in the Old Testament:

1. Ro'eh is the word for seer, or one who stands and looks a long time (a gazer).
2. Choseh carries the same basic thought as ro'eh.
3. Navi, the third word translated prophet, is used about 500 times in the Old Testament. It denotes one who is called or spoken to, and one who speaks.

The word navi is first used in Genesis 20:7 where Abraham is called a prophet. In I Peter, Noah is called a preacher of righteousness and in Jude Enoch seems to have been called of God for the same task.

The navi was one who proclaimed the "thus saith the Lord." There were times when the prophet was called upon to foretell future events, but more often he was called upon to tell forth (speak forth) divine truth. Amos was called of Yahweh both to preach the word of the Lord and to prophesy of future events. The Holman Bible Commentary adds to our information on the place of Amos in Old Testament prophecy:

As a prophet, Amos was a primary figure among the series of courageous men known as the "Minor Prophets." Neither they nor their inspired messages were minor, and they are called "minor" only because their books are far shorter than "Major Prophets" such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. So brief were their writings that all twelve were written on a single scroll. Hence, those writings were commonly known as the Book

of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets [18: HBD].

Amos stressed that he was a layman, and not a professional prophet: "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (7:14-15 RSV).

Because of God's call, Amos assumed his prophetic responsibilities as a lonely voice prophesying from both the desert and the villages. He indicted both Judah and Israel, challenging the superficial qualities of religious institutions. For Amos, his call and his continuing ministry rested in God's initiative and in His sustaining power: "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (3:8 RSV) [18: HBD].

Amos lived in a time of relative peace on the international scene. Both Egypt and Assyria were in a period of decline, although Assyria was beginning to flex its military muscles. Syria had become ineffective, but the reduction of this buffer state between Israel and Assyria was to have serious repercussions in the generation following Amos.

**POLITICAL SITUATION.** Amos prophesied during the reign of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel.

It was the most productive period in Israel's history since the golden era of David and Solomon (1011-931 B.C.). Civil war had broken the nations into two rival states, Israel and Judah (931 B.C.). But during Amos' day, the territories of Judah and Israel together were equal to the realm of David and Solomon [10: 8].

Uzziah's had brought prosperity and security to Judah, but his success was overshadowed by his sin. "Prosperous but proud, he ended his rule in disgraceful shame as a leper (2 Chron. 26)" [10: 8]. The reign of Jeroboam II in Israel had been one of unparalleled success, both economically and militarily. He had defeated Syria and taken back territories previously lost (II Kings 14). But he had continued the idolatry that had plagued Israel since her inception as an independent nation. She continued to practice calf worship which Jeroboam I had introduced in 931 B.C. when he set up golden calves in Dan and Bethel (I Kings 12:26-33). According to Hosea, whose ministry followed close behind that of Amos, there was a calf shrine in Samaria (Hos. 8:5-6).

On the international scene Syria, long a threat to Israel, was growing weak. But Egypt, though far

from the zenith of her power, was still a force to be reckoned with by all parties in that part of the world. Assyria, though not an immediate cause for alarm, was, as already noted, in the early stages of the process of becoming a powerful empire. The Assyrians would defeat the combined forces of Syria and Israel in 734 (or 735) B.C. She would defeat Israel in 732, and in 722 B.C. she would deport large numbers of Israelites and settle foreigners in their place.

It is important to understand the internal situation. The political structures of both Israel and Judah were more stable than at any time since the division of the kingdoms under Rehoboam.

Beginning his prophetic activity during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos lived during an era that rivaled Solomon's generation in its stability and economic prosperity (2 Kings 14:23-27). Yet, it was precisely the social, moral, and religious problems attending that prosperity that became the focus for Amos' voice of judgment. In the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the noble king Uzziah reigned (Amos 1:1). Amos probably began his ministry with God's call in 765 B.C., "two years before the earthquake" (1:1) [18: HBD].

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.** The internal political stability and international situation in the region had brought material prosperity to those in a position to take advantage of it. There were only two socioeconomic classes: the very rich and the very poor. There was no middle class. The wealthy oppressed and exploited the poor in order to become more wealthy. The poor, in no position to exploit the wealthy and with no voice in government, were left without recourse or defense. For the wealthy this was the golden era of Israel (the northern kingdom), but for the poor it was a time of deprivation and abuse. Exploitation of the poor was the rule, not the exception (2:6; 3:10; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4-6), and justice the victim of a corrupt political system.

As strange as it may seem, Israel was suffering from material prosperity which they interpreted as a blessing and stamp of God's approval. The wealthy pointed to their wealth as a sign of divine favor and to the poverty of the poor as sign of their unworthiness. It must be stressed that material blessings are not necessarily evil. The Bible teaches that it is the love of money that is evil - not money itself. Their problem was what has been termed ill-gotten gain. They exploited the poor for their own gain. Another problem with material possessions is seen when the person ceases to possess the possessions and the possessions possess them. Greed and covetousness are always associated with these conditions and in this case, both greed and covetousness were expressed in cheating and stealing from those who were less fortunate. Self-indulgent, sinful luxury was the charge brought by Amos (1:6ff; 4:1ff; 5:10ff; 6:1ff; 8:4ff).

**RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS.** "Morally, Israel and Judah were suffering under the corruption

generated as a by-product of Canaanite and Tyrian Baalism, as well as infidelity to the Lord's covenant" [18: HBD]. There was a connection between the social and economic circumstances and the moral and spiritual climate.

It may appear strange that the corruption of Israelite society could be traced to its contemporary religious structures and to the material prosperity which Israelites so often interpreted as a sign of divine favor. Despite the contradictory nature of those circumstances, the debauched moral condition of the land was the product of both corrupt religion and perverted material prosperity [18: HBD].

Nearly a century and a half after Amos proclaimed God's message to Israel, the Lord would indict Judah for two sins. "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns; broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). They were guilty of two evils: (1) worship of false gods and (2) false worship of the true God. Israel was guilty of the same two evils.

The dynamism of personal religious experience gave way to the superficiality of institutional religion as demonstrated in the conflict between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7:10ff). Amos' opposition to those moral and religious evils led him to emphasize the primary theme of the book: "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream" (5:24 RSV) [18: HBD].

Baal worship was dominant in Israel by this time. It had become the state religion under Ahab and Jezebel. Many people still practiced the same pagan acts the prophets of Baal had taught, even though Jehu had tried to rid the country of Baal worship. People went to the temple of the Lord but many of them also went to places of pagan worship and practiced abominable things involved in worship of Baal.

1. Sacred prostitution was encouraged in Baal worship and these rich people had kept this as a part of their worship. According to the teachings of this fertility cult the sex act stimulated the gods and the gods would visit the land with fertility.

2. Calf worship which had begun under Jeroboam was still being practiced.

Yahweh worship was only an outward formality. In vain they brought their sacrifices and offerings, but they persisted in immorality and idolatry. In Israel the same people were going to the house of God and the house of Baal, worshiping God and practicing immorality in the house of Baal.

Amos addresses various issues, but the central theme running throughout the book stresses sin and judgment. Whether in addressing the pagan nations, Judah, or Israel, the prophet condemned those who sin against:

1. a universal conscience (1:1-2:3)
2. the revealed law (2:4-5)
3. God's redeeming love (2:6-16).

“Amos challenged people to live by covenant standards and condemned them for their failure to reflect the covenant in daily life” [18: HBD]. He claimed that the nation of Israel was already dead and offered her funeral lament: "Fallen, no more to rise, is the virgin Israel" (5:1 RSV).

For individuals who were superficially and confidently "at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria" (6:1 RSV), their only hope rested in the renewal of authentic religious experience leading to a life of justice and righteousness which overflow the land (5:24). For those who rejected that way, only judgment remained: "prepare to meet your God" [18: HBD].

## INTRODUCTION, 1:1-3.

NOTE: The outline followed in this study is an adaptation of an outline given by Dr. T. J. DeLaughter when he was Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

**1:1 - THE WORDS OF AMOS.** This book of prophecy begins with the statement that the recorded prophecy consists of the words of Amos. The book is made up of a collection of messages, delivered by the prophet to the people of Israel in front of the temple in Bethel. This statement answers the claim made by some that the book consists of a collection of messages collected by a disciple, or by disciples, of Amos, based on their memory of his messages. The statement also refutes the view held by some that someone else, at some later date, may have edited the work by adding to, changing, or revising Amos' messages. "For many years, literary critics thought they found evidence in Amos' book that it was a patchwork of message fragments first spoken by several prophets. They surmise that editors had gathered those fragments into one book. More recent critics recognize that the book is consistent to itself and to the times mentioned in its heading" [6: 1].

**EARTHQUAKE.** Amos did not have to tell the people which earthquake. Obviously, everyone would

know. Some will not speculate as to the date of the earthquake, but June 15, 863 B.C. has been suggested. The earthquake must have been particularly destructive because it was referred to by Zechariah about 250 years later (Zech. 14:5), and by Josephus, who related it to Uzziah's sin against the Lord and His temple in acting as a priest (2 Chron. 26:16). However that claim may not stand close scrutiny.

Amos says he delivered these messages "two years before the earthquake." Does this mean that his entire prophetic ministry occurred within one year? "One author wrote that Amos' book contains only one message, preached in a period of about 30 minutes. Reading the book gives the impression that it contains several sermons, not one. Amos could have preached those messages during one trip to Bethel, Israel's religious capital" [6: 3].

**AMONG THE SHEEPHERDERS FROM TEKOA.** Tekoa, as noted in the introduction, was a small town or village in the southern kingdom of Judah, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. It was about five miles southeast of Bethlehem, near the edge of the Judean desert. Tekoa seems to have been known for a special breed of sheep.

**1:2 - THE LORD WILL ROAR.** In introducing the judgment of God against the pagan nations, against Judah, and finally against Israel, Amos portrays the Lord as roaring like a lion leaping on his prey. Amos is totally convinced that God has spoken and likens the voice of God to the sound of a roaring lion. "The prophet has a tremendous sense of the majesty of God and the authority of his Word. As far as he is concerned, he has left his normal job to proclaim the majesty of God and the authority of His word. Amos has become obsessed with listening to God" [1: 45]. What a magnificent obsession!

I once heard R. G. Lee give an illustration about a new convert whose pastor had just preached an evangelistic sermon. He announced that the hymn of invitation would be "Rescue the Perishing." Halfway through the invitation the young man rushed down the aisle, took the pastor by the hand rather enthusiastically, and asked, "When do we start?" "Start what," asked the surprised pastor. "Rescuing the perishing!", he responded. The pastor explained, "Son, that's just a song. Just a song." To Amos the command was not just a song.

Today one seldom hears God portrayed as a roaring lion. God is love. He is our Father. He is our Creator, our Sustainer, our Redeemer. He is all of that, but He also speaks as a roaring lion. People ignore the love of God and take for granted the mercy and grace of God, but how can they dismiss God roaring as a lion, demanding to be heard? They can only ignore Him if they are not reading His word, which is exactly what is happening in America today. America was founded on the Word of God, but today

AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE IS A FADING MEMORY FOR

MOST AMERICANS. Decades of value-neutral public education have left our nation without a moral anchor. While the Bible is a perennial best seller, and Americans publish and purchase more Bibles than any other people on earth, 'the Bible has virtually disappeared from American education. It is rarely studied, even as literature, in public classrooms.' And yet, it was the Bible that made America. The rejection of the Bible in our day is resulting in the unmaking of America" [4: 191].

Robert C. Winthrop (1809 - 1894) was speaker of the thirtieth Congress when he addressed the Massachusetts Bible Society in 1849. In his speech he said, "Men must necessarily be controlled, either by a power within them, or by a power without them; either by the Word of God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible, or by the bayonet" [4: 191].

The word LORD is written in capital letters in the New New American Standard (NNAS), the New King James Version (NKJV), and other translations to let us know that the word used in the Hebrew Scripture is the personal name, or covenant name for God (Yahweh). Careful attention should be given to the names and titles by which the Lord identifies Himself as the source of this prophecy.

**CARMEL.** Carmel means "garden land," which seems appropriate considering the prosperity Israel was enjoying under King Jeroboam, and Judah under Uzziah. Sadly, this prosperity was about to turn into despair.

## I. JUDGMENT IS ANNOUNCED AGAINST THE NATIONS, 1:3-4:13.

### A. Divine Judgment Is Proclaimed Against Nations Outside the Covenant Relationship, 1:3-2:3.

Before looking at the oracles (announcements of judgment) against the nations the student of the Word needs to understand the structure of this section and the formula followed in each oracle. In order to appreciate the genius of the message, both oratorically and psychologically, picture the scene. Amos, a farmer from Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah is standing before an audience in the northern kingdom of Israel. He is a foreigner, but still a Hebrew who worships Jehovah, so they will listen to him.

Amos begins with a series of seven oracles against enemy nations. It is as though he draws a ring around Israel and announces that God has revealed to him that He is going to severely punish all their



enemies. As the judgment of God is announced against each of the surrounding nations, the Israelites become more and more attentive and by the time he finishes they are nodding (some possibly shouting) their approval. Then he announces that God is about to punish Judah. They are still nodding their approval because relationships between Israel and Judah often strained. Suddenly, shockingly, he announces, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because..." They are stunned! They have been entrapped. They had shouted their approval seven times as judgment was announced against the pagan nations, and once again as they heard what God had planned for Judah. They have condemned themselves. The conclusion is inescapable - Israel is the primary target of God's message of judgment.

Amos has accomplished two things with this approach. First, he has assured himself an attentive audience. They were hanging onto every word, elated that their God was about to break the power of their enemies, one by one. Second, by shouting their approval of the judgment of the nations because of their sins, it is not going to be easy for them to justify their own sins. They have enthusiastically agreed that other nations, even Judah, deserve punishment for their sins. If sin brings judgment to others how can they deny that their sins should bring judgment?

Smith, in *The New American Commentary (NAC)*, points out that there is a general form followed throughout the oracles. There are some variations, but the general pattern is followed. The following Scripture is from the *New International Version (NIV)* of the Bible.

(1) It begins with the introductory messenger formula, "This is what the Lord says." (2) Next comes a statement of the certainty of judgment, "For three sins of . . . even for four, I will not turn back my wrath." (3) Then follows the specific charge of guilt. (4) The succeeding item is the announcement of punishment, "I will send fire." (5) The concluding element is the concluding messenger formula, "says the Lord" [12: 44].

The NAC also deals with the significance of the number seven in the Book of Amos. Smith and Page quote J. Limburg: "The number seven appears to play a significant role in the structure of the book of Amos and in the makeup of certain sayings" [12: 45]. They continue:

He concluded from his studies that Amos used divine speech formulas as a structuring device to introduce or conclude prophetic sayings as well as to identify them as coming from the Lord. The book contains forty-nine divine speech formulas arranged in such a way that each major section has seven ( in one case fourteen, 1:3-2:16) of them. Since seven is the number for completeness, this divine speech formula usage is a way of

certifying the book as a whole and each section of the book as the word of the Lord [12: 45].

## 1. DAMASCUS, 1:3-5.

### THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four."
3. REASON FOR JUDGMENT - "Because they have threshed Gilead..."
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - "I will send a fire..."

**1:3 - DAMASCUS.** Damascus was the capital of the Arameans (later, Syria) and the name is often used interchangeably with Aram (Syria, KJV). "The Arameans consisted of several tribes, as did Israel. The Aramean tribes sometimes divided into several kingdoms" [6: 4]. It is believed that Damascus has been occupied continuously for a longer period of time than any other city in the world. Historical ties to Israel are so significant that one cannot study the history of Israel without taking Damascus into account. The Holman Bible Dictionary provides us with some interesting data.

Setting Its geographical location enabled Damascus to become a dominant trading and transportation center. Standing 2300 feet above sea level, it lay northeast of Mount Harmon and about 60 miles east of Sidon, the Mediterranean port city. Both major international highways ran through Damascus--the Via Maris from Mesopotamia in the east through Damascus and the Jezreel Valley to the Plain of Sharon and the Mediterranean coast, then south to Egypt; and the King's Highway from Damascus south through Ashtaroth, Rabbath-ammon, and Bozrah to Elath on the Red Sea and to Arabia. By the same token, Damascus saw armies march along the highways, often using Damascus as the staging area.

Explorations ... indicate settlement from before 3000 B.C. Tablets from the Syrian center of Ebla mention Damascus about 2300 B.C. Thutmose III of Egypt claimed to have conquered Damascus about 1475 B.C. The Hittites battled Egypt for control of Damascus until the Hittites were defeated by the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. At this time Arameans from the nearby desert came in and took control of an independent Damascus,

gradually establishing a political power base [18: HBD].

The basic sin of Aram (Syria) was cruelty, or inhumanity. The Arameans “literally threshed and mangled the bodies of prisoners under heavily studded threshing sledges. In the case of the surrounding nations on which Amos pronounced doom, only one sin is named; in Israel's case, seven are listed (2:6-8, 12)” [20: RSB]. Jerome is quoted by Keil-Delitzsch as saying the threshing machine was “A kind of cart with toothed iron wheels underneath, which was driven about to crush straw in the threshing-floors after the grain and been beaten out” [7: 243]. It is noteworthy that the Lord assumes absolute sovereignty over all the nations, including pagan nations. By what right does He claim such authority? By His right as Creator and Owner of all the world.

History testifies that nations that build on the bones of innocent people collapse under the weight of their own corruption. While most people today would point to political and economic factors for the fall of a nation, the Bible explains that a society stands or falls on moral grounds [10: 5].

Columnist Cal Thomas appeared on a television program with a liberal political expert who thought the answer to America's problems was economic. Thomas rebutted his claims, stressing that the primary problems in America are moral and spiritual. So it is with all nations.

**1:3 - FOR THREE TRANSGRESSIONS AND... FOR FOUR.** We must look beyond a simple herdsman from Tekoa and appreciate the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in using such a powerful oratorical introduction to each message of judgment. With these startling words Amos dramatically declares that the sins of the people had reached the point that divine judgment was inevitable and inescapable. According to The Believer's Study Bible (BSB) study notes:

The number "three," in its usual sense, could mean sin in "fullness," while "and for four" would indicate "an overflow" of sin. This phrase occurs eight times in chs. 1; 2. The word transgression (pasha<sup>^</sup>, Heb.) conveys the idea of strong willful rebellion and breach of trust [15: BSB].

**1:4 - I WILL SEND FIRE.** It is not unusual to find fire used, either as a symbol or an instrument, of divine judgment (Sodom and Gomorrah). Fire was also a terrifying instrument of war in ancient times, just as it is today. Napalm was used to ignite the jungles of Vietnam with devastation effect. Flaming arrows and catapults were used to propel fire over walls of fortified cities to burn buildings, weapons, and food supplies and to kill as many people as possible and demoralize others.

Destruction by fire was a type of covenant curse (Deut. 32:21-22) and an

expression of divine wrath (Gen. 19:24; Num. 11:1-3). The image of God sending fire suggests the concept of holy war. The Lord was portrayed as the military leader of Israel's army. Whatever was devoted to destruction (*herem*) was 'either killed, if alive, or burned, if flammable (Deut. 7:25-26; 12:3; Num. 31:10; Judg. 1:8).' The particular property of fire that made it suitable as a method of warfare was its power to consume (...devour) [12: 49].

**1:5 - I WILL BREAK ALSO THE BAR (KJV).** The NNAS removes the mystery by adding the word *gate* before bar. "The breaking of the bar (the bolt of the gate) denotes the conquest of the capital" [7: 43]; and the cutting off of the inhabitants of the Plains of Aven "indicates the slaughter connected with the capture of the towns, and not their deportation" [7: 243]. Tiglath-pileser III defeated the combined forces of Syria and Israel in the Syro-Ephriamitic Crisis in 734 B.C. and then prosecuted his campaign in Syria in 733 B.C., and against in 732 B.C. [19: PCBA]

**ARAM WILL GO EXILED TO KIR.** "So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir,' Says the LORD" (NNAS). This would be fulfilled when, following the slaughter described above, the remnant of Aram "would be carried away to Kir, i.e. to the country on the banks of the river Kir. From which, according to ch. ix. 7, the Syrians originally emigrated. This prediction was fulfilled when the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser conquered Damascus in the time of Ahaz, and broke up the kingdom of Syria (2 Kings xvi.9)" [7: 245].

**SAYS THE LORD.** These words are added to "add strength to the threat, and therefore recur in vers. 8, 15, and ch. ii. 3" [7: 245]. These words are included, both for emphasis and to remind the reader of the source of the prophecy.

## 2. PHILISTIA, 1:6-8.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four."
3. REASON FOR JUDGMENT - "They have carried away the whole captivity..."
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGEMENT - "I will send a fire..."

Philistia refers to the coastal plain of southwestern Palestine which was under the control of the Philistines for centuries (Ex. 15:14; Pss. 60:8;

87:4; 108:9; Isa. 14:29-31). The origin and background of the Philistines remains unclear despite historical research and archaeological digs. From ancient Egyptian records we may deduce that the Philistines represented a large movement of people known as the "Sea Peoples, who invaded Egypt about 1188 B.C. by land and by sea, battling the forces of Ramses III, who, according to Egyptian records, defeated them."

The Sea Peoples were a massive group that originated in the Aegean area... As they moved eastward from the Aegean region, the Sea Peoples made war with people in their path including the Hittites in Anatolia and the inhabitants at sites in North Syria such as those at the site of Ugarit. According to biblical references, the homeland of the Philistines was Caphtor (Amos 9:7; Jer. 47:4).

Several features of Philistine life and culture are reflected in the Old Testament. Politically, the Philistines had a highly organized city-state system comprised of five towns in southwest Palestine: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (1 Sam. 6:17). Each of the city-states was ruled by a "lord" (1 Sam. 6:18), a kinglike figure. Gath was perhaps the major city of this Philistine pentapolis, and as such, served as the hub of the city-state system [18: HBD].

The Philistines were far more advanced in metallurgy than the Israelites, giving them a decided military advantage (1 Sam. 13:19-23). They had a highly trained and well-armed military. The armor of Philistine soldiers included bronze helmets, coats of mail, leg protectors, spears, and shields (1 Sam. 17:5-7).

Information on Philistine religion is limited, but three Philistine deities are mentioned in the Old Testament - Dagon, Ashtoreth, and Baal.

Dagon appears to be the chief god of the Philistines. Temples of Dagon were located at Gaza (Judg. 16:21-30) and Ashdod (1 Sam. 5:1-7). Ashtoreth, the fertility goddess of the Canaanites, was most likely adopted by the Philistines. Baalzebub, the Philistine god whose name means "lord of the flies," was the god of Ekron (2 Kings 1:1-16). Most likely the Philistines worshiped Baalzebub as a god who averted pestilence or plagues [18: HBD].

The area inhabited by the ancient Philistines is today known as the Gaza Strip. Amos prophesied

of the total destruction of the Philistine nation, and that prophecy was fulfilled. "The Philistine people no longer exist. They have left behind only the name Palestine" [6: 5].

The basic sins of the Philistines were (1) contempt for human personality and (2) slave trade (exploiting others for profit). Such contempt and exploitation of others never went unnoticed by the Lord and we can be sure it will not go unpunished. It must be stressed that the God Who never changes still sees every incident of exploitation and every expression of contempt for others today; and whether we see it or not, He still punishes sinners. Both nations and individuals are accountable to Him.

This truth has particular relevance as the twentieth century yields to the twenty first. *The News Star* (Monroe, LA, September 19, 1995) carried an AP news release out of Sydney Australia, claiming that "More than 100 million Asian children - some as young as 4 - are forced to work in appalling conditions to make consumer products for Western nations..." According to the article, "between 104 and 146 million children, mostly in India, are making car parts, jewelry, clothing, toys, food, fireworks, chemicals, and other goods in sweatshops." According to the Anti-Slavery Society, "The punishments meted out to these children by their owners defy description. They have been burned, branded with red-hot irons, starved, whipped, chained up, raped, and kept locked in cupboards for days on end" [*The News Star*].

"Children generally work from 6 a.m. to midnight, have no regular meal breaks and are beaten for spending longer than three minutes in stench-ridden toilets... In most of these sweatshops, children are forced to eat, sleep, and work in the same stuffy overcrowded room" [*The News Star*].

It is ironic that the religion which has fostered much of the exploitation of those children has become so popular in certain circles in America. Entertainers, politicians, and educators are coming together under the banner of Hinduism (the basic religion behind the New Age movements that have radically changed our society). Cruelty and exploitation have prevailed in nations that professed to be Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, but the point here is that Eastern Mysticism is being touted as superior to Christianity and the key to peace on earth.

Treatment of Bosnian Moslems by Bosnian Serbs has been as barbaric as the treatment of the Serbs by the Moslems and Croatians in the past. Genocide was a government policy under Adolph Hitler in Germany, and it seems to be the order of the day in Somalia. Modern man can be just as cruel as his ancient counterpart, but the same God Who held them accountable is holding modern man accountable. God has eternity in which to punish unrepentant individuals, but He must punish nations in time.

**1:7 - GAZA.** Gaza was one of five cities making up the Philistine pentapolis. Each city had a king and each played a prominent role in the history of Israel. Gaza was a trade city, which trafficked in slaves. Israelites were sold into slavery there by the Edomites, their kinsmen and their bitterest enemy.

**6:8 - I WILL CUT OFF.** The prophecy is alarming: *“I will also cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, And him who holds the scepter, from Ashkelon; I will even unleash My power upon Ekron, And the remnant of the Philistines will perish,’ Says the Lord GOD.”* He will utterly destroy the five Philistine city-states.

### 3. TYRE, 1:9-10.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - “Thus saith the Lord.”
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - “for three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.”
3. REASONS FOR JUDGMENT - “they have delivered up the whole captivity to Edom and remembered not the brotherly covenant.”
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - “I will send a fire.”

Tyre and Sidon were the principal cities of the Phoenicians. Tyre was a city-state located in what today is Lebanon. Sidon was located on the coastal plain between the Mediterranean Sea and the mountains of Lebanon (Gen. 10:15). Tyre was a practically impregnable island fortress which successfully withstood a 13 year siege by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. It was, however, conquered by Alexander the Great, who besieged the city for seven months in 332 B.C. The city was conquered after Alexander’s army built a mile long causeway from the shore to the island fortress. Tyre was not never destroyed and remains in existence today.

Sidon and Tyre were ancient cities, having been founded long before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan. Extra biblical sources first mention Sidon before 2000 B.C. and Tyre just after 2000 B.C. While Sidon seems to have been the most dominant of the two cities during the early part of their histories, Tyre assumed this role in the latter times. Both cities were known for their maritime exploits and as centers of trade [18: HBD].

The two basic sins for which God will send a fire on the wall and devour the palaces were (1) Slave trade and (2) covenant breaking. Covenant breaking was, and is, a serious matter. So is slavery. Those who charge God with having no compassion for slaves fail to read and understand what He sought to do for slaves in both the Old and New Testaments.

Many Americans speak passionately about the slavery of blacks in America from the earliest days

of the republic until the Civil War (which was neither civil, nor necessary - slavery should have been abolished without it). Estimates of the total number of black slavers in America range from three to five million (everyone precious to the Lord). It is still an emotional subject for many and it seems that the media and the entertainment industry often fan the flames of our emotions through documentaries, movies, television shows (*Mississippi Burning, Roots, etc.*). We do not fret over any other slavery, at any other place, or any other time. Of course they did not have an elite core in the media, the entertainment industry, in public schools, and in politics to focus our attention on that which is politically correct (PC). For example, to some of these people all the evils of our society have been caused by white (European) males.

I have a charge to make. There has been no slavery in America for well over one hundred years, but many people show a lot more concern for the three (or five) million people who were slaves one, two, or three centuries ago than they are for the 104 to 146 million enslaved Asian children (mentioned earlier) who are being brutalized by their masters today. Right now!

For years we were inundated with news about atrocities committed against blacks in South Africa by the whites who controlled the government (and we should have been concerned). However, there was little being said about the atrocities committed against blacks by other blacks all over Africa. Such biased reporting and programs tend to polarize our society, and lead to strife between various ethnic groups. There is the possibility that this will encourage some people to commit violent acts against members of other ethnic groups. If there is any doubt about this, one could take a fresh look at Bosnia, Somalia, Lebanon, Ireland, and the Middle East today.

Walter Williams points out that there have been no slaves in America for one a hundred years. The institution of slavery is dead, yet, he says, many are still slaves; they have just moved to a different plantation (socially, politically). We need to address these issues in such a way as to promote peace rather than tension. Some individuals and certain groups are trying to do just that. The Southern Baptist Convention made an official apology to blacks for slavery at the 1995 annual meeting in Atlanta. There is some debate as to whether or not this was the best way to address the issue. Immediately after that there was some speculation as to when Southern Baptists would apologize to women. And what comes next, gays and lesbians?

It should be stressed that this writer is not defending slavery. It is unfortunate that more of the founders did not have the same convictions as General James Oglethorpe (1696-1785), founder of Georgia. In 1734 he praised Georgia for its anti-slavery policy:

The name of slavery is here unheard, and every inhabitant is free from unchosen masters and oppression... Slavery is against the gospel as well as the fundamental law of England. We refused, as trustees, to make a



law permitting such a horrid crime [4: 67-68].

It is unfortunate that Georgia later adopted the policy of neighboring states.

**1:9 - COVENANT.** Students of the Scriptures are familiar with the covenant idea in the Old Testament and when they see the word immediately think of a covenant made by Yahweh with individuals or with Israel (the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant). But here the reference is to a covenant between Hiram, king of Tyre, and David (II Sam. 5:11ff) and Solomon, (1 Kings 5:1-12; 9:13). This covenant apparently included a prohibition against selling Hebrews into slavery.

**1:10 - I WILL SEND A FIRE ON THE WALLS OF TYRE.** The message is simple: judgement is coming, and when it comes it will come according to the directive will of Almighty God as punishment for sin. Fire symbolizes the devastating effect of the judgment. A city looked to its walls for protection; the first line of defense against an enemy. When the walls were destroyed, the city was extremely vulnerable and in great danger of being conquered and pillaged.

#### 4. EDOM, 1:11-12.

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions, and for four, I will turn away the punishment thereof." **b**
3. REASON FOR JUDGMENT - "He did pursue his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity..." **d**
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - "I will send a fire..."

**1:11 - FOR THREE TRANSGRESSIONS OF EDOM.** In Bible times Edom was the name for the area southeast and southwest of the Dead Sea. The Edomites were descendants of Esau and therefore, kinsmen of the Israelites. The name Edom derives from a Semitic root which means "red" or "ruddy," apparently because of the red sandstone terrain of a good part of the area in where they lived. The land of the Edomites was mostly wilderness or semi-desert, which means that it was not ideally suited for agriculture. For that reason many of the inhabitants were semi-nomadic. Consequently, the boundaries of Edom were not very well defined. Not all of Edom was wilderness; "the vicinity of present-day Tafilih and Buseireh, east of the Arabah, is fairly well watered, cultivable land, and would have boasted numerous villages during Old Testament times. This would have been the center of Edomite population. Buseireh is situated on the ruins of ancient Bozrah, the capital of Edom. Note that the modern name, 'Buseireh,' preserves memory of the ancient one, 'Bozrah' [18: HBD].

Most of the biblical passages pertaining to Edom refer to this Edomite

center east of the Arabah. Isaiah 63:1, for example, speaks of one that "... cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, ... glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength." (See also Jer. 49:22; Amos 1:11-12). Yet there are other passages which presuppose that the territory west of the Arabah, south of the Judean hill country and separating Judah from the Gulf of Aqaba, was also part of Edom. See especially the description of Judah's boundary in Numbers 34:3-4 and Joshua 15:1-3, where Judah's south side is described as extending "even to the border of Edom the wilderness of Zin."

The "land of Seir" seems to be synonymous with Edom in some passages (Gen. 32:3; 36:8; Judg. 5:4). Egyptian texts from about 1300 to 1100 B.C. know of Shasu (apparently semi-nomadic tribes) from Seir and Edom. "Teman" also is used in apposition to Edom in at least one biblical passage (Amos 1:12), but normally refers to a specific district of Edom and possibly to a town by that name. One of Job's visitors was Eliphaz the Temanite (Job 2:11; compare Ezek. 25:13) [18: HBD].

The Israelites regarded the Edomites as close relatives. They were also related to the Ammonites and Moabites, descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother (Gen. 19:30-36; 36). Amos even referred to Edom as a "brother" to Israel (Amos 1:11-12). Apparently the Edomites were not barred from worship in the Jerusalem Temple with the same strictness as the Ammonites and Moabites (Deut. 23:3-8). Yet, kinship did not prevent them from becoming bitter enemies. Enmity between Israel and Edom began when Jacob stole the birthright from Esau and was intensified at the time of the Exodus when Edom refused the Israelites passage through their land.

Dr. T. J. DeLaughter was for many years Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at New Orleans Baptist theological Seminary. Dr. DeLaughter had an interesting way of using humor to make a point and to be sure students would remember his point. Concerning Judah and Edom, he said, "Even though Jacob and Esau buried the hatchet, their descendants left the handle sticking out".

**HE DID PURSUE HIS BROTHER.** The basic sin of the Edomites was covenant breaking. From the time of the Exodus and Conquest, there had been enmity between Israel and Edom. Four centuries in Egypt was not enough time for them to forget the strife that began with their forefathers, Jacob (Israel) and Esau. After the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, and before they entered the Promised Land, Edom moved against them to rekindled the ancient enmity.

**CAST OFF ALL PITY.** See the Book of Obadiah for more on this. Neither nations nor individuals should cast off all pity in dealing with others. The twentieth century is filled with shocking examples of both nations and individuals who cast off all pity. Mass murderers like Henry Lucas and Ted Bundy stalked and killed without compassion. Nazi Germany, Communist regimes (Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam, Cambodia, and Cuba), and empirical Japan, prior to and during World War II, illustrate how governments, with the support of a large percentage of the population, can butcher their fellow man without pity. Today people are shocked by indescribable atrocities committed by nations or tribes in Africa, the Middle East, and Bosnia.

**HE KEPT HIS WRATH FOR EVER.** He booded over it and kept it alive in his heart. I attended Mississippi College with Anis Shirosh, The Mobile, Alabama-based evangelist. Dr. Shirosh is a Palestinian Arab whose father was killed when he was a child. He and his family held the Jews responsible for his death. He has written, and I have heard him say, that as he was growing up his goal in life was to get old enough to kill Jews. But he became a Christian first! He now says, "When I stand on a street in Jerusalem and look at a Jew and love him, it is a miracle from God."

It is also the answer to the bloody conflict in the Middle East today. There are three strong religions represented in the area. In Israel the predominate religion is Judaism, and the primary religion of the Arab nations is Islam. There are some Christians in Israel and in Arab lands. Of the three religions, only Christianity places emphasis on loving one's enemies and forgiving them for their sins and trespasses. Islam and Judaism teach "an eye for and eye." A Jewish lady was quoted in an American newspaper as saying, "I don't believe in forgiving. I believe in getting even." There are no solutions in such a philosophy. But I cannot help but wonder what difference it would make if nations and individuals would simply say from the heart, "I forgive you."

**1:12 - I WILL SEND A FIRE.** "So I will send fire upon Teman And it will consume the citadels of Bozrah" (NNAS). Teman was a district in Edom, Bozrah the capital. "Edom no longer exists as a nation, and the Edomites have been absorbed as a part of the Arab peoples. Its territory is located within the country of Jordan today" [6: 6].

## 5. AMMON, 1:13-15.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Ammon, d  
for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof."
3. REASONS FOR JUDGMENT - "...Ripped up the women with child."

#### 4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - "I will kindle a fire."

**1:13 - AMMON.** The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through Ben-ammi, Lot's son by his younger daughter (Gen. 19:38). They were Semitic people who lived to the northeast of the Dead Sea and east of the Gilead plateau. Ammon, the kingdom of the Ammonites, was little more than a city-state, consisting of the capital city itself, Rabbah and territory surrounding it. Because of the agricultural productivity of Gilead, certain geographical advantages, and the naturally defensible position Rabbah was a city of some importance in ancient times. The proximity of the Ammonites to Gilead likewise destined them to be constant enemies of the Israelites, who made claims to Gilead and actually controlled it during the reigns of certain strong kings such as David, Omri, Ahab, and Jeroboam II" [18: HBD].

Like the Edomites, the Ammonites no longer exist as a separate people. Survivors were probably absorbed into the Arab peoples. The land occupied by the Ammonites is a part of modern day Jordan. Rabbah is known today as Amman, the capital of Jordan.

Two basic charges are brought against Ammon: (1) Ripping up women with child, and (2) Aggressive, ruthless brutality in general. Both of these sins were usually associated with warfare and the aftermath of war in ancient times.

When the Croatians reclaimed some territory from the Bosnian Serbs they found a mass grave where some five-hundred victims of the most aggressive brutality imaginable were buried. Mutilation by bomb and artillery, rape and starvation became a routine in the execution of what has been termed "ethnic cleansing."

There was an article in the Monroe, Louisiana News Star on September 26, 1995 under the headline: WOMEN FACE CHARGES IN RWANDAN GENOCIDE.

Amid the 10,000 inmates packed into the hellhole of Kigali's sweltering central prison are 342 women...Like the men, each awaits judgment for genocide.

The women represent a largely overlooked aspect of Rwanda's plunge into savagery last year: female participation in butchering at least 500,000 people over three months.

The officials say the role of women as killers and "cheerleaders"

for murder was unprecedented in any other genocide this century

“The difference between our genocide and the German one was that theirs was carried out by the government against the people,” said former Justice Minister Alphonse-Marie Nkubito. “Here, it was the government that mobilized the people to kill each other.”

Instigated by extremists in the former Hutu-dominated regime, the slaughter of minority Tutsi and moderate Hutus was carried out by soldiers, police, militias and ordinary people swept along by hatred, fear, and opportunism [AP news release].

**RIPPED UP WOMEN WITH CHILD.** Elisha, in his day, lamented the kind of warfare Aram (Syria) would bring to Israel:

And Hazael said, "Why does my lord weep?" Then he answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up" (2 Kings 8:12, NASV)

The Ammonites were intensely aggressive in carrying out this kind of warfare.

**1:14 - I WILL KINDLE A FIRE.** "So I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah, And it will consume her citadels Amid war cries on the day of battle And a storm on the day of tempest" (NASV). Their punishment would fit their crime. From “So” we may infer that the judgment would be appropriate and well deserved. Fire would utterly destroy the part of the wall that was flammable and then spread to buildings within the city, including the palaces. If the palaces could not be protected, private dwellings and businesses would have no chance at all. The Ammonites must have felt secure because Rabbah, their capital city was located on a “high, flat-topped hill, which drops 300 to 400 feet into dry riverbeds on two sides. The Jabbok River encloses a third side. On top of the cliff was a massive wall, making it almost unconquerable” [6: 7]. Rabbah is the city where Uriah the Hitite was killed (II Sam. 11:1-17).

**1:15 - THEIR KINGS SHALL GO INTO CAPTIVITY.** The prospects of this kind of judgment may have seemed remote to the Ammonites, but many of them would live to see the

fulfillment of this prophecy. Assyria, under Tiglath-Pileser III, conquered Ammon in 734 B.C.

## 6. MOAB, 2:1-3.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof"
3. REASON FOR JUDGEMENT "He burned the bones of the king of Edom..."
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGEMENT "I will send a fire upon Moab."

**2:1 - MOAB.** The nation of Moab was descended from the son of Lot by his elder daughter (Gen. 19:37). Moab means "descended from my father." The land of the Moabites was a narrow strip of cultivatable land directly east of the Dead Sea and south from Ammon. The land is a "rolling plateau (averaging approximately 3,300 feet elevation), bounded on the west by the rugged escarpment which drops down to the Dead Sea (itself almost 1,300 feet below sea level), on the east by the desert, and running through it the steep Wady Mujib canyon (the Arnon River of biblical times) [18: HBD].

**BURNED THE BONES...UNTO POWDER.** The basic charge against Moab was that "he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime." That is, he burned them into powder. The student of the Old Testament today may wonder why that was vide as a particularly heinous sin. The point is that Moab showed no respect for the sacredness of the human body.

One and a half million abortions a year in the United States speaks volumes about what has happened to the value we place on human life - and this in a nation that boasts of its compassion for the weak and helpless. The so-called D & X, or partial birth, abortions shows that some in our society have regressed from devaluing human life to contempt for it. Euthanasia and genetic engineering may present the biggest tests of of our attitude toward human life in the coming generation.

Horror stories abound about the disposal of aborted fetuses following early abortions reveals a similar contempt for the human body. When pro-life groups began to display pictures of the grizzly scenes, they began disposing of them more carefully. No nation has blessed of God

any more than America, yet elements of our society have set their face against God as surely as ancient Israel or her pagan neighbors. How can America hope to avoid punishment for such sins? The guilt is compounded by the fact that we are sinning against a greater light than those ancient nations.

**2:2 - I WILL SEND A FIRE.** The Moabites had shown no respect for the body of the king of Edom. Now the Lord announces that He is going to send a fire upon Edom that would “devour the palaces of Kirioth,” the capital of Moab. Their conquerors would show them no mercy. As her people were being slaughtered, a treacherous enemy would be shouting and sounding the trumpet. They would be celebrating her death. Moab was conquered by Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III, and no people of the ancient world were more cruel than the Assyrians.

We know from Assyrian records that Assyria placed Moab under subjection, and when Babylon replaced Assyria as the major empire, Moab remained in subjection to a foreign power. Like the Ammonites, they were probably absorbed into the Arab peoples and lost their identity as a distinct people.

**2:3 - JUDGE.** This title was sometimes used of a king, who often functioned as a judge (Mic. 5:1). The king and all other officials would be cut off in the coming judgment. God is the Judge before Whom all the judges of this world will stand to be judged.

God held the nations outside of the covenant relationship accountable for their sins. It seems that He held them accountable under the law of “God consciousness” (DeLaughter) and the law of nature. The Lord holds every nation in the world accountable, no matter how emphatically they deny His existence, or how fervently they serve false gods. He is the Creator and all nations are subject to His Sovereign judgment, and every individual is personally accountable to Him.

One might be able to see this principle in effect in Bible times without relating it to the world today. After all, Amos lived in the primitive world of the eighth century BC and we are at the threshold of the Twenty-first Century. Do we not live in a far more civilized world? Are not governments more civilized? Is this prophecy still relevant? Walter Williams, Head of the Economics Department at George Mason University and popular author and columnist, has some shocking answers to those questions. In a column circulated by Creators Syndicate, Inc., he refers to a study published in the book, *Death By Government* (by Professor R. J. Rummel of the University of Hawaii’s political science department). Dr. Williams writes:

So far this century, international wars and civil wars have taken about 39 million lives. But that's small in comparison to deliberate government murder. Since the beginning of this century...governments have murdered 170 million people, mostly their own citizens.

The top government murderers are those adored by American campus leftists and their counterparts in the media and the political arena: the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Between 1917 and 1987, the Soviet Union...murdered 62 million of its own citizens. Between 1949 and 1987, mostly under that leftist favorite Mao Tse-tung's rule, 35 million Chinese citizens were murdered by their own government [21: 21].

Williams says that Hitler's Nazis were "pikers" by comparison to the communists. "They managed to exterminate about 21 million Jews, Slavs, Serbs, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians and people they deemed misfits, such as homosexuals and the mentally ill" [21: 21]. Japan murdered six million unarmed citizens in Asian countries during World War II. "Many of the deaths included unspeakable barbarities like soldiers tossing an infant in the air so a comrade could catch it on his bayonet" [21: 21].

Lesser-known murdering governments include: Turkey, which between 1909 and 1918 murdered close to 2 million Armenians; the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, which caused 2 million Cambodians to lose their lives; Pakistan's government, which murdered 12.5 million people; and Tito's Yugoslavian government, which murdered a million citizens. It might surprise us to know that our southern neighbor, Mexico, had a hand in these barbarities, murdering about 1.5 million of its citizens between 1900 and 1920 [21: 21].

Rummel estimates that prior to the 20th century governments murdered about 133 million people, including the Crusades, slavery of Africans and other atrocities. "Therefore, our century is clearly mankind's most brutal" Williams concludes [21: 21]. Rummel gives the reason in the first sentence of his book:



“Power kills; absolute power kills absolutely. ...The more power a government has, the more it can act arbitrarily according to the whims and desires of the elite, and the more it will make war on others and murder its foreign and domestic subjects” [21: 21].

Williams stresses that he is not saying that America has anything at all in common with any of these murderous regimes. At the same time, he says,

Our government has massive power to do evil. Murderers like Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Mao Tse-tung, and Pol Pot would have loved to have had the kind of information about its citizens that agencies like the Internal Revenue Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms have [21: 21].

Americans should appreciate the fact that America was founded upon Christian principles, in spite of what historical revisionists may say. The Founding Fathers made that abundantly clear. Russell Kirk (*The Roots of American Order*) points out that while there were Deists like Jefferson who sought to weaken the Christian (or Biblical) terminology, the Christians clearly prevailed. Furthermore, Kirk says, “the First Amendment to the Constitution established no ‘wall of Separation’ between Church and State; that phrase and that concept appear nowhere in the Constitution, or in any other official national document” [8: 437]. Kirk quotes de Tocqueville:

“For the Americans,” de Tocqueville found, “the idea of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of one without the other; it is not a question with them of sterile beliefs bequeathed by the past and vegetating rather than living in the depth of the soul” [8: 448].

Today America, to a disturbing degree, has forsaken its foundations. As America moves deeper and deeper into the Post-Christian era, it is time we asked, with the Psalmist of old, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3). Before the foundations are completely destroyed, the people of God must call down the fires of revival from Heaven. His throne is still in Heaven (Ps. 11:4).

Never in the history of the world have so many experts from so many fields applied so

many sophisticated plans, with so many technological marvels, to so many social, political, and economic problems as we see in America today. In some areas, like electronics and medical science, we have experienced unparalleled success, but in the most critical areas (morality, human relationships, personal responsibility), it seems that the more we try the worse things get. Why is that? This Amos will answer for us.

## B. JUDGEMENT IS ANNOUNCED AGAINST JUDAH, 2:4-5.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof."
3. REASONS FOR JUDGMENT - "They have despised the law of the Lord."
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - "I will send a fire."

**2:4 - JUDAH.** For background study see II Kings, beginning with chapter 17. Amos had been sent from the southern kingdom of Judah to the northern kingdom of Israel to deliver the "thus saith the word of the Lord." It is doubtful that any other message of judgment has ever been announced with greater genius than the message of Amos to Israel. He had drawn a circle around Israel, announcing that all her traditional enemies had marked for judgment, some for eradication, by the Lord. The people of Israel must have been listening with more than passing approval, many ready to celebrate.

Now Amos brings Judah into the picture. This message must have generated mixed emotions. The nation of Israel was founded when Jeroboam I led ten tribes in a revolt against Rehoboam, son of Solomon, in 926 B.C. The southern kingdom was known as Judah, but it was composed of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The loyal Israelite would have wanted his nation to be the superior nation. He might have been jealous of Judah because Judah had the Temple and all the ecclesiastical services associated with it. But while there had been tension between the two nations, they had often been allies. What is more important, both nations were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and both nations had a covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Amos' audience could rejoice in the judgment of nations outside the covenant, but how could they celebrate the judgment of Judah? Furthermore, if God would punish Judah, might He

also punish Israel? Is it possible that through their approval of God's message of judgment against others, they were condemning themselves? Had they cooperated with Amos in painting themselves into a corner?

The basic sins of Judah were (1) rebellion against the Lord, and (2) idolatry. They had a history of both and a century and a half later these two sins would cause God to send the Babylonians into Judah to defeat the nation and take the people into captivity. Remember the words of Jeremiah:

For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me,  
The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns,  
Broken cisterns, That can hold no water (Jer. 2:13)

They rejected the true God ("The fountain of living water") in favor of a false god ("broken cisterns that can hold no water"). For further study see II Kings 17:41 and related passages in Isaiah. Francis Shaeffer was right when he said that the most meaningless word in the English language is the word god spelled with a little "g" (see p. 4).

Judah was guilty of breaking the covenant they had entered with the Lord at Sinai. The charge against Judah was different from the indictments against the pagan nations, since they had never enjoyed a covenant relationship with God. His covenant with His Chosen People contained two requirements - "Obey My voice and keep My covenant." They "hated God's covenant and refused to keep its commandments. They also erred by refusing to obey God's voice and by accepting instead the lies of their fathers. Those 'lies' probably consisted of worshiping through calf idols, as their fathers had done at Sinai (Ex. 32:1-8; I Kings 12:26-30) [6: 7].

Matthew Henry comments on this passage:

The evil passions of the heart break out in various forms; but the Lord looks to our motives, as well as our conduct. Those that deal cruelly, shall be cruelly dealt with. Other nations were reckoned with for injuries done to men; Judah is reckoned with for dishonor done to God. Judah despised the law of the Lord; and he justly gave them up to strong delusion; nor was it any excuse for their sin, that they were the lies, the idols, after which their fathers walked. The worst abominations and most grievous oppressions have been committed by some of the professed worshipers of the Lord. Such

conduct leads many to unbelief and vile idolatry [17: MH].

As Paul reveals in the first chapter of Romans, idolatry is not the sin of ignorance, but of iniquity. "The crime of Judah lay in the fact that they had known the law of God and did not sin in ignorance" [5: 32]. One would think that Judah, with the destruction of Israel in their minds, would have repented and walked after God rather than idols, but they stubbornly refused to repent. More than one hundred-fifty years later, the Lord would raise up another and send him to Judah with message that reveals the hold idolatry had on them. Jeremiah wrote:

Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen'" (Jer. 6:16-17, NKJV).

**THEIR LIES.** Judah faced judgment at the hand of Jehovah "Because they rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; *Their lies also have led them astray*, Those after which their fathers walked" (NNAS, italics added). What were the lies? "Lies," standing alone, may have denoted the deceit that Judah's false prophets and leaders promoted in social and religious matters. But many Bible students understand the Hebrew word for "lies" as meaning "false gods" (NIV), indicating the worship of idols" [10: 17]. "After which their fathers walked" may have referred to the golden calf they worshiped at Sinai (Ex. 32). Keil-Delitzsch says that "their lies are their idols, as we may see from the relative clause, since "walking after" is the standing expression for idolatry" [7: 251]. Their idols were lies, "fabrications and nonentities, having no reality in themselves and therefore quite unable to perform what was expected of them" [7: 251-252].

At Sinai the Hebrew people began a long and shameful courtship with idolatry. From the time of the Exodus until the ministry of Amos their "fathers" had practiced idolatry almost continuously. Israel practiced idolatry in the wilderness (5:26), and "was more or less addicted to it ever afterwards, with the sole exception of the times of Josuha, Samuel, David, and part of the reign of Solomon, so that even the most godly kings of Judah were unable to eradicate the worship upon the high places" [7: 252]. To be fair to them, Hezekiah and Josiah ried to rid Judah of idolatry. But a century and a half later Jeremiah would still be condemning the people of Judah for walking after the same lie. It took the Babylonian Captivity to purge Judah of this senseless and contemptible sin.

**2:5 - I WILL SEND A FIRE.** This prophecy was fulfilled in 586 B.C. when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah for the third time, broke down the wall of the city, looted and destroyed the city, and took the people into captivity. This followed invasions in 606 B.C.

(When Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego were taken to Babylon), and 597 B.C. when other captives were taken into exile.

After seventy years of captivity, God used Cyrus, king of the Medo-Persian Empire to conquer Babylon and return a remnant of His Chosen People to the land He had given Abraham, their father. "Since that day, Jewish history has been determined by a combination of the Jews' response to God's mercy and grace" [6: 8].

There is a special point of interest here. Shalmanesar V, following Tiglath-Pileser's conquest, would conquer Israel, the northern kingdom, and then Sargon II, his commander-in-chief, would succeed him and carry out the deportation and resettlement he had begun with the nations of the region. The Lord warned both Judah and Israel that they would be judged by fire if they did not repent. Israel refused to repent and suffered destruction in 722 B. C., but Judah repented and God miraculously spared her from Assyria, His instrument of judgment at that time. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib was leading his army against Egypt and seemingly thought he could simply pause and quickly conquer Judah as one might swat a pesky fly (II Kings 13). However, Judah repented and the Lord sent His death angel through the camp of the Assyrians, slaying 185,000 men, forcing Sennacherib to return to Nineveh. If Israel had repented, destruction could have been averted!

### C. JUDGMENT IS ANNOUNCED AGAINST ISRAEL, 2:6-4:13.

THE FORMULA:

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT - "Thus saith the Lord."
2. CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT - "For three transgressions of Israel..."
3. REASONS FOR JUDGMENT - "They have sold the righteous for silver..."
4. INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT - War, destruction, deportation.

1. Israel's sins are described, 2:6-16.

a. Israel's sins are listed, 2:6-8.

- 1) Oppression.
- 2) Bribes.
- 3) Covetousness.
- 4) Immorality.
- 5) Sacrilege.

**2:6 - ISRAEL.** Now the prophet comes to the target of the message of judgment from the Lord - Israel itself! He has set them up - with their help. They had been saying "Amen!" to everything he had said until he came to Judah. The most astute among them may have made the connection and anticipated what was coming next. But even they could not have envisioned in those moments the magnitude and reach of the message against Israel. It was devastating. First, the Lord charged them with social injustice and gives six examples (2:7-8). Then He charged them with ingratitude (2:9-12).

**THEY SOLD THE RIGHTEOUS FOR SILVER.** There were two classes in ancient Israel, the rich and the poor. There was a small elite core of wealthy, influential citizens who had experienced prosperity unknown since the establishment of the northern kingdom. But the masses were very poor and they were at the mercy of the merciless. There was no middle class as we know it today. The rich are about to be punished because "they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals" (NASV). They did not discriminate: they sold the strong and the weak. It was bad enough that they would sell the righteous, but what is shocking is the cheap price they placed on the needy - a pair of sandals.

**2:7 - THEY PANT AFTER THE DUST.** This is very graphic. The rich had taken everything the poor had and in so doing had reduced them to the place where they had thrown dust on their heads (as a sign of grief). And now they pant after the very dust that settled in the hair of the poor.

**TURN ASIDE THE WAY OF THE MEEK.** The ancient world did not respect meekness. In fact, the world always views meekness as weakness. The meek are often seen as targets by the power hungry, the greedy, and the thief who cannot comprehend the fact that the meek "shall inherit the world" (Matt. 5:5).

**A MAN AND HIS FATHER.** The NNAS has, "And a man and his father resort to the same girl." In verse 8, according to some interpreters, it seems that a father would take his son and go to a pagan temple to commit adultery with the same temple prostitute. But in this verse the word for "girl" was the "general term for a young woman of marriageable age. Other terms were commonly used to designate a harlot or temple prostitute. Here *girl* probably refers to a woman who was overpowered by the men of a household" [10: 24]. This was all done in a land that claimed God as their Lord. How depraved God's chosen people had become!

**2:8 - THEY LAY...UPON CLOTHES.** The NASV renders this verse:

And on garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar, And  
in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been

fined.

Ryrie provides some background for this verse:

When taken as security for loans, a man's cloak was to be returned at night because the poor needed it for a covering (Ex. 22:25-26). A widow's cloak could not be taken at all (Deut. 24:17). The picture is of ruthless foreclosure because of debts. Wine taken as fines was drunk to a heathen god (not God) [20: RSB].

It may have been even more degrading than it seems on the surface. The poor man had to put up his garment as collateral for money to buy bread for his family. If he could not redeem his garment that day the Law required the lender to return his robe so he could use it for cover at night. Not only were these men not returning the garments, they were taking them to a pagan temple where they would throw them on the floor by the altar and there proceed with their drunken orgies - with their own sons right beside them, vs. 7). Paul was inspired to write of people like this: "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18).

With reference to this charge, Keil-Delitzsch shows just how horrible their sins really were.

A man and his father, i.e. both son and father, go to the girl, i.e. to the prostitute. The meaning is, to one and the same girl; but 'achath is omitted, to preclude all possible misunderstanding, as though going to different prostitutes was allowed. This sin was tantamount to incest, which, according to the law, was to be punished with death (cf. Lev. xviii. 7, 15, and xx. 11) [7: 253].

Keil-Delitzsch lists four crimes for which the people of Israel are condemned.

- (1) The first is unjust treatment, or condemnation of the innocent in their administration of justice.
- (2) As a second crime, Amos reproves in ver. 7a their thirst for the oppression of the quiet in the land.
- (3) The third crime is their profanation of the name of God by shameless immorality (ver 7b).
- (4) And the fourth, desecration of the sanctuary by drinking carousals (ver. 8) [7: 252-

253].

Some think the fourth crime denotes adultery committed with the temple prostitutes who served in the licentious worship of Baal and Asherah. Others reject this view in favor of the idea that the sin here is flagrant contempt for, and arrogant defiance of, the commandments of God. The Hebrew shows that the “profanation of the holy name of God is represented as intentional, to bring out the daring character of the sin, and to show that it did not arise from weakness or ignorance, but was practiced with studious contempt of the Holy God” [K-D: 254]. Which ever view is correct, the practice was a sin of the most abominable nature.

b. Israel has sinned against the light, 2:9-13.

**2:9 - YET DESTROYED THE AMORITE.** The Amorites were the pre-conquest inhabitants of Canaan. Israel sent a letter to Sihon, king of the Amorites, asking permission to pass through their territory. Sihon refused and the Lord enabled Israel to defeat the Amorites and occupy their cities (Num. 21). They must make no mistake about it - God defeated the Amorites and the defeat was complete:

*Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Whose height was like the height of the cedars, And he was as strong as the oaks; Yet I destroyed his fruit above And his roots beneath* (NKJV, italics added).

**2:10 - I BROUGHT YOU UP.** The point is clear and inescapable: they had been delivered from Egypt by the hand of God when they could not deliver themselves. He led them through the wilderness - they could not have survived without Him.

**2:11 - I RAISED UP OF YOUR SONS FOR PROPHETS.** God had blessed the people of Israel uniquely by raising up prophets from among them through whom He would communicate with them. A nation is blessed indeed to have God call ministers and send them to proclaim His Word.

**NAZARITES.** The Hebrew word for Nazarite means consecration, devotion, and separation. There were two traditional orders of the Nazirites. One was based on a vow by the individual for a specific period of time. “The other was a lifelong devotion following the revelatory experience of a parent which announced the impending birth of a child” [18: HBD]. The outward signs of a Nazarite were (1) the growth of hair, (2) abstention from wine and other alcoholic beverages (see Num. 6:1-21), and (3) the avoidance of contact with the dead, all of which illustrate devotion to God.

**2:12 - BUT YE GAVE THE NAZARITES WINE TO DRINK.** The people God had chosen for Himself had corrupted the Nazarites He had raised up among them to serve His purpose. They encouraged the Nazarites to break their vows by drinking wine.



**COMMANDED THE PROPHETS, SAYING PROPHECY NOT.** The Lord had sent the prophets to with them with the "Thus saith the Lord," and they had ordered them to "prophecy not." You may think those people who had seen the mighty works of God revealed before their eyes would have been afraid to command the prophets not to prophesy. It is a more serious transgression today when men and women who have far more Old Testament Scripture to guide them, as well as the New Testament and the Holy Spirit to lead them still try to silence the man of God.

I have said on a number of occasions that when you preach the Word of God without compromise in America today, you will not have to worry about evil people in our society persecuting you - some of your church members will beat them to it! It is happening all across America today.

**2:13 - I AM PRESSED UNDER YOU.** The NKJV reads: "Behold, I am weighed down by you, As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down." The Lord was burdened because the people He had chosen who had rejected Him when they had every reason to follow Him. They owed their existence and all their blessings to Him, yet they absolutely refused to follow Him. Does that sound familiar?

c. Retribution is inescapable, 2:14-16.

The prophecy in 2:14-16 was fulfilled by the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. War was the instrument of judgment. Since the Fall, man has been plagued with all sorts of problems, including death, disease, strife, famine and war. War can be, and usually is a horrifying experience, especially for the defeated nation. The horror of war is intensified when the lost war is fought at home. Invaders lose soldiers, but the invaded land loses much more. The barbarism carried out by the Japanese against the Koreans and Chinese at the beginning of World War II illustrates that war can be as brutal in the twentieth century as it was in the eighth century B.C. The Bible speaks of wars and rumors of war, and the world has seldom been free of either.

On the basis of the computation in the Moscow Gazette, Gustave Valbert in his day could report that "From the year 1496 B.C. to A.D. 1861 in 3358 years there were 227 years of peace and 3,130 years of war, or 13 years of war to every year of peace. Within the last three centuries, there have been 286 wars in Europe. He added that from the year 1500 B.C. to A.D. 1860 more than 8000 treaties of peace, meant to remain in force forever, were concluded. The average time they remained in force was two years" [16: BI, #3766].

Also:

In the over 3100 years of recorded world history, the world has only been at peace 8% of the time or a total of 286 years and 8000 treaties have been made and broken. Even now we seem headed for a nuclear showdown. See: Jer 6:14; Jer 8:11 [16: BI, #3766].

**2:14 - FLIGHT SHALL PERISH FROM THE SWIFT.** Israel will not be able to depend upon speed or strength when the Assyrians invasion comes. No human power is going to save them. In verses 14-16 the prophet lists seven groups who would not be able to stand when the judgment came. They were (1) the swift, (2) the stalwart, (3) the mighty men, (4) the archer, (5) the quickest runner, (6) the horsemen, and (7) the bravest.

**2:15 - NEITHER SHALL HE STAND.** The prophecy is both graphic and distressing: "He shall not stand who handles the bow, The swift of foot shall not escape, Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself" (NKJV). All the things a nation depends upon for security will fail them.

**2:16 - HE THAT IS COURAGEOUS.** There were no doubt many courageous men in Israel's army but, "The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, Says the LORD."

When God returned a remnant in 536 B.C. to rebuild the temple and re-establish His Chosen People in the land, they made their capital in Jerusalem, not Samaria. Samaria would become the home of the hated Samaritans of the First Century. They were descendants of an amalgamation of the Israelites who remained in the land and foreigners who were settled in the land. Those foreigners were also Semitic people, so it was not so much a racial hatred as a theological hatred that existed between the Jews and Samaritans of Jesus' day.

2. Israel will be judged because of her failure to meet her responsibility through election, 3:1-2.

**3:1 - HEAR THIS WORD.** This means to hear with a mind to obey. They must pay close attention to this word which the Lord has spoken against them. Some of Amos' sermons were very short. The reason seems obvious. He was having to shout at a moving target. He had not been invited to come to the temple in Bethel and deliver this entire message at one time. Rather, he stood outside the temple and cried out to passers-by, many of whom surely listened to the oracles against the nations with a great deal of satisfaction. But when his messages focused the spotlight on their sins, many of them would hasten on by him, either to get into the temple, or to get away from it.

Street preachers were apparently not uncommon in ancient times. Amos probably stood in the open area before the temple and preached these short, powerful sermons to worshipers as they came to the temple, or as they left. If the prophet had to preach under these circumstances, it would explain his “short, pointed preaching style” [6: 12].

**AGAINST THE WHOLE FAMILY.** The word of God was spoken against the entire family of the Israelites (i.e., all 12 tribes, not just the northern 10 tribes of Israel).

**3:2 - ONLY YOU HAVE I KNOWN.** Matthew Henry says, “The distinguishing favours of God to us, if they do not restrain from sin, shall not exempt from punishment. They could not expect communion with God, unless they first sought peace with him” [17: MH]. Ryrie notes, “The special privileges God bestowed on Israel by choosing them increased their ethical responsibilities and did not exempt them from judgment as some thought” [20: RSB]. Matthew Henry wrote:

The threatenings of the word and providence of God against the sin of man are certain, and certainly show that the judgments of God are at hand. Nor will God remove the affliction he has sent, till it has done its work. The evil of sin is from ourselves, it is our own doing; but the evil of trouble is from God, and is his doing, whoever are the instruments. ...The whole of the passage shows that natural evil, or troubles, and not moral evil, or sin, is here meant. The warning given to a careless world will increase its condemnation another day. Oh the amazing stupidity of an unbelieving world, that will not be wrought upon by the terrors of the Lord, and that despise his mercies! [17: MH].

3. The law of cause and effect is in effect, 3:3-8.

**3:3 - CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER...** The NKJV has, “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” He clearly anticipates a negative answer. This is only the first of several questions in verses 3-6 which are designed to show Israel how her sin had separated her from the God she claimed to serve. The NASB reads, “Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?” “Where there is not friendship, there can be no fellowship. God and man cannot walk together, except they are agreed. Unless we seek his glory, we cannot walk with him” [17: MH].

**3:4 - WILL A LION ROAR...WHEN HE HATH NO PREY?** “Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey? Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured something?” (NNAS). He anticipates a negative answer. Is it God’s nature to promised something and then not perform it?

**3:5 - CAN A BIRD FALL...** The NASB is helpful: “Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when

there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?" "Gin" (KJV) is an old English word for trap. The first part of the verse refers to a trap with a bait that attracted the bird; the second to a trap with a rope or string as a trigger mechanism that is sprung by the animal.

**3:6 - TRUMPET.** "If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?" (NKJV). The question anticipates a negative response. The trumpet was sounded to alarm the people; they would have been foolish to have disregard it.

This brings us to a timeless question, a question Job and his friends wrestled with way back in the days of the Patriarchs. Does God cause everything that happens? In other words, does God directly send a punishment for every sin, or a blessing for every good deed? Job's friends tried to apply the wisdom of the world to his situation, so this was no new subject to them. The Pharisees held strongly to the view that those who were prosperous prospered because they were righteous and God was blessing them; and those who were deprived and those who suffered did so because they were being punished for their sins.

A man said, with emphasis, "There are no accidents." The Deist would say that God does not involved Himself in the every day affairs of men. Others see every drop of rain falling as the direct result of God's will. There is a more "moderate" view - for those who do not equate "moderate" in an interpretation of certain passages of Scripture with "lukewarm" in thinking of hot coffee or iced tea. There are countless times when God claims absolute responsibility for blessings, and for curses. In those cases we can speak absolutely - God caused it! However, it is possible that God set certain laws in motion and they operate according to His predetermined purpose and according to His predetermined law. If this is the case, every drop of dew does not require a fresh act of God, but it forms according to the laws He has established at the beginning of creation.

There are also people who see all good things as the work of God, and all bad things as the work of Satan. This was the position of Job's friends and the Pharisees of Jesus' day. What is the answer? Does God cause everything, or do things just happen? It may help to distinguish between the directive will of God and the permissive will of God. Nothing cannot happen that God does not either cause or permit. Accordingly, all things are under His control. Nothing is out of control with God. Satan may be the prince of this world, but God has never relinquished control to him. Rabbi Kershman was wrong. In his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, he concluded that bad things happen to good people because God cannot do everything. If your God cannot do everything you have the wrong God.

The great "I AM" God is the sovereign Lord over all history and over all human events. Everything that happens, happens according to either His directive will, or His permissive will. That is not the same things as saying that the Lord has anointed you to tell all your neighbors why God is punishing them. Pray for guidance so that you will understand how the Lord is working with you to achieve His purpose for your life. Pray for your neighbors and minister to them, but try to avoid being judgmental.

After an eight and one-half year pastorate in which we experienced a measure of “overnight success” (following several years of prayer and visitation), I was called to serve as pastor of an outstanding church in another state. After a period of time I sustained an injury which was compounded by medical errors in diagnosis and in appliances prescribed for my shoes. The members of the former church heard about and invited me to return as pastor to allow me more time for recuperation. When we were convinced that it was the Lord’s will for us to return, we moved back.

I was surprised by a few friends who were convinced that God had punished me for leaving a growing church in the first place. What they did not understand is that if I could have accepted that answer I would have confessed and rejoiced in the fact that I knew the answer. I have never discovered why it happened, but I determined that rather than dwelling on “why,” I would concentrate on what the Lord wanted me to do with it.

My mother was teaching a Sunday School class when she lost her voice. We were called and drove immediately to the hospital where she had been admitted. Even before it was discovered that she had a malignant tumor on the brain, we knew it was serious. I was wondering what I would say to my mother when I entered the room. She looked at me and very slowly, and with great effort, formed the words, “It’s not what happens to you that counts. It’s what you do with it.”

In the case of ancient Israel, they would not have to speculate as to the cause of the disaster. The Lord claimed responsibility. He had a purpose in choosing Israel as a people through whom He would accomplish His redemptive purpose. He has used pain and sorrow as well as joy and blessings to accomplish His purpose.

**3:7 - HE REVEALETH.** “ Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets’ (NKJV). “God had warned the people through His prophets (including Amos), but the people told the prophets to keep quiet (2:12)” [20: RSB].

**3:8 - THE LION HATH ROARED.** The concluding questions drive home the point: “A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” (NASB). Peter and John understood this:

And they (religious leaders) called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20)

It is interesting that in the New Testament Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and in the Old Testament Yahweh is the Lion. Now He has roared - who will not fear. In the wild, when the lion charges with a terrifying roar, smaller animals flee in panic.

4. The heathens are put on the witness stand against Israel, 3:9-10.

**3:9 - PUBLISH IN...ASHDOD AND IN...EGYPT.** The palaces of all the nations were deeply concerned about the events going on in every other nation in that part of the world. They will not have to depend upon spies to try to ascertain what is going on in Israel. The Lord wants it published abroad so that all nations will know His sovereign will for Israel and His sovereign power over all nations. Ashdod and Egypt, representing the heathen nations, are summoned to witness the punishment of Israel. They are summoned: "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst."

**3:10 - FOR THEY KNOW NOT TO DO RIGHT.** This does not mean that they lacked intellectual knowledge. What they lacked was moral knowledge. They knew the "Thou shalt" and the "Thou shalt not" of the Law, but what they did not have was moral knowledge, without which there is no incentive to obey the Lord. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Pro. 9:10a). There was simply no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18) or in their hearts.

5. Judgment is pronounced, 3:11-15.

**3:11 - THEREFORE.** The therefore of God are significant. He has established their guilt and proved that they are deserving of His punishment. Now He is about to tell them what the punishment will be.

**AN ADVERSARY.** "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'An enemy, even one surrounding the land, Will pull down your strength from you And your citadels will be looted'" (NASB). Ryrie comments on Vs. 3:11-12:

An enemy. I.e., the Assyrians, who will sack Israel, leaving only remnants of her former prosperity, like the few pieces of the carcass a shepherd would snatch out of the mouth of a lion that had killed one of his sheep. In the meantime the leaders in Samaria lived in luxury on a cushioned corner of a bed [20: RSB].

**3:12 - THUS SAITH THE LORD.** This message is from the Lord and it is shocking. The judgment is

going to be devastating and far-reaching, but it will be a just judgment. Indiscriminate judgment is the result of intentional sins of Israel. This will be a vicious judgement, but as we will see, there is still a ray of hope.

**3:13 - HEAR YE, AND TESTIFY.** The people are commanded to hear the oracle of God against Israel and testify throughout the “house of Jacob” - that is, both Judah and Israel.

**3:14 - IN THAT DAY.** The people of Judah and Israel looked forward to the Day of the Lord (5:18). Here it is clear that the day which should concern them was the day in which God would “visit the transgression of Israel upon him.”

**ALTARS OF BETHEL.** Bethel means “House of God,” but Bethel had become a principal center of idol worship. Bethel had a rich history of Yahweh worship, but they had turned it into a place of false worship.

**HORNS OF THE ALTAR.** For the ancient Israelite this was very graphic. According to the Law, if one had slain another person, in self-defense for example, he could flee to a city of refuge and take hold of the horns of the altar and pursuers who sought vengeance would be forced to give him a fair hearing. The horns of the altar symbolized God’s mercy, but in that day there would be no mercy, because “the horns of the altar will be cut off, And they will fall to the ground.” The sanctuary of last resort would not protect Israel from God's wrath in the day when he would visit their transgressions upon them. The horns of the altar offered hope for protection, but the protection was not automatically guaranteed (Ex. 21:14; 1 Kings 2:28-34). The message was as startling as it was brief: NO MORE MERCY!

**3:15 - I WILL SMITE THE WINTER HOUSE.** The wealthiest people enjoyed both a winter house and a summer house. The more affluent are often able to build safer homes, or build them in safer places than the poor. In the day God would visit the transgressions of Israel against her, no one would be exempt from judgment. The wealthy, with their luxurious homes and their carvings of ivory (many examples of which have been found) will be demolished along with the simple houses of the poor. No amount of money, power, or influence could protect one from the coming judgment.

6. Greed and the luxury of women are denounced, 4:1-3.

**4:1- KINE OF BASHAN.** Literally, the prophet is calling the women of Israel “cows of Bashan.” In reality, he is calling them a bunch of fat cows.

The well-fed women of Samaria. (Bashan was known for its fat cattle; cf. Ps. 22:12.) These women were insatiable (v. 1), pretentiously religious (vv. 4-5), and calloused in the face of warnings (vv. 6-11) [20: RSB].

**OPPRESS THE POOR.** The poor are often at the mercy of the rich and powerful, many of whom became wealthy by oppressing the poor. Americans, including a large percentage of those at or below the poverty level, cannot imagine the plight of the poor in third world countries today, or in most countries of the ancient world. These women were totally without mercy. They were wives of the elite, the princes and officials of the nation of Israel. Living in the lap of luxury, they not only insulated themselves (on the mountain of Samaria) from the poor, they coveted everything the poor owned and pressured their husbands to take it for them.

**4:2 - THE LORD GOD HATH SWORN BY HIS HOLINESS.** This prophecy should strike terror in the heart of any person who really believes in God. The one true holy God has taken an oath on His holiness that He is about to destroy the nation. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and what He has promised He is able to perform” (Rom. 4:22).

God is love, but He is also holy, and His holiness demands punishment of sin. The coming judgment is certain and it will be severe.

The people will be led into captivity through breaches or gaps in the walls of their cities, just as animals are led by using meat hooks. Fish hooks were used when the other hooks run out, because of the number of Israelites who will be taken [20: RSB].

**4:3 - YE SHALL GO OUT THROUGH THE BREACHES.** That is, you will go out through the breaches in the walls caused by the battering rams of the Assyrians. This may mean that as soon as the invading army entered through the breaches they had made in the walls, these women would make a desperate attempt to escape through the same breaks. The NNAS reads, "You will go out through breaches in the walls, Each one straight before her, And you will be cast to Harmon," declares the LORD." The last part of the verse is difficult.

The verb translated You will be cast is feminine plural; so the fleeing women would do the casting. The meaning of the word translated Harmon is not clear. Perhaps the women would cast themselves into a place of captivity named Harmon [6: 16].

I commonly refer to the Assyrians as the Nazis of the ancient world. They seemed invincible - and as long as they were being used by God to judge Israel they were invincible. They also rank among the most bloodthirsty people in history. We know this, not just from references to their cruelty in the Bible, but also from their own records. Inscriptions have been recovered from the ninth to the seventh centuries



B.C. which record the military campaigns and colonial policies of the Assyrians. “Pictorial representations show the brutality of the vanquished, including the impaling of bodies on stakes, the flaying of human skin, and the piling of body parts (such as heads) for display” [10: 48].

The Assyrian monarch Ashurnasirpal (883-859 B.C.) Boasted of such cruel treatment: “I captured many troops alive: I cut off of some their arms and hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears, and extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living and one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city” [10: 48].

The sermon in 4:1-3 is the briefest of all his messages. I wonder why! One can imagine these greedy, sanctimonious, pseudo-aristocratic women entering, or leaving the temple when suddenly Amos, in a loud voice so that everyone could hear, and delivers this shocking indictment against them. He began by addressing them as a bunch of fat cows! Amos was not the last preacher to have some haughty woman suddenly, and with effect, turn her back to him. There are some who seemed to think all this preaching is a little beneath them anyway.

7. Empty worship is condemned, 4:4-5.

**4:4 - COME TO BETHEL AND TRANSGRESS.** No attempt is made to disguise the biting sarcasm. It was merited by the contemptable nature of their worship. “Come to Bethel and transgress,” He invites them, and “At Gilgal multiply transgression.” This derisive call to come to Bethel (House of God) and carry on their false worship was intended to show the people who professed a special relationship with God just how far they were from Him. No doubt, Amos delivered this message when a large number of people, including their leaders were gathered at the temple to worship. Alexander Maclaren comments on this verse:

Indignant irony flashes in that permission or command to persevere in calf worship. The seeming command is the strongest prohibition. There can be no worse thing befall a man than that he should be left to go on forwardly in the way of his heart. The real meaning is sufficiently emphasised by that second verb, ‘and transgress’ [9: 151].

These people were guilty of (1) worship of false gods and (2) false worship of the true God. They worshiped false gods, but still brought sacrifices and tithes to the Yahweh. I took a group of young people to a youth camp at Acadian Baptist Center. One of the speakers, a university professor and wife of a Baptist pastor, was a native of Brazil. Brazil is the largest Catholic country in the world. It is also the largest occult country in the world. As a professional entertainer, our speaker had apparently been involved with both in her youth and a young adult. She told us of young parents who would take their

babies to the Catholic Church to be blessed by the priest, and then on the way home take to see a practitioner of white magic to seek protection from black magic.

**BRING YOUR SACRIFICES.** The people of the covenant had forgotten the words of their great prophet and judge, Samuel:

Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams (I Sam. 15:22).

**TITHES AFTER THREE YEARS.** "Apparently this was the tithe that was brought only every three years. See note on Deut. 14:28-29. thank offering. See Lev. 7:12. freewill offerings. See Deut. 12:6" [20:RSB].

**4:5 - OFFER A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING.** Thanksgiving and a sacrifice of thanksgiving were a central part of Old Testament worship. Sacrifice and offerings were never to be made grudgingly, but with thanksgiving (Ps. 54:6; Jonah 2:9).

The psalmist valued a song of thanksgiving more than sacrifice (Ps. 69:30-31). David employed Levites "to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord" (1 Chron. 16:4; also 23:30; Neh. 12:46). Pilgrimage to the Temple and Temple worship were characterized by thanksgiving (Pss. 42:4; 95:2; 100:4; 122:4). Thankfulness was expressed: for personal (Ps. 35:18) and national deliverance (Ps. 44:7-8); for God's faithfulness to the covenant (Ps. 100:5); and for forgiveness (Ps. 30:4-5; Isa. 12:1). All creation joins in offering thanks to God (Ps. 145:10) [18: HBD].

**WITH LEAVEN.** Normally, in Old Testament times bread was made with leaven. Bread made with leaven was acceptable as wave offerings for the priests and as loaves to accompany the peace offerings (Lev. 7:11-13; 23:17). However, bread made with leaven or honey, both associated with the process of fermentation (and symbolizing a source of corruption), was never to be used as offerings to be burned on the altar (Lev. 2:11-12).

These people were participating in idol worship, and then coming to the Lord's altar with their sacrifices of thanksgiving. To do so is to bring leaven (corruption) to the altar of God.

**FREEWILL OFFERING.** The Freewill Offering was a gift given at the impulse of the giver (Ex. 35:21-29; 36:3-7; Lev. 7:16). The free will offering brought as a result of the "stirred hearts" and

"willing spirits" of the givers. The tabernacle in the wilderness was constructed, using materials given as free will offerings (Ex. 35:29). The generosity of the people was so great that Moses was compelled to ask them to bring more gifts (Ex. 36:3-7). Free will offerings were traditionally given at Pentecost (Deut. 16:10). The charge is that they were still bringing the Freewill Offering, but it did not come from hearts filled with love for, or gratitude to God.

8. God's chastisements had gone unheeded, 4:6-11.

a. He had sent famines and droughts, 6-8.

The idolatry and rebellion of Israel were no recent development. From the time they entered the land, beginning with their failure to drive the heathen out of the land, they continually turned to idolatry. The Lord did not ignore their infidelity and they had paid a terrible price throughout their entire history. Yet, from generation to generation they had turned back to false religion.

I remember stating early in my ministry that we are never more than a generation away from paganism. All it takes is for one generation to fail to teach the following generation the Word of God. Little did I realize that I would see the time that a group in America would call themselves pagans and urge others to us that name for them. But that is exactly what those involved in witchcraft are doing at present. Douglas Groothuis, an authority on New Age movements, reported seeing the words PAGAN AND PROUD on a bumper sticker in Seattle. False religion is growing by leaps and bounds in America, highlighted by the spread of New Age religions, Hinduism, Islam, and the more prolific cults like Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses. Our system (political, social, educational, and economic) restricts Christianity while either ignoring or favoring many of these false religions. This is no wild claim; it has been well documented. America is paying a terrible price for its rebellion against the true God and its love affair with the false gods of our time.

**4:6 - CLEANNES OF TEETH.** We have come to expect graphic word pictures from Amos, and he is never more explicit and colorful than here. They did not have to worry about tooth picks; there was nothing to stick between their teeth. They had cleanness of teeth because they had nothing to eat, and they had nothing to eat because of famine, and they had famine because of their rebellion against God.

**LACK OF BREAD.** Lack of bread was the result of famine, which was often the result of some natural disaster. Here the Lord claims credit for many of the natural disasters. God had never excused their rebellion and false religion. He had sent numerous "natural" catastrophes (vv. 6-11) as warnings, but Israel did not repent (Yet you have not returned to Me, vv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11).

A famine is an extreme shortage of food and a drought denotes conditions when there is no rain for a long period of time and the land is parched by the sun. Drought was the most common cause of famine in the Old Testament. Famines and droughts are often seen as God's judgment of His people (or others) because of sin.

**4:7 - I HAVE WITHHELD THE RAIN.** Drought caused severe problems in ancient times, just as it does in underdeveloped countries today. Before irrigation became common throughout America, drought had a devastating effect on farmers, and if it continued very long it affected everyone else. Even a brief drought could wipe out the assets of a produce grower or cotton or grain farmer. Those who cannot afford the cost of irrigation rigs watch the clouds very closely during the growing season, and in any situations the only thing standing between the farmer and bankruptcy is their federal crop insurance. In countries without such protection drought is still catastrophic.

Drought caused famines in the time of Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Isaac (Gen. 26:1), Joseph (Gen. 41:27), and the judges (Ruth 1:1). Drought and famine also plagued the Israelites in the days of David (2 Sam. 21:1), Elijah (1 Kings 18:2), Elisha (2 Kings 4:38), Haggai (Hag. 1:11), and Nehemiah (Neh. 5:3)" [18: HBD].

Famines were also caused by such things as locusts, wind, hail, and mildew (Joel 1:4; Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17). In ancient times famine was often caused by a nation's enemy as the invaders destroyed crops and confiscated food (Deut. 28:33,51; Isa. 1:7).

The siege of cities also resulted in famine, such as the siege of Samaria by Ben-hadad (2 Kings 6:24-25) and the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:2-3)" [18: HBD].

The famines which Israel experienced were often severe, some of them lasting for years (Gen. 12:10; 41:27; Jer. 14:1-6). During famines it was not uncommon for people to resort to eating such things as wild vines, heads of animals, garbage, dung, and under extreme circumstances, even human flesh (2 Kings 4:39; 6:25,28; Lam. 4:4-10).

b. He had sent the hot east wind (blasting and mildew), 9a.

**BLASTING - 4:9a.** I met the late Dr. Leo Eddleman when he was president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and I was a student. His father had been pastor of my home church and he and my pastor were friends. We spend many hours together in the gym, sometimes just the two of us but usually with others. Later we worked in revivals together, and I talked with him on the phone when I needed help with a passage of Scripture. Dr. Eddleman had been a missionary to Israel before serving as a pastor,

seminary professor, president of Georgetown College, and then seminary president. He described the condition mentioned here.

He said that one moment you could see a valley or hillside covered with green grass and beautiful flowers, but suddenly the hot east wind would sweep in off the desert almost immediately the grass would wilt and flowers fade (see Is. 40:8). Within a matter of a few hours everything would turn brown. Those who heard Amos knew what he was talking about, but apparently just considered it a natural phenomenon. It had not occurred to them that there were times when God had sent the hot east wind as punishment for sin.

In the Old Testament wind is used in numerous ways (the storm wind, Isa. 32:2; the whirlwind, II Kings 2:11; and the scorching wind (Ps. 11:6 NRSV).

“Winds from the mountains and sea to the north and west brought rain and storm (1 Kings 18:43-45; see Ex. 10:19; Ezek. 1:4); those coming from the deserts of the south and east could at times be balmy but more often would sear the land and dry up the vegetation (Gen. 41:6; Job 37:1-2)” [18: HBD].

c. He had sent the palmer worm, 9b.

**4:9b - THE PALMERWORM.** The palmerworm attacked the very things that made the land of Canaan a “land flowing with milk and honey” (your gardens, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees) The palmerworm refers to the caterpillar stage of a species of locust (Joel 1:4; 2:25; Amos 4:9). In fact, the NKJV translates the word *locust*, and the NASB, *caterpillar*.

This points to another cause of famine. A cotton farmer who had to try to cope with bowl weevils and bowl worms in the days before mechanical application of insecticides made the problem manageable can appreciate the fear the ancient Israelites had of the palmerworm.

**YOU HAVE NOT RETURNED.** As mentioned earlier, there are natural disasters that happen according to the permissive will of God. But there are natural catastrophes which come as a result of the directive will of God, and these are the ones to which Amos refers here. He had sent disasters upon the people to convince them to return to Him, but they had not returned. He had blessed them in order to get them to follow Him, but they had not repented. So, He had sent disasters for the same purpose, but they still did not return unto Him.

d. He has sent pestilence, 10a.

**4:10A - PESTILENCE.** In the Old Testament pestilence denotes a devastating catastrophe or epidemic some of which were sent by God (Ex. 9:15; Jer. 15:2; Hab. 3:5) as punishment for rebellion, idolatry, unbelief (Num. 14:12) or failure to fulfill covenant obligations (Deut. 28:21). God's purpose in sending a pestilence "after the manner of Egypt" was not only for punishment. He also sought their repentance and obedience (Amos 4:10).

e. He had sent war, 10b.

**4:10b - I SLEW YOUR YOUNG MEN.** In the Old Testament pestilence is often associated with war, or more specifically, conditions that occurred when a city was under siege (Ex. 5:3; Lev. 26:25; Amos 4:10; Luke 21:11).

**YOU HAVE NOT RETURNED.** Throughout the period of the Judges and during the entire history of the kingdom the Lord had used war to punish Israel. She still had never returned to the Lord with her whole heart. But they had never seen an invading force to compare with the one He was about to unleash on the northern kingdom.

9. Judgment is imminent, 4:11-12.

**4:11 - I OVERTHREW YOU.** The NKJV follows the KJV, "*some of you.*" The One responsible for the overthrow of Israel on certain occasions was none other than the Lord Who had chosen them. Yet, He had always spared them because of His covenant with them: "I overthrew you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, And you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze." When they were about to be consumed, He had plucked them from the flames. He had punished them, but not without mercy.

When I was growing up in the Mississippi Delta, my father had bought farms that were partially cleared. There was quite a difference between total acreage and cultivatable acreage. We had to have additional woodlands in order to grow crops on the land. We usually cut larger trees for firewood, or let people on the farm cut them for wood. Neighbors were always permitted to cut trees for firewood or for wood cook stoves. Then we had to contend with stumps, treetops, saplings, and bushes. Limbs and brush were thrown onto a brushpile and when dry enough, set afire. After the brushpile burned out we would have to go back and pick up the ends of limbs that were on the outer perimeter of the brushpile, make a fresh pile and then burn those charred ends. At times we picked up the ends of limbs that had been burned into and threw them back into the fire before it went out. Those were like the firebrands mentioned here.

**YOU HAVE NOT RETURNED.** They have stubbornly refused to repent and return to the Lord. Punishment has escalated as their infidelity increased. He has blessed them and He has punished them, but

nothing He has done has caused them to return. Has God failed? Absolutely not! They have failed and they will suffer the consequences.

**4:12 - THEREFORE, THUS WILL I DO TO YOU.** “Therefore” holds all God has done trying to get them to return to Him and their stubborn refusal to return before them as He goes on to tell them what comes next. What happens will not come by accident, nor will it come simply because some foreign monarch wants more territory. The Lord is moving nations as one moves pieces on a chessboard.

**PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL.** Of all the solemn warnings ever issued in the history of the world, this has to rank with the most awesome. Israel, which had refused to meet God reverently in worship, or humbly in service, will meet Him now in judgment. Until now they have had a choice and they have made the wrong choice time and time again. But now the choice rests with God and they are approaching the point when they have no say in it. They are rushing headlong toward the point of no return.

In his best seller, *Against the Night*, Chuck Colson paints a very disturbing portrait of moral and spiritual conditions in America. He finds no consolation in contemporaries who share his burden: Carl F. H. Henry talking about the twilight of our culture; Malcolm Muggeridge predicting the end of Christendom; secular journals (*Newsweek* declares “the American century...over” [3: 10]. He finds more chilling the supposition from theologian Donald Bloesch,

who wonders if God Himself is “bringing about the moral and spiritual desolation that is so rampant today . . . confusing the counsel and deliberations of even His own people.” Bloesch goes on to surmise that God may well be bringing judgment upon a corrupt society and church so that out of the ruins he might raise up his own church, pure and whole [3: 10].

Just how bad are things in America? Some claim that moral and spiritual conditions are no worse than they were a century ago; we just have more people and more sophisticated media. Others are convinced that “things” are worse today than they were two or three generations ago. Many point to economic problems, others to racial issues, and still others to ecological threats.

Dr. Michael S. Coffman, author of *Saviors of the Earth?*, writes about “the politics and religion of the environmental movement.” He documents cases in which various environmental groups have been able to take a genuine, but manageable problem, and blow it up into a full-grown crisis, get the media behind them, get pressure applied to congress and the president, get bills passed and a program funded - at tax payers’ expense. Thus government grows bigger and bigger as it tries to micro-manage every faucet of our lives. Coffman claims that “It was the New Age Counterculture Movement exploding into the

American scene in the 1960s and 1970s that propelled the fledgling environmental movement to dizzying new heights of god/nature worship, mysticism, and radical antimodernism. This movement is proving to have a far greater impact on America than anything else since the Civil War” [2: 73].

If Coffman is right, what does it mean? It means that political and special interest groups are offering solutions that may end up being harder to solve than the problems they are supposed to solve! There is a crisis in America, but as Colson says, “The crisis is not political; it is moral and spiritual. And so is the solution. That’s why Christians are the only ones who can offer viable answers” [3: 11].

10. The first hymn honors the Creator, 4:13.

**4:13 - HE WHO FORMS MOUNTAINS.** Who is it Who is warning Israel? “He who forms mountains and creates the wind.” By what right does warn them? By His sovereign right as Creator. The Creator can do as He chooses with His creation. Creation is one of the most neglected subjects in our schools, colleges, seminaries, and churches. It is not only neglected, it is resisted, if not categorically rejected by the majority in the academic community. It seems ironic that some of those who have fought the Institute for Creation Research with greatest intensity have been theologians, Bible professors, and some pastors.

Evolutionists have done a good job (thanks in part to their willing accomplices in the media) of convincing the masses that they have proved evolution and debunked the claims of creationists. The National Geographic Society, Walt Disney, and children’s cartoons have helped foster this belief. But the simple fact is that neither creation, nor evolution can be proved scientifically. We can examine the available evidence and make a decision based on the evidence available to us at any point in time. But in the final analysis a decision is going to have to be made on the basis of faith in evidence which cannot be confirmed in a laboratory. Evolution requires a lot more faith than creation. Ken Hamm was a high school science teacher in Australia. He worked with the Institute for Creation Research before founding a new Creation organization. Mr. Hamm asks, “Who are you going to believe, man who does not know everything and was not there, or God who knows everything and was there?”

The point here is that if we accept God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and therefore, our Creator, then we must yield to Him as Sovereign over all He created. This they would not do. But how much better do we do today?

**DECLARES TO MAN.** It is amazing that He would bother. Man should be humbled by the thought that his Creator would bother communicating with him. Francis Shaeffer wrote more than twenty books - and they are not what one might consider light reading. His first book was *The God Who is There*. He followed that book with a book that shows his conclusion: *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. Like Francis Shaeffer, we should be humbled by the fact that our Creator communicates with us.



**WHO TREADS THE HIGH PLACES OF THE EARTH.** The deists are wrong: We have God's word on it! He is not only the Creator; He is also the Sustainer and the Redeemer. The transcendent God does involve Himself in Human affairs, supernaturally influencing individuals, moving nations, blessing the faithful, and punishing transgressors at His own discretion.

In all, the Lord makes five illustrative statements about Himself in this verse.

- (1) God formed the mountains.
- (2) God created the wind.
- (3) God declared to men His thoughts.
- (4) God makes morning darkness.
- (5) God treads on the high places of the earth.

**THE LORD.** The Lord identifies Himself here by His covenant name, Yahweh - the great I AM. In the fullest sense His name means I am that I am, I was that which I was, and I will be that which I will be. He exists of Himself (not the first cause, but the uncaused cause!), and He is the cause of our existence. He is the changeless God of eternity.

He adds a name with which they were very familiar: "the God of Hosts, is His name." Both the claims and names for God in this verse hold before us three primary attributes of Almighty God.

- a. He is omnipotent - all powerful.
- b. He is omniscient - all knowing.
- c. He is omnipresent - ever present.

## II. THE RULING HOUSE OF ISRAEL WILL BE DESTROYED BY CAPTIVITY, 5:1- 6:14.

### A. The Funeral Dirge of a Nation Is Given, 1-3.

**5:1 - HEAR THIS WORD.** In order to have an audience for his message, Amos had to stand in the plaza in front of the temple and call out to those who were either going into, or coming from the temple to worship. Under the circumstances, this seems like a natural way for the prophet to get the attention of the people.

When God commands people to hear His word, the idea is to hear with a mind to obey. It denotes careful attention to what the speaker is about to say. In English we have the one word “hear,” but tone of one’s voice or the context in which it is used may convey a different idea. A parent may say to a child, “I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say.” After the lecture the parent may then ask, “Did you hear what I said?” What he is asking is, “Did you hear with a mind to obey?”

I have two sons and while they have a lot in common today, when they were growing up they were as different as day and night. They were like most other children in that you had to be sure they were paying attention when you talked with them. But one did not always look like he was listening, but he never missed a word. The other one would look you right in the eye and even nod and say, “Yes Sir,” while you were talking, but when you finished you knew to ask, “Did you hear me.” Of course he always assured me he did. Then I would ask, “What did I say?” Sometimes the answer was, “Uhh...” He was not being defiant; he started with me but then let his mind drift. It was not always amusing when that happened. And it is not amusing when we do not give God our undivided attention.

**DIRGE.** When we think of a dirge we usually think of a funeral dirge or song. A dirge might also be used to mourn a catastrophe. In this case the dirge mourns the death of the nation of Israel. It continues through chapter 6 with Amos stressing seven times that it came from the Lord (5:3, 4, 16, 17, 27; 6:8, 14). Leon Hyatt prepared the *Expository Notes* for the Southern Baptist Winter Bible Conference for 1996. He points out that

Throughout the poem, God spoke in the first person. God addressed the poem to “the house of Israel.” References to Bethel and Gilgal (5:5-6), the house of Joseph (5:6; 6:6), the remnant of Joseph (5:15), and Jacob (6:8) show that at times God had only the northern kingdom in mind. In other passages, He spoke to the north and the south together (6:1, 14) [6: 19].

**AGAINST YOU.** The Lord chose them as a people unto Himself. He wanted them to walk with Him in fellowship, He revealed His redemptive love for them, and He provided a way for them to be saved and walk with Him. But they refused - and they refused assertively. Now the God Who had sought to redeem them has set Himself squarely against them. Matthew Henry wrote:

The Lord still proclaims mercy to men, but they often expect deliverance from such self-invented forms as make their condemnation sure. While they refuse to come to Christ and to seek mercy in and by him, that they may live, the fire of Divine wrath breaks forth upon them. Men may make an idol of the world, but will find it cannot protect [17: MH].

**5:2 - THE VIRGIN OF ISRAEL.** The poem is not expressing God's sorrow because of Israel was already dead, but because death would soon come to her. Up to this time Israel had been unconquered, but she was about to fall, never to rise again. The lamentation carries the force of divine prophecy that reminds us of the lamentations of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet:

She has fallen, she will not rise again - The virgin Israel. She lies  
neglected on her land; There is none to raise her up (NASB).

"The virgin Israel" does not speak to the moral condition of the nation here, as bad as it was. He apparently uses it as a term of endearment. God loved Israel deeply and mourned the fact that the nation was about to fall, never to rise again. Judah would go into captivity for seventy years, after which the Lord would return a remnant. But Israel, as a national entity was about to fall, never to rise again. Who could raise her up again if God was determined that she would never rise again?

**5:3 - THUS SAITH THE LORD.** It may seem redundant to remind the student of Scripture of what he already knows. But the Lord did not deem it so when He gave Amos the message. And we should consider the significance of the repetition. What they were hearing was the "Thus saith the Lord," and not the "thus reasoneth the mind of Amos." Years ago I wrote in the front of my favorite Bible: "It is true because God said it. It is not enough to say that God said it because it is true." I do not remember when or where I wrote it, or who said it first, but we must understand that when God speaks truth is established.

**THOUSAND...HUNDRED.** Israel's death would come as the result of a military invasion. Israel would send a thousand into battle and only one hundred would be left. She would never recover from such heavy loss (90 percent destroyed, cf. 3:12). The nation would be destroyed, but a remnant of the people would survive. Some of the people fled to Judah when the invasion came and were spared, but most of the people were dispersed among the nations of that part of the world. People from other nations were settled in parts of Israel by their conquerors, the Assyrians. A few of the descendants of those who were dispersed among the nations joined themselves to the remnant of Judah which returned to Jerusalem in 536 B.C.

## **B. Vain Rituals Are Offered and Prized Virtues Repudiated, 4-9.**

**5:4 - SEEK YE THE LORD.** There is still hope if they will seek the Lord but they must seek Him without delay. Time is running out on the nation, but even at this late date, there is still hope - if they will just seek the Lord. Jeremiah would later write: "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13, NKJV).

It is interesting that each time the Lord invited Israel to seek Him and live, “He gave them a compelling reason for doing so. First, He said they should seek Him and live because their empty rituals of worship could not save them. ...Second, God urged Israel to seek Him and live so that He would not break forth on them like a fire” [6: 20]. A third reason is given in 5:14 (that God would be with them). Fire would be the instrument by which God would destroy the nation. It might be more accurate to say that fire was a symbol of the destruction that would be unleashed upon Israel by the military might of Assyria.

Another point should be made. Even when Israel as a nation passed the point of no return, individuals could still repent and find salvation in the Lord. That does not mean that they would be spared the humiliation and suffering associated with the defeat of their nation. They would find salvation from their sins, but as citizens of Israel, there is no guarantee that they would not have to go through the trauma that would come when a powerful and cruel enemy invaded their land. They would be deported, never to return, and some would be killed.

**5:5 - SEEK NOT BETHEL.** Seek the Lord, but not at the places of worship, Bethel and Gilgal, which will be destroyed, nor even at Beersheba in southern Judah. Alexander Maclaren comments of this:

We must give up seeking Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba, seats of calf worship, if we are to seek God to purpose. The sin of the Northern Kingdom was that it wanted to worship Jehovah under the symbol of the calves, thus trying to unite two discrepant things. And is not a great deal of our Christianity of much the same quality? [9: 159].

**GILGAL SHALL GO INTO CAPTIVITY.** The site of Israel’s first encampment when she crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land was Gilgal, immediately to the east of Jericho. The Lord instructed them to set up a monument there to mark the place where they crossed the Jordan River. Here they were affirmed as the people of God and they affirmed their commitment to the Covenant through circumcision and the Passover. At that time the manna they had eaten in the wilderness ceased and they began to eat the fruit of the land. This is where Saul was confirmed as the first king over Israel. It held a sacred place in the hearts of all Israelites. They basked in the glory of Gilgal with its rich historical significance. Imagine how stunned these people were when they heard Amos say, “Gilgal shall surely go into captivity.” They thought they were under God’s protection, but that to which they looked with religious pride was going into captivity! A century and a half later Jeremiah tried to reach a people who looked to “the temple of the Lord” (Jer. Ch. 7) for their security, while neglecting and rejecting the Lord of the temple.

**5:6 - SEEK YE THE LORD AND YE SHALL LIVE.** To seek the Lord and live is to seek Him

with all your heart and soul. "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.  
(Deut. 4:29, NKJV).

**5:7 - WHO TURN JUSTICE INTO WORMWOOD.** Wormwood is a plant whose stalk and leaves were very bitter to the taste. Those who were responsible for justice were the very ones who were turning it to wormwood (bitterness) of injustice. "...the name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter" (Rev. 8:11). No one could Matthew Henryize verses 7-17 better than Matthew Henry.

The same almighty power can, for repenting sinners, easily turn affliction and sorrow into prosperity and joy, and as easily turn the prosperity of daring sinners into utter darkness... These men were evil men indeed, when wise and good men thought it in vain even to speak to them. The Lord is ever ready to be gracious to the souls that seek him... But as for sinful Israel, God's judgments had often passed by them, now they shall pass through them [17: MH].

God loves justice and expects peoples and nations do deal justly with one another. The individual sinner must have mercy and grace and not justice to be saved. If we receive our just reward, we will all go to hell. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); and "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). But in our dealings with others, as individuals and nations, we must be just. "He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But *to do justly*, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8, italics added).

There is an interesting story is shared in First Samuel, Chapter 30, concerning justice. David and his men were away at battle and while away their foes came in and burned the city of Ziklag and carried away the wives and sons and daughters of the absent soldiers. When the men returned they were overwhelmed with grief. The Scripture says they "lifted up their voices and wept until they had no more power to weep." They began to blame David.

Then David selected 600 men and set out to rescue the captives. When they came to the brook Besor, 200 were so faint they could not cross over the brook.

"Very well," said David. "You two hundred stay here and mind the baggage and the others of us who are stronger will go on." They went on, made a great recovery, and returned with the spoil. When they returned to the brook Besor a protest arose on the part of those who went to battle.

They did not want to share the spoil. Then it was that David made a great statement about faithfulness: "As his part is that goeth down to the battle so shall his part be that tarried by the stuff. They shall part alike." What David said was that not are all equally strong yet all can be equally faithful. The 200 that did the best they could were just as worthy of the reward [16: BI].

America has witnessed numerous miscarriages of justice. Millions of Americans sent an extraordinary amount of time in 1995 watching the O. J. Simpson double murder trial from Los Angeles. He was acquitted in spite of what most people considered irrefutable evidence. There was an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 1995 which detailed similar cases in which there was a miscarriage of justice.

The evidence against Davon Neverdon seemed overwhelming. Four eyewitnesses testified that they saw him kill a man in a robbery attempt. Two others said he told them he committed the crime. Even Mr. Neverdon was expecting to be convicted: He had offered to plead guilty in exchange for a 40-year sentence, a deal the prosecutor had rejected at the request of the victim's family.

But that wasn't how the Baltimore jury, which included 11 African Americans, saw it. After 11 hours of deliberation, they acquitted the defendant, who is black.

A note from the lone Asian-American on the jury suggested that the reason for the decision was racial.

The case of Darryl Smith in 1990 is a less celebrated, but perhaps more telling, example of how race can affect a criminal trial. After an all-black jury in Washington acquitted Mr. Smith of murder in March, 1990, a letter from an anonymous juror arrived at the superior court there. The letter said that while most jurors in the case believed Mr. Smith was guilty, the majority bowed to the holdouts who "didn't want to send any more Young Black men to Jail."

Earlier in our history there were charges that in some places Blacks were convicted on flimsy evidence. Then there were charges that white officials did not aggressively prosecute black on black crimes. The point is not intended to be racial. The point is that a miscarriage of justice is a miscarriage of justice; whether the issue is race, money, power, family, sex, or any other influence.

Columnist Linda Bowles, in an article on what many feel was a miscarriage of justice in the O. J. Simpson trial, commented on the tactics of defense attorney Johnnie Cochran:

It apparently matters very little that in the process of defending his client, Cochran deliberately fanned the flames of racial hatred, promoted back paranoia, helped destroy trust in the police, undermined confidence in the judicial process and fortified the general conception that lawyers are unprincipled scoundrels, willing to cheat to win an argument an honest man would lose.

...Is what goes on in the courts of America nothing more than a game of winning and losing, played at the expense of justice? [21: 21].

**5:8 - HE WHO MADE.** The KJV reads, “*Seek him*” (italics show these words were added by the translators. The NNAS has, “He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The LORD is His name.” The obvious conclusion is that we should seek Him. But it is not enough to seek Him in nature and providence. We must seek Him as Savior and Lord.

The first part of the verse in an invitation to seek the Creator. The second part, “and changes deep darkness into morning,” teaches “that God can change or settle conditions, as it pleaseth; and if he settle, none can shake, and if he shake, non can establish. And therefore, the short path to well-being is to seek him” [13: 284-285].

**WHO CALLS FOR THE WATERS.** This teaches us that God has “showers of comforts and deluges of miseries to pour out as he pleaseth” [13: 285].

**5:9 - IT IS HE.** Make no mistake, God would use the Assyrians to punish Israel, but “It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress” (NNAS). Verses 8 and 9 reveal three reasons God is to be sought.

- (1) God displays omnipotence in the creation of the world.
  - (2) God displays omnipotence in the government of the world.
  - (3) God displays omnipotence in the retribution of the world
- [13: 283-284].

**C. Israel Is Doomed Because of Decadent Moral Conditions, 10-13.**

**5:10 - THEY HATE HIM WHO REPROVES.** In verses 10-13, the leaders of the people are indicted on three specific charges:

- (1) Hating honest judges.
- (2) Robbing the poor.
- (3) Taking bribes.

The gate of the city was where justice was administered (v. 15; cf. Deut. 22:15; Ruth 4:1-2). The Lord loves justice and expected His people to “do justly” (Micah 6:8), but they despised honest judges. When people get used to bribing corrupt officials and revel in a “It’s not what you know, but who you know” philosophy they may corrupt justice and boast arrogantly of their connections and their savvy. An honest judge or policeman can create some problems in such an environment. For example, an honest judge is a threat to a drug cartel in Columbia. Because he is a threat to them, they are a threat to him.

**5:11 - THE POOR.** “You impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them.” The poor are often the first to feel the oppression of greedy persons who devalue justice, hate honest judges, and aggressively seek more and more at the expense of others. Abuse of the poor by the wealthy and powerful has a long and ugly history, as illustrated by slum lords in the inner city, slave owners, and owners of factories that exploit children.

I grew up on a cotton and soy bean farm in the Mississippi delta and helped pay for my education by working an agency of the Department of Agriculture (ASCS) during summers and at other times. I later worked surveys for the Statistical Reporting Service (also under the USDA). I witnessed the exploitation of the poor and underprivileged on some occasions. This was during the time of civil rights marches and the desegregation of schools and there were those who saw this strictly as a racial issue. There is no question that race was a factor in some cases. I witnessed attitudes on both sides of that issue that were not Christlike.

I well remember a hostile reception I received when I drove up to a farm I had never visited before. Even the exaggerated hand waving, and loud harsh language of the black farmer did not prepare me for the hatred I saw in the eyes of a man who had never seen me before. I did not respond with anger, but it still hurts to think of what his attitude was doing to him. I enjoyed working with the black farmers in the county and when I had problems with a farmer it was usually a white farmer.

When I observed exploitation of those who were less fortunate, the issue was not primarily racial. An unscrupulous plantation owner used people as he used his land, his livestock, or his tractors, and he used them for the same purpose - profit. An honest farmer used labor, land, and machines for his profit, but he did so with a sense of justice. The greedy planter not only used his sharecroppers and hired hands;



he exploited them for his own gain. There were white sharecroppers on some farms in those days who wished they had been treated as well as black sharecroppers on other farms. The issue was vulnerability, and poverty made one vulnerable. A dishonest owner was often an equal exploitation operator - his primary concern was not the color of his skin but the color of his money.

There was, however, a subtle difference. The white man might be more inclined to object, which resulted in a little more security for a black tenant. If any sharecropper irritated the planter, he would simply tell him to move. He was then faced with the challenge of finding another farmer who had a house for him and his family. He had to find a farmer who needed a sharecropper, and he had to find one who would let him borrow money for food, school clothes and supplies, and any medicine he might need from November until the following March when he could begin farming again. That prospect made one vulnerable and an unscrupulous farmer was aware of it.

Since our farm was not very large, we never had more than three or four families on the place at any one time. I watched my parents cultivate a friendship with people who lived on the farm. They cared what happened to them. There were some years when the sharecroppers came out with more money for the winter than we did because we had land notes and tractor payments to make.

As I think of some of the abuse and deceit, I was aware of, I have concluded that it would have hurt me to see my parents exploited, but I could live with that. However, if they had cheated and abused others, I could not live comfortably with that.

**YE HAVE BUILT HOUSES.** With their ill-gotten gain they had built their expensive homes and planted their vineyards, but they are about to pay a terrible price for their greed and dishonesty. "Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine."

#### **D. Mercy Is Possible for Those who Seek the Lord, 14-15.**

**5:14 - SEEK GOOD...THAT YOU MAY LIVE.** "This is not a salvation of works but a salvation that works. To seek good and not evil emphasizes the radical change that repentance brings" [15: BSB]. Here the Lord gives the third reason for urging Israel to seek the Lord and live: so that they might have Him with them. People are not saved either by doing good or by abstaining from evil, but they are saved "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). People were saved in the same way and for the same purpose in Old Testament times as they are today - that is, by grace, through faith, unto good works (Eph. 2:8-10).

**5:15 - ESTABLISH JUSTICE.** "The LORD loves justice" (Ps. 37:28). In the Law He is seen as a just

God: "For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He" (Deut 32:3-4, NKJV). It is to be expected that a just God would expect His people to love Justice ("The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice" (Ps. 37:30).

The word justice appears 130 times in the NKJV Bible, with a heavy consecration in the Wisdom Literature.

Pro. 16:8 - Better is a little with righteousness, Than vast revenues without justice.

Pro. 21: 3 - To do righteousness and justice Is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Pro. 21:15 - It is a joy for the just to do justice, But destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

**THE REMNANT OF JOSEPH.** Joseph here represents all ten of the northern tribes, two of which were named for his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. At times Ephraim is used interchangeably with Israel in referring to the northern ten tribes. What he is saying is that the nation would be destroyed, but individuals who repented would escape.

#### **E. The Dark Picture of the Future Should Bring Lamentation, 16-17.**

**5:16 - THE LORD GOD OF HOSTS, THE LORD.** Knowing that this was not divided into chapters and verses, you cannot read verses 15 and 16 together without an awareness of the significance of the repetition of the names or titles for God:

Establish justice in the gate! Perhaps *the LORD God of hosts* May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Therefore, thus says *the LORD God of hosts, the Lord* (15b-16a, NASB).

**CALL THE FARMER TO MOURNING.** The dramatic call for lamentation needs little commentary: "There is wailing in all the plazas, And in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to lamentation" (NASB). Professional mourners were usually women (cf. Jer. 9:17) but here their ranks must be expanded to include all who were "skillful of lamentation" (KJV).

## F. The Day of the Lord Is a Day of Peril and Disaster, 18-20.

**5:18 - WOE.** There are two woe statements in this poem, here and in 6:1. The NNAS has “alas” in 5:18 and “woe” in 6:1, the KJV has “woe” in each place. The same Hebrew word is used. Matthew Henry ‘s comments on verses 18-27 are penetrating.

The day of the Lord will be a dark, dismal, gloomy day to all impenitent sinners. When God makes a day dark, all the world cannot make it light. Those who are not reformed by the judgments of God, will be pursued by them; if they escape one, another stands ready to seize them. A pretense of piety is double iniquity, and so it will be found. The people of Israel copied the crimes of their forefathers. The law of worshipping the Lord our God, is, Him only we must serve. Professors thrive so little, because they have little or no communion with God in their duties. They were led captive by Satan into idolatry, therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters [17: MH].

**5:18 - LONGING FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD.** Israel desired “the day of the Lord,” and apparently professed a longing for the security and glory that day would bring to Israel. They believed the day of the LORD would bring judgment only on their enemies. They could not believe that they would be include the judgment.

Amos contends that such desire is the consequence of their ignorance concerning the nature of that awesome day. While the messianic age was viewed by Israel as deliverance, Amos construed it as judgment for the ungodly of Israel. Amos's vivid metaphorical language again is marshaled in depicting Israel as a man fleeing from a lion only to encounter a bear, or resting on his hand only to be bitten by an adder (v. 19). Thus there is no escape from the calamitous nature of God's judgment [15: BSB].

It seems that “The day of the Lord” was ever on the lips of many of the people of ancient Israel, regardless of how they lived or how much they perverted justice and polluted worship. In our day there are many who speak of signs of the end of time, the Second Coming of Christ, or the Judgment Day who give little indication that they are very concerned about either. Amos would be joined by Isaiah in that Golden Era of Prophecy in warning that the Day of the Lord was not going to be a day to celebrate, but a day to dread. The following Scripture is from the NKJV, with italics added.

Isaiah 2:12 - For *the day of the LORD* of hosts Shall come upon everything proud and

lofty, Upon everything lifted up; And it shall be brought low;

Isaiah 13:6 - Wail, for *the day of the LORD* is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Isaiah 13:9 - Behold, *the day of the LORD* comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.

Jeremiah delivered the same prophecy to Judah a century and a half after Amos proclaimed the warning in the northern kingdom. Ezekiel issued the same message to the exiles.

Jer. 46:10 - For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, A day of vengeance, That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; *For the Lord GOD* of hosts has a sacrifice In the north country by the River Euphrates.

Eze. 13:5 - You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on *the day of the LORD*.

The day of the Lord would bring destruction for the northern kingdom; Hosea (II Kings 17) would be the last king. There had been numerous smaller wars and petty skirmishes with neighboring countries, but soon after Amos delivered this message a world empire would come together under the "ruthless hands of the Assyrians, whose very name was fast becoming a byword in that ancient world for cruelty and atrocity" [11: 28].

When that time came, Shalmaneser sent his troops into Israel and besieged Samaria. Shalmaneser died and Sargon, his commanding officer, replaced him and continued the siege for three insufferable. Samaria fell to Sargon in 722 B.C. and they fell into the hands of one of the most ingeniously cruel conquerors in history. The Assyrians uprooted citizens from one conquered country and resettled them in another. A large number of Israelites who survived the battle were relocated in other countries and foreigners were brought into Israel and settled there.

The new arrivals adopted a debased form of Judaism - a mixture of truth and tradition, of the corrupted religion of the northern tribes mixed with the pagan rites they brought with them from foreign parts. Those settlers became the "Samaritans," who later harassed the Jews who returned from Babylonian Exile and who were cordially detested by the Jews to the time of Christ [11: 28].

## G. Ritual Without Righteousness Is Rejected, 5:21-27.

Ritual without righteousness was repudiated twenty-seven hundred years ago, and it is rejected today. Some germane notes on these verses are appear in the BSB.

Solemn assemblies (v. 21), offerings (v. 22), and music (v. 23) forfeit their intended purpose if no life-changing results ensue. The people of God are to add to these acts of worship a torrent of justice and righteousness. True revival has come when justice and righteousness flow through the land. The pinnacle of Amos's prophecy is reached in this vivid mandate for social and spiritual righteousness [15: BSB].

**5:21 - I DESPISE YOUR FEAST DAYS.** The Lord had given His people a system of worship which included feast days, fasts, and a sacrificial system. When they worshiped Him in humility and sincerity, He received their worship. He loved genuine worship, but when He says, "I hate, I despise your feast days," it does not take much imagination to conclude that their worship was far from what He expected of them. It is reasonable to assume that the one true God would despise idolatrous, pagan worship, but that is not what He is addressing here. He refused to accept meaningless, hollow rituals.

Six major rituals are listed that the Israelites observed as a part of their worship:

- (1) Festivals or feast days (Ex. 23:14-17).
- (2) Solemn assemblies (Lev. 23:23-38).
- (3) Burnt offerings (Lev. 1:3-17; 6:8-13).
- (4) Grain offerings (Lev. 2:1-16; 6:14-18).
- (5) Peace offerings (Lev. 3:1-17; 7:11-34).
- (6) Music (I Chron. 6:31-48; 15:16-24; ,25:1-31).

God rejected all aspects of their worship for two reasons.

First, He demanded that they practice justice and righteousness before He could accept their worship (5:24). ...Second, God insisted that the people must worship only Him before He could accept their worship (5:25-25) [6: 23].

He hates their worship! Is it not reasonable to assume that He still despises worship which is not pure and holy? Is it possible that all over the world every Lord's Day there are services conducted in

church buildings dedicated to the name of God which are despised by the Most High God?

**I WILL NOT SMELL IN YOUR SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES.** It would be bad enough if the Lord had simply said, “Your services stink.” But there is a rich background which compounds their guilt. He had given them the privilege of coming into His presence to worship with prayer, and with sacrifices and offerings in a way which would bring pleasure to Him and blessings to the worshiper. Smoke from their burnt offerings rising from His holy altar symbolized their prayers and devotion rising to Him. Just as a steak on a barbecue grill gives off a pleasant aroma, the smoke rising from the burnt offering brought by a sincere worshiper was like a sweet aroma the nostrils of God. Anything less than a total commitment, anything less than complete faith, anything less than absolute sincerity, humility and purity would be offensive to the nostrils of God.

Exodus 29:18 - And you will burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is *a sweet aroma*, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Exodus 29:41 - And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for *a sweet aroma*, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Lev. 1:9 - And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, *a sweet aroma* to the LORD.

Lev. 2:9 - Then the priest shall take from the grain offering a memorial portion, and burn it on the altar. It is an offering made by fire, *a sweet aroma* to the LORD.

**5:22 - BURNT OFFERINGS.** “The burnt offering was offered both in the morning and in the evening, as well as on special days such as the Sabbath, the new moon, and the yearly feasts (Num. 28-29; 2 Kings 16:15; 2 Chron. 2:4; 31:3; Ezra 3:3-6)” [18: HBD]. The person making this sacrifice did so to restore the relationship with God and to atone for some sin. The Lord categorically rejects their offerings and sacrifices. The worshiper today might bring his tithes and offerings to the Lord’s house every Sunday but if his motives are not pure, they will not be accepted by the Lord. The local church will accept his money, keep a record for tax purposes, and then pay bills with it or give it to missions. But that does not mean that God has accepted it.

**PEACE OFFERING.** The peace offering consisted of the sacrifice of a bull, cow, lamb, or goat with no defect. The worshiper laid his hand on the animal and killed it and the priests sprinkled the blood around the altar. Only certain parts of the internal organs were burned. The priest received the breast and the right thigh (Lev. 7:28-36), but the worshiper was given most of the meat for a meal of celebration with his

family (Lev. 7:11-21). Thanksgiving was associated with the peace offering and therefore, ingratitude to God would nullify the worship and cause God to reject the offering. What peace is there in a peace offering that is rejected by God?

**5:23 - TAKE AWAY FROM ME THE NOISE OF THY SONGS.** A lot of people are very sensitive about their music, but on the basis of this prophecy it seems that the Lord also has some strong feelings about it. He also has some shocking things to say on the subject. Let us observe that they had not brought rock band into the house of God, nor, from what we read, were they holding secular concerts at their worship services. He is addressing their “church music” which they presented to Him as worship.

Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments (NKJV).

Music is a vital part of worship. The Book of Psalms was a hymnal for worship. Instruments also played an important role in their worship. Carroll Lowe, Director of the Church Music Department of the Louisiana Baptist Convention has pointed out that a platform of church music is found in Psalm 33.

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the LORD with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy (Ps. 33:1-4, NKJV).

Music may glorify the Lord, but it may not. All “Christian” or “Gospel” music does not honor Him. For example, songs with a false theology do not honor the Lord. Two things are absolutely essential for God to receive our music as worship. First, we must come before Him with a pure heart (worship humbly and sincerely). Secondly, we must offer Him our best. Nothing else will do.

**5:24 - LET JUDGMENT RUN DOWN AS WATERS.** Nowhere is there a more beautiful expression of God’s desire for justice and righteousness from His people than we find in this verse. The NKJV has, “But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.” The NASB renders it, “But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” The Lord desires an ever-flowing stream of justice and righteousness from His people. His people, in any age, should be characterized by righteous living, by justice and fairness.

**5:25 - SACRIFICES... IN THE WILDERNESS?** During the 40 years of wilderness wanderings the

people were not always able to bring sacrifices and offerings to God, yet He provided for them. God cannot be bribed or conned by our tithes and offerings today any more than He could be deceived by the sacrifices and offerings of the ancient Israelites. The point is that they should not have taken pride in their sacrifices, nor should they have concluded that God's blessings were merited because of what they were doing for God. They had forgotten the words of Samuel when Saul used the sacrifice as his excuse for disobedience: "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams" (I Sam. 15:22).

**5:26 - MOLECH AND CHIUN.** The NASB has, "You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves." Sikkuth (Sakkuth, NRSV) is a

transliteration of Assyrian divine name applied to god Ninurta (or Ninib), apparently an Assyrian name for Saturn or another astral deity. Some translators take the name as a common noun meaning, "shrine" (REB, NIV), "tabernacle" (KJV), since the Hebrew term resembles the word for "tent." Amos condemned Israel for such false worship (Amos 5:26) [18: HBD].

Chiun is KJV spelling (Kyyun in NASB) of a Babylonian god whose name means, "the constant, unchanging one" (Amos 5:26).

The Hebrew word kiyun appears to represent an intentional change by the Hebrew scribes, inserting the vowels of siqquts, "abomination," for an original reading, Kaiwan, the name of a Babylonian god of the stars equivalent to the Greek god Saturn. Amos condemned the people of Israel for priding in their sophisticated worship of foreign gods. He called them back to the simple worship of the wilderness [18: HBD].

The hearts of these people were totally set on false gods. Idolatry had been the predominant sin of the Israelites from the time they entered the land, through the period of the Judges and throughout the entire history of the kingdom, especially the northern kingdom. It was a flagrant violation of God's commandments and it was also a senseless sin born of their pride, and lust of the flesh.

## **H. Indifferent, Ruthless Rulers are Rebuked, 6:1-6.**

**6:1 - WOE TO THEM THAT ARE AT EASE IN ZION.** Chapter six is a continuation of the dirge



(poem or song) the prophet began in 5:1. This is the second “woe” in the poem and it concerns both the southern and the northern kingdoms. The leaders of the people had known a period of prosperity and all the people had enjoyed a security that had not always marked their history. They, at least their leaders, were at ease in Zion. They prided themselves in being the people of God, but in reality they were living in sin and in conformity to the world about them.

By Zion Amos probably means the city of Jerusalem, however, a case might be made for the temple (temple area, or hill on which the temple was located). “At ease in Zion” means that they felt safe because Jerusalem was built on a high hill and protected by a great wall they believed to be almost impenetrable.

Those are looked upon as doing well for themselves, who do well for their bodies; but we are here told what their ease is, and what their woe is. Here is a description of the pride, security, and sensuality, for which God would reckon. Careless sinners are every where in danger; but those at ease in Zion, who are stupid, vainly confident, and abusing their privileges, are in the greatest danger [17: MH].

The elite of the land lived for the pleasures of the world. Only the wealthy could afford the pleasures of the world in that day, but today the masses in America can indulge to some degree in them. The tourist industry, recreation, housing sales, automobile sales, expensive restaurants, jewelry sales, and the gambling fever among the middle class, and middle to upper lower class, in America attest to the fact that one does not have to be wealthy to get caught up in the pleasures of the world. Matthew Henry understood this:

Those who are set upon their pleasures are commonly careless of the troubles of others, but this is great offence to God. Those who placed their happiness in the pleasures of sense, and set their hearts upon them, shall be deprived of those pleasures. Those who try to put the evil day far from them, find it nearest to them [17: MH].

The rulers and leading citizens placed their faith in material possessions, probably reasoning that their wealth was proof that God was blessing them, and He surely would not have blessed them if He was not pleased with them. There is always a danger that material possessions will dull the spiritual senses.

Before it arrives, prosperity has a way of promising deliverance from every problem that irritates and chafes man. Once present, however, it is generally found that the same problems must not only be faced anew but

are often present with renewed intensity. Increasing the abundance of man's possessions is not necessarily the secret for the multiplication of happiness [5: 109-110].

**SECURE IN THE MOUNTAIN OF SAMARIA.** In Judah citizens were "at ease in Zion." In Israel they felt safe in the "mountain of Samaria," because they believed the fortifications there would protect them from an invading force. Samaria was built on a flat-topped hill which rises some 300 feet above the valley floor. Three sides of the hill are almost straight up. They could not imagine an invading army attempting to climb those walls. Then, on top of the hill, a strong wall had been constructed around the city. The rulers and leading citizens, could not imagine how any army could conquer Samaria.

"The distinguished men of the foremost of nations" (NNAS) is how the rulers and the elite citizens saw themselves. "Nations" is plural because the prophecy concerns both Israel and Judah. They viewed Israel and Judah as "foremost (chief in KJV) of nations" because they were enjoying a time of prosperity that surpassed that of the surrounding nations. Not only did they view their nation(s) as the foremost of nations, they saw themselves as the foremost citizens of their nation.

**6:2 - GO OVER TO CALNEH AND SEE.** Calneh was a city in Syria which was under Israel's control in the days of Amos and Isaiah (around 740 B.C.). Amos invited Israel to look at Calneh's fate see if Israel was really better in any way than they. Isaiah would later warn Jerusalem that Calno (Calneh) was as good as Jerusalem and yet had suffered conquest by Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria in 738. "This Calneh may be modern Kullan Koy in northern Syria, six miles from Arpad" [18: HBD].

**HAMATH.** Hamath was a wealthy Aramean city at the time. The name Hamath means "fortress" or "citadel." It was a city-state located in the valley of the Orontes River, about 120 miles north of Damascus. Hamath reached the zenith of its power between 800 and 750 B.C.

In 738 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria exacted tribute from Hamath together with other states including Israel. Following the fall of Samaria in 722-721 B.C., Hamath was devastated in 720 B.C. by Sargon II of Assyria (Amos 6:2). Refugees from Samaria may have been exiled to Hamath by the Assyrians, while refugees from Hamath were brought to Samaria along with their god, Ashima (2 Kings 17:24,30; Isa. 11:11). From this time, Hamath's history seems to merge with that of Damascus (Jer. 49:23) [18: HBD].

**GATH.** Gath is one of the five cities making up the Philistine pentapolis. Amos continues his challenge, "Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater

than yours?"

Since Gath had fallen to Uzziah in 760 B.C. (2 Chron. 26:6) and since Calneh and Hamath would soon be captured by Assyria (Isa. 10:9), how could Israel expect to escape the coming judgment? [20: RSB].

Some think the Lord told the people to go look at these once prosperous Gentile cities that had been conquered by other nations and understand that if those cities could be conquered, so could Jerusalem and Samaria. However, Amos does not say that these cities had been destroyed at the time he prophesied. It may be that he is saying those cities are known for their prosperity, but God has blessed Samaria and Jerusalem with greater prosperity than theirs. It is possible that the Lord is telling them to watch those thriving cities and see what would happen to them as the prophecies in this book were fulfilled. Jerusalem and Samaria were greater cities than those He told them to observe, and if those cities could fall, so could the cities of Judah and Israel.

**6:3 - PUT OFF THE DAY.** The NKJV reads, "Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, Who cause the seat of violence to come near." The NASB has, "Do you put off the day of calamity, And would you bring near the seat of violence?" By the expression, "put far off the day of doom," Amos seems to mean that they put it out of their mind - put off thinking about it. They looked forward to "The Day of the Lord,"

which they believed would be a day when Israel would be restored to the glory and splendor of the days of David and Solomon. However, God has told them that day will not be a day of glory as they think, but a calamitous day for most of them. It will be a day of judgment.

They put the day of judgment out of their mind. Amos asks, "Do you *put off the day of calamity*, And would you *bring near the seat of violence*?" (NNAS, italics added). "The seat of violence" seems to "play on the idea of the seat of justice. Instead of dispensing justice, their officials dished out violence on the helpless. They were so powerful and wealthy they believed the evil day was far away from them. They believed their authority gave them the right to use violence to preserve their power" [6: 24].

Today, men and women who profess to know the Lord, often live as though they never give Him a thought. Such people put off any consideration of the coming judgment, but that is a mistake.

God may send a day of judgment upon any generation, but final judgment will come on that "great and awesome day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20), in relation to which all other such days of judgment are insignificant [15: BSB].

**6:4 - BEDS OF IVORY.** In vs. 4-7 we have a description of their luxurious, hedonistic lifestyle. The wealthy class slept on beds of inlaid ivory, lounged on elegant couches, and dined sumptuously on only the

tenderest meat of lambs and calves. Modern television shows and movies portray the lifestyles of the rich and famous in a positive way, glamorizing a lifestyle condemned here by the Lord. What does that say for millions who revel in that hedonistic lifestyle?

**6:5 - WHO SING IDLY.** "Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David" (NKJV). What the Lord is condemning is not sing, nor is it the playing of instruments. What He clearly does condemn is the use of music in debauchery and hedonism. Music may be used to glorify God, but it may also be used to glorify violence, drugs, and immorality.

**6:6 - WHO DRINK WINE IN BOWLS.** The rebukes those "Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils" (NASB). Throughout history abuse of alcoholic beverages has been connected to the most debased of human behavior. We now must add to that the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Alcoholic is still the most abused drug in America, but it is portrayed as a vital ingredient of the sophisticated lifestyle. We desperately need to heed the warning of Scripture when it comes to the use of beverage alcohol.

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?" (Pro. 23:29-35, NKJV).

**ARE NOT GRIEVED FOR THE AFFLICTION OF JOSEPH.** They indulge in the things of the world, but they are not burdened for the things of God and they do not grieve for the affliction that must shortly come to the house of Joseph. Neither do they grieve for the spiritual condition of the house of Joseph. Of course, it should be noted that Amos' rebuke is not based on the "acquisition of ivory, the abundance of food, nor the accompaniment of music. Rather the splendor of these riches has blinded Israel spiritually so that they "are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" [15: BSB].

## I. The Invasion Cannot Be Averted By Bolstered Strength Because of The Violation of the Laws of Truth and Light, 6:7-14.

**6:7 - EXILE.** "Therefore" (because of their rebellion against God) "they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, And those who recline at banquets ("Sprawlers," NASB) shall be removed" (NKJV). These rulers and wealthy leaders who have no thought or compassion for the poor will be the very first to go into captivity. The status and position they lie, cheat, steal, and even murder to protect will cause them to be the first to be deported. The Assyrians would remove them first to eliminate their leadership in any rebellion.

**6:8 - THE LORD GOD HATH SWORN.** They do not have to speculate as to the source of this message: "The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts" (NASB) is the source and authority for this message. They have His word for it! His word is always true, and what He says He can accomplish.

**I LOATH THE ARROGANCE OF JACOB.** The Lord God has declared: "I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, And detest his citadels; Therefore I will deliver up the city and all it contains" (NASB). He detested "the arrogance of Jacob" in her boasting about her great palaces and cities. Her cities and palaces would be conquered, looted and destroyed.

**6:9 - IF TEN MEN ARE LEFT.** The coming judgment will be catastrophic and far-reaching for those who were at ease in Zion. They would not be subjected to an exhaustive slaughter but not total annihilation.

**6:10 - IS THERE YET ANY?** Large numbers would be slain during the invasion or put to the sword immediately afterwards.

Then one's uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out his bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, "Is anyone else with you?" And that one will say, "No one." Then he will answer, "Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned" (NNAS).

Many not killed in battle would die from starvation, or some pestilences associated with such a military defeat. Family funerals would not be possible, but an uncle or undertaker would carry out bodies for cremation. The word translated undertaker is literally, the one who burns him. Perhaps this denotes cremation made necessary by the excessive number of dead or to the burning of spices (cf. 2 Chron. 16:14). The Hebrews did not usually cremate (but see 1 Sam. 31:12)" [20: RSB].

The punishment will be very thorough and to compound matters, they would not be able to call on the name of the Lord: ""Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned." The stubborn rebellion of the people would lead to cataclysmic consequences. "How dreadful, how miserable, is the

case of those whose eternal ruin the Lord himself has sworn; for he can execute his purpose, and none can alter it! ...Men should take warning not to harden their hearts, for those who walk in pride, God will destroy [17 - MH].

## SERMON OR LESSON OUTLINE

SUBJECT: Rebellion and Punishment

TITLE: At Ease in Zion

TEXT: Amos 6:1-14

INTRODUCTION: In Amos 2:6 - 5:27 there is a picture of a nation's senseless rebellion against a loving Lord Who had chosen them above all other nations and established a special relationship with them. When they rebelled against Him, He demonstrated His love for them by blessing them, but they would not return to Him. Then He sent judgment upon them, but they would not return to Him. We might refer to this as UNPARALLELED PROVOCATION.

- I. THEY HAD KNOWN UNPRECEDENTED PROSPERITY, 6:1-6.
  - A. There Was a False Sense of Security, 6:1.
  - B. There Was a Dismissal of Serious Thought, 6:2.
  - C. There Was Gross Indulgence, 6:4-6a.
  - D. There Was a Complete Indifference to the Needs of Others, 6:6b.
  
- II. THEY FACED UNAVOIDABLE PUNISHMENT, 6:7-14.
  - A. Exile Was Inevitable, 6:7.
  - B. The Extent of Punishment Is Described, 6:8-11.
  - C. An Explanation of the Punishment is Given, 6:12-14.
    1. They would be judged because of their actions, 6:12.
    2. They would be judged because of their arrogance, 6:13.
    3. The Extent of judgment is staggering.

CONCLUSION. This makes interesting history for most Bible students. For the true history buff, it is even exciting. However, the relevance of this Scripture to modern day America is nothing short of staggering. America is at Ease in Zion and an America at ease in Zion is facing judgment at the hand of God as surely as Israel did twenty-seven hundred years ago. What must we do as a nation? Repent. What must we do as individuals? We must repent (II Chronicles 7:14).

**6:11 - THE LORD IS GOING TO COMMAND.** What happened will not be by random chance, nor will it be simply the activities of man. God will use the Assyrians as His instrument of judgment, but He is the One responsible for the coming calamity: "For the Lord is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments" (NNAS). The judgment will be devastating in intensity, and it will be sweeping in scope.

**6:12 - DO HORSES RUN ON ROCKS?** The word translated rocks actually means crag or cliff. Horses do not run across rocky crevices and canyons. The prophet is using absurdity to illustrate absurdity. Horses do not run on rocky precipices and Israel's confidence in her wealth and her walls is just as absurd. A second absurd question follows: "does one plow them with oxen?" One does not plow the crags and crevices with oxen. A negative answer is demanded. It was enough a challenge to plow new ground corn with a mule!

**YOU HAVE TURNED JUSTICE INTO POISON.** They would never plow the rocky ravines with oxen, but what they were doing was just as absurd, and just as impossible. He says: (1) You have turned justice into poison, (2) And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood." (3) In verse 13, he says they also boasting of things that were meaningless.

When one goes to court he is looking for justice. Israel's rulers were not dispensing justice but "gall" (KJV). People came before them seeking the joy of justice, and left with the bitterness of injustice. The righteous should have been dealt with in righteousness, but they received wormwood. "Israel's corrupt leaders made the lives of righteous people bitter and unpleasant" [6: 26].

A Christian attorney shared with me his burden for those who live most of their lives confident that if they ever have a legal problem, they will find justice when they have their "day in court," only to be disappointed by some miscarriage of justice. And this can happen in a court system that is in no way corrupt - it is just not perfect. It would be far more devastating to enter a corrupt court seeking justice.

**6:13 - YOU REJOICE IN LODEBAR.** "You who rejoice in Lodebar, And say, "Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?" (NNAS). If this translation is correct, he is saying that they boasted of their accomplishments in conquering two small towns. They boasted of insignificant victories which would soon be lost. Perhaps the Lord chose these towns because of the meaning of the word Lodebar - "no thing."

Karnaim means "horns." Since horns symbolized power in ancient times, these people may have boasted of the power then had obtained for themselves - through their own effort.

**6:14 - I AM GOING TO RAISE UP A NATION.** He has illustrated the absurdity of their attitude

and their behavior. Now He will tell them why their actions are so absurd: "For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD God of hosts." While they were pursuing wealth in every dishonest way, reveling in their hedonistic lifestyles, at ease in Zion and secure in the mountain of Samaria, God was preparing a nation to raise up against them.

The LORD God of hosts is Sovereign Lord over nations and when it serves His purpose he can move nations and empires as one moves a piece on a chess board to accomplish His objective. He has Assyria waiting in the wings to serve His cause.

**THEY SHALL AFFLICT YOU.** He says, "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the brook of the Arabah." Hamath was at the northern extreme of Israel (or their ideal boundary). The brook of Arabah is actually the dry riverbed of Arabah, a deep depression that runs from the southern end of the Dead Sea down to the Sea of Akabah. When it rains the water runs through this normally dry riverbed on down to the Sea of Akabah.

As this "woe" begins by expressing scorn for Judah and Israel, it ends by announcing that both nations would be destroyed. A coming enemy would cause havoc all over the land, from the extreme north to the extreme south. That nation's conquests would demonstrate that Israel's leaders could not get away with their illogical and immoral actions [6: 27].

### III. CHASTISEMENT WILL LEAD TO RESTORATION UNDER THE DAVIDIC LINE, 7:1-9:15.

#### A. Vision of the Locusts, 7:1-3.

Chapters 7-9 contain the Visions of Amos. In chapters 1-6 we have the messages of Amos. He received both the messages of the first six chapters and the visions of the last three from the Lord. In 1:1 we are told that the words he spoke were the words "he saw concerning Israel." He begins this section with the words, "Thus the Lord GOD showed me" (7:1). The entire book came to the prophet by divine revelation.

**7:1 - THE LORD GOD SHOWED ME.** The Lord showed Him His message through three visions: the swarms of locusts, the judgment by fire, and the plumb line. Observe that the first two are different from the third. The first two are so graphic that they produced an emotional response from Amos (verses 2 and



5). In response to his appeal the Lord “repented,” or relented. Holman defines a vision as:

An experience in the life of a person, whereby a special revelation from God was received. The revelation from God had two purposes. First, a vision was given for immediate direction, as with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3; Lot, Genesis 19:15; Balaam, Numbers 22:22-40; and Peter, Acts 12:7. Second, a vision was given to develop the kingdom of God by revealing the moral and spiritual deficiencies of the people of God in light of God's requirements for maintaining a proper relationship with Him [18: HBD].

**LOCUST SWARMS.** In this vision Amos saw a swarm of locusts, or grasshoppers, destroying the second mowing of grass that went to the people after the king’s mowing. In ancient Israel they planted their wheat early in the fall so they could gather in the first harvest before winter, and that first crop went to the king to feed his animals. We are not told when this policy was implemented, but it is possible that the tax was decreed by the king during this period of prosperity.

Following the first mowing, the roots would remain dormant through the winter, and then put out new growth when the weather warmed up in the spring, producing a second harvest. The farmer looked to the second crop for his expense and profit.

**WHEN THEY HAD FINISHED EATING.** The swarms of locust devoured all the grass in the entire land. The effects would be devastating. Amos knew that without grass the animals would starve, and then people would be compelled to eat the animals that remained and then they would starve. Even though most translations have locust, some understand this to mean grasshoppers. Louis L’Amour, in *The Quick and the Dead*, has his main character comment on the devastation caused by grasshoppers: “They come in clouds to darken the sun, an’ they eat everything in sight. Mostly they like cultivated crops” [22: 15].

**HOW CAN JACOB STAND?** “Jacob” is an indication that the prophecy is now aimed at the total nation (both Israel and Judah), after the stinging pronouncements of judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel.

A distinction between the house of Israel as the ruling families (officialdom, government) and the masses of people at large is in view. Here it is simply “Oh, that Jacob may stand, / For he is small!”; whereas in 3:13 it is “the house of Jacob.” At this point, inasmuch as Amos already had predicted the final destruction of “the house of Jacob” with

the retention of a bare remnant from among the "children of Israel," the question arises as to what will be the relation in the future of this "remnant" to Israel as a whole? (Cf. Isa. 11:11, note.) The answer appears in visions recorded immediately after this question, beginning in v. 7 [15: BSB].

The Lord had chosen Israel and blessed the nation, but His blessings had never elicited the response He desired. The more He blessed, the more they rebelled. God bears long, but he will not bear always with a provoking people. Matthew Henry wrote:

The remembrance of the mercies we formerly received, like the produce of the earth of the former growth, should make us submissive to the will of God. ...The Lord has many ways of humbling a sinful nation. Whatever trouble we are under, we should be most earnest with God for the forgiveness of sin. Sin will soon make a great people small. What will become of Israel, if the hand that should raise him be stretched out against him? [17: MH].

**7:3 - THE LORD REPENTED.** This particular punishment was withdrawn, but the nation was not forgiven. The word "repented" carries no moral connotation with God, as it does with sinful man. Man needs to repent of sin; God does not. The NKJV has "So the LORD relented concerning this. "It shall not be," said the LORD." We may follow the NASB, "the Lord changed His mind."

We can learn from God's changing His mind that God is often swift to change His tactics in response to repentance and prayer. God never changes His Purposes. He is always working toward bringing people to salvation. In working toward that goal, He adapts His actions in many ways to people's circumstances, attitudes, and prayers [6: 28].

Why would God ever change His mind? Does this challenge doctrine of the immutability of God? The omniscience of God? Absolutely not! What it does do is set forth the power of prayer. How often the direction, or the very existence, of a nation is, or may be, determined by prayer.

Francis Shaeffer believed, and tried to alert us to the fact, that America entered the post-Christian era in 1935 ( England, he says, in 1895). Because many Americans called on the Lord during the World War II, most Christians missed the signs. Encouraged by some marvelous reports of revival, growth of some denominations and the rise of some mega-churches, Christians anticipated a great awakening. Instead, we saw the rise of Humanism (modernism), and then we saw Humanism yield to New Age religious philosophies (postmodernism). Postmodernism helped stem the tide of modernism (Humanism),

but rather than becoming the ally of the church, it became a more illusive enemy of Christianity than the atheistic evolution which characterized Humanism.

America is at ease in Zion, and millions who profess to be Christians are totally oblivious to that fact, or fail to see the implications of it. We are seeing some monumental problems in America - social, environmental, moral. And we are seeing the most brilliant minds, the most sophisticated research, and the most highly technical machinery, and the greatest governmental involvement in the history of the world applied to the quest for a solution to our most pressing problems. And while progress is being made in certain fields, we are losing ground in the most important areas.

The answer to our most pressing problems is the same as it was in the days of Amos. A nation of people committed to prayer can bring peace and prosperity to that nation. I am convinced that this is the only thing that will save America. Our most pressing problems are not economic, environmental, or political, but spiritual. And the solution to our problems is a spiritual solutions. When will we ever learn that the solutions to our racial problems are spiritual, not just political?

#### **B. Vision of the Fire, 7:4-6.**

**7:4 - CONTEND BY FIRE.** The instrument of divine judgment against the heathen nations was fire (Ch 1-2). In this the second vision, a consuming fire is the instrument of punishment for Israel.

**DEVoured THE GREAT DEEP.** Fire would devour the "great deep," possibly a reference to " the subterranean waters and springs that fed the surface" [10: 82]. The fire in the vision was so hot it dried up the sources of water. Some think the "great deep" could possibly mean the Mediterranean Sea. Whichever view is correct, this graphically portrays a total destruction in a fiery holocaust. The conflagration shown Amos in this vision was so intense that it "consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land" (NNAS).

**7:5 - LORD GOD, PLEASE STOP!** The consuming fire of the vision was so great that it devoured land and sea. Nothing could survive the fire the Lord would send. A horrified Amos cried out to God in shock, "How can Jacob stand, for he is small?"

**7:6 - THE LORD CHANGED HIS MIND.** In response to the appeal of Amos, "The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD" (NNAS).

The threat of extinction of the entire people was but a threat. The coming harshness of the Lord's dealing with His people does not entail the

abrogation of the unconditional, unrepealed promise concerning the land of Israel [15: BSB].

The first two visions reveal vividly God's estimate of sin, but the fundamental message in this passage is not simply the horror of God's reaction to sins, or the awesome nature of His judgment. And it is a frightful thing to picture "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The most important truth revealed here, however, is the magnitude of the mercy and grace of the "Lord God." He is a longsuffering God, Who lovingly holds out His mercy to guilty sinners to give them every opportunity to repent and accept His marvelous grace. He will not, however, hold out His mercy forever. There will be a time when the offer of mercy will be withdrawn, and when His mercy is withdrawn, the sinner must bear the full weight of His wrath.

Mercy and grace go hand in hand. Mercy means that we do not get what we deserve, which is death. Grace means that we do get what we can never deserve, which is life (full, abundant, and eternal). It should also be stressed that the only response from man that is compatible with the grace of God is faith (trust), not works (Eph. 2:9); and not any combination of grace plus works (Rom. 11:6).

### **C. Vision of the Plumb Line, 7:7-9.**

**7:7 - HE SHOWED ME.** The "Lord God" showed Amos a third vision. The visions of Amos, like those of Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John are representative of the second aspect of revelation through visions (see notes on 7:1). The Lord sought to correct a deficiency in the nation.

**A PLUMB LINE.** A plumb line was a cord with a piece of metal or stone attached to one end. The plumb line would be held beside a wall during its construction to be sure the wall was vertical, or plumb. "Prophets spoke of the measurement God would use on the nation (Isa. 28:17; Amos 7:7-8). Israel had been built straight, but, because it was out of line, it would be destroyed" [18: HBD].

The "plumb line" indicated an instrument absolutely straight. It is an undeviating line; and metaphorically it is the righteousness of Yahweh, demanding the judgment of His people as Amos portrayed them. When measured by God's plumb line, Israel was seen to be crooked and untrue. Therefore, judgment was sure [15: BSB].

**7:8 - A PLUMB LINE IN THE MIDST OF MY PEOPLE.** In verse 7, God checks the wall and discovers that it is not plumb (vertical). Now, in the vision, the Lord stands upon the wall, holding the plumb line in the midst of His people. In the same way that He measured the wall he would measure the people of Israel, and discover their wickedness. The time would come, when those who had been spared,

would be spared no longer.

**7:9 - THE HIGH PLACES OF ISAAC.** The high places were hills or artificial mounds where altars were set up for Baal worship. Israel, the children of Isaac, carried on her idolatrous worship on these high places (cf. Hos. 4:13). Those hills would be “desolate.” Desolate might normally mean abandoned, or deserted, but that is not the idea here. The high places would be uninhabited, but not voluntarily. They would be uninhabited and “the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste” as a result of the judgment of God.

God’s purpose in punishing Israel would be twofold: The first was to destroy her religious shrines. The second purpose was to destroy her ruling dynasty (the house of Jeroboam). Tragically, Judah saw what happened to an unrepentant Israel, but refused to learn from it. A century and a half later, as we have seen, the Lord would send Jeremiah to with His message to the southern kingdom:

"Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. "For My people have committed *two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water*(Jer. 2:11-13, NNAS, italics added).

Judah was guilty of rejecting the true God in favor of false gods. They committed two sins in their false worship: (1) worship of false gods and (2) false worship of the true God. Both sins are rampant in post-Christian America today. How long will God hold out His mercy to America? It is inconceivable that He would let America go to Satan and hell without a fight.

Israel had built two kinds of shrines on the high places. Some shrines were erected for the worship of God, but what they practiced was false worship after the manner of Jeroboam I (I Kings 12:25-33; II Kings 18-23). Other shrines were erected specifically for the worship of false gods (I Kings 14; II Kings 17-23). Both forms of worship displeased God and He was about to destroy all of those shrines.

**THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM.** The reference is to Jeroboam II. Jeroboam I was the first king of the Northern Kingdom Israel (about 926-909 B.C.). The name seems to have meant, "he who contends for justice for the people." When Solomon died, Jeroboam I learned that the tribes would assemble at Shechem to make Solomon's son Rehoboam their king. Taking advantage of resentment of the people toward some of Solomon’s policies, Jeroboam led the ten tribes to revolt against the house of David. They crowned him as the first king of Israel, the northern kingdom.

Jeroboam II was a powerful king of the northern kingdom in the dynasty of Jehu about 793-753 B.C. (2 Kings 14:23-29). Jehu had overthrown the evil dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel. In the eyes of the world Jeroboam II had been a great king.

He managed to restore prosperity and territory to a weak nation but continued the religious practices of Jeroboam I and thus met condemnation from the biblical writers. Jonah, Amos, and Hosea prophesied during his reign. Jeroboam basically restored the boundaries of David's empire, reaching even into Syria [18: HBD].

The house of Jeroboam would be destroyed, not because of its weakness, nor was it a testimony to the power of Assyria. The Lord declared, "Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

#### **D. Amaziah's Fate Is Announced, 7:10-17.**

**7:10 - AMAZIAH THE PRIEST.** Amaziah was the priest (in the service of the Lord) at Bethel (House of God), but he was not all pleased with the prophecy of Amos, the prophet of Yahweh. He sent word to Jeroboam that Amos had conspired against him. This was a serious charge and Amaziah knew that if he could make the charge stick it might mean death to Amos. "It is no new thing for the accusers of the brethren, to misrepresent them as enemies to the king and kingdom, as traitors to their prince, and troublers of the land, when they are the best friends to both" [17: MH].

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for the servant of God to be criticized, condemned, or even persecuted by those who try to convince people they are doing it for the Lord. Some have convinced themselves they are doing it for the Lord. David's attitude toward the anointed of the Lord is a good example for all believers:

And he said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD" (I Sam. 24:6, NASB).

Those who are called by God to deliver the "Thus saith the Lord," must be faithful to their calling and never compromise. They must be not paralyzed with fear of those who would persecute them. The Lord has promised to be with those who serve Him:

You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand (Isa. 41:9b-10, NKJV).

Matthew Henry reminds us:

The Lord often chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. But no fervent prayers, or self-denying labours, can bring proud sinners to bear faithful reproofs and warnings. And all who oppose or despise the Divine word, must expect fatal effects to their souls, unless they repent [17: MH].

Jesus knew that those who served Him without compromise would be persecuted. He sought to prepare His servants for the inevitable:

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:11-12, NKJV).

True prophets of God have often been opposed by false prophets who sought the favor of a king, some other official, or even religious leaders. One of the best examples came one hundred-fifty years later in Judah. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck, and send word to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the sons of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon by the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah" (Jer. 27:2-3, NNAS). He sent them a message: "Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (6a). He continues (7-8):

"All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant. It will be, that the nation or the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine and with pestilence," declares the LORD," until I have destroyed it by his hand.

The Lord warned them (9-10):

"But as for you, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers or your sorcerers who speak to you, saying, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' For they prophesy a lie to you in order to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out and you will perish."

In chapter 28, Hananiah, a false prophet, opposed Jeremiah and announced:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 'Within two years I am going to bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon'" (28:2-3).

Hananiah insisted that the Lord had told him that He would "break the yoke of the king of Babylon" (28:4b). Jeremiah answered Hananiah by saying, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD confirm your words..." (28:6). There was nothing Jeremiah wanted to see more than this, but he knew this was not what the Lord had revealed to him.

Jeremiah's response to Hananiah ties the message of Amos to the message the Lord had given him (28:8-9):

*"The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. "The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent"* (italics added).

What was Hananiah's response to this word from Jeremiah? See 28:10-11:

*"Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke it. Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Even so will I break within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.' "Then the prophet Jeremiah went his way"* (italics added).

The Lord, never at a loss as to what to say or what to do, sent Jeremiah back with a message for the false prophet (28:13-14):

"Go and speak to Hananiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD,' You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron." 'For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they will serve him. And I have



also given him the beasts of the field."

Only those who have been reviled and persecuted, and then experienced the love and protection of the Lord can understand how one can "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" when they are persecuted. What an indictment it would be on one's life and ministry if he had never been persecuted and falsely accused for their faithful service! And what a joy it is to know that you have been included in the company of the committed, "the prophets who were before you."

**7:11 - JEROBOAM SHALL DIE.** Amaziah, the compromising priest of Bethel, had hears about as much of what Amos had to say as he could stand. First, he informs Jeroboam II that Amos is involved in a conspiracy in which he holds that Jeroboam should die by the sword and "Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land."

**7:12 - AMAZIAH SAID UNTO AMOS.** Now Amaziah confronts Amos with the charge that he was a hireling prophet, or "seer." He demands two things: that he stop preaching in Israel, and that he go back to Judah and work there for his bread, implying possibly that he is only preaching for the money, even though, there is no indication that he received any money for what he was doing.

A true preacher of the Gospel should expect to be persecuted. Not many of them are voted Whose Who in Religion in America. But there some who compromise: they go along to get along. They do not set out to compromise, and probably rationalize in order to justify what they do. However, they gradually refocus their ministry. The wife of a denominational worker lamented the fact that in visiting various churches they are not finding the Bible preached from the pulpit. She added, "Some of them now have no concept of a call; they see their ministry as a vocation. When my husband talks with some about their call, they don't seem to understand what he means."

She recalled that when her husband was a pastor he preached expository sermons, She added that she recently said to him, "People today are not interested in your kind of preaching. They don't look for a church where the pastor preaches the Bible; they look for a church with a gym. They don't care what kind of preaching they have; they are looking or activities, and some of these men are really professionals. They know how to run a program."

This minister's wife based her comments on their search for a church in their city, and church services they attend in their work. Is she overstating the situation? One certainly hopes so. She was referring to the "baby boomers," and the so-called "baby-busters." She was aware that her criticism does not apply to the traditional, or conservative worshipper." Committed senior adults love to hear the Gospel proclaimed.

Yet there may be some truth in what she says.

I met Dr. Stephen Olford, founder of Encounter Ministries, a number of years ago. We both

earned our doctorates at the same time, and sat on the same row the night the degrees were conferred upon us. Dr. Olford is a great expository preacher who knows preaching; and he knows preachers as well as anyone in America. I once heard him say, "There is a famine in America, and it is a famine of expository preaching in the pulpit." I suspect that he may know what he is talking about.

**7:13 - PROPHECY NOT AGAIN AT BETHEL.** It is not unusual for someone to try to silence the true servant of the Lord, whether the prophet in Bible times or the modern day preacher of the Word. Isaiah wrote of those "Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isa. 30:10).

Amaziah orders Amos not to prophesy again in Bethel for "it is a sanctuary of the king and a royal residence." The implication may be that Amos had not received any regal invitations (v. 13), or possibly that he had no legal permit. "The effectiveness of this rustic prophet's ministry is eloquently attested by Amaziah, who remarks, "The land is not able to bear all his words" (v. 10) [15: BSB].

It is ironic that Amaziah would conclude that the solution to their problem was to send the prophet back where he came from, back to Judah. Stuart Briscoe says he can understand what it is like to be in Amos' position.

Not long after I came from England to America, I tried to preach the Word of God and apply it to the American scene. Some people became so upset with me that they angrily demanded that I go home. "If you don't like it here, go back to England," they said. "If you earn more money here than you earned preaching there, tough! Go back and earn your living there; but don't talk to us as you have been talking." I'm still here, so obviously, what they said did not go very deep. I solved my problem quickly. After being here five years, I became an American citizen. Then I said: "What do you mean 'go home'? I am home" [1: 48].

In review of 7:10-13, Amaziah accused Amos of:

- (1) conspiracy against the king (vv. 10-11).
- (2) of being a "visionary" (seer, v. 12).
- (3) of being an unwanted foreign intruder (v. 12).
- (4) of trespassing on the sacred precincts of Bethel (v. 13).

"He twisted the prophecy of Amos (cf. v. 11a with v. 9) in order to try to evoke a more violent reaction from Jeroboam" [20: RSB].

**7:14 - THEN ANSWERED AMOS.** It is interesting that Amos ignores the charge of a conspiracy against Jeroboam. There are many times when the servant of the Lord should follow his example. Your best defense against some charges is not in denial, but in character, faith in the Lord, and trust that His people will understand and support you. Rather than a rebuttal of the charges of a conspiracy, he goes immediately into a lengthy defense of his call to this prophetic ministry.

**I WAS NO PROPHET.** He was not a "full-time" prophet, a vocational prophet, nor was he "a son of a prophet." This latter refers to a custom apparently begun by Samuel, who apparently began a school of prophets. The young prophets who became disciples, or students of Samuel (and later of Elijah and Elisha) followed them to learn from them. These young men were called "sons of the prophets" (2 Kin. 2:3) and were associated with a prophetic seminary (see 1 Sam. 19:24, note). Amos denies that he was a vocational prophet and that he was a seminary student preparing for a prophetic ministry.

I once went to hear a controversial layman speak in an area church. Several people interrupted him with questions before an educator challenged, "Who do you think you are, a layman, coming over here to tell us something like this?" The quote is close, if not accurate. The visitor responded that it was his understanding that a layman had the right to interpret Scripture as led by the Holy Spirit. While I had been prepared not to appreciate the speaker, I found myself agreeing with this point. During a break, I had an opportunity to visit with the speaker. Concerning the criticism, I said, "For me to tell you that because you do not have a degree in theology you cannot speak on these issues is like someone telling me that because I am not an automotive engineer, I have no right to say anything if my automobile is not running right." God calls men and women to special service, but He uses laypersons to serve His purpose.

**I WAS AM A HERDSMAN.** Amos was prophesying in Israel, the northern kingdom, but he was a shepherd (sheep breeder) from the Tekoa, in the southern kingdom of Judah. Amos had not left his sheep to go prophesy in Israel by choice or chance, but by the call and command of God. Stuart Briscoe, in his book on the minor prophets, *Taking God Seriously*, writes, "The tremendous burden of Amos' ministry is this: He is so convinced of what God is saying, so committed to what He commands, that he expects the people to be as convinced and committed as he. But he discovers that is not the case" [1: 44]. There is an ironic contrast between Amos who expected the Israel to repent (but they did not), and Jonah who did not expect the people of Nineveh to repent (but they did).

**GATHERER OF SYCAMORE FRUIT.** The NKJV has, "a tender of sycamore fruit," while the NASB has, "grower of sycamore fruit." "This latter vocation involved bruising or pinching the fruit of this "poor man's fig" in order to hasten its ripening" [15: BSB].

**7:15 - THE LORD SAID.** This qualified Amos to deliver this prophecy. His resume' did not include a

list of degrees from colleges and seminaries, a list of positions held in the past, or honors received in the ministry. He was simply God sent. God took him and sent him to prophesy to Israel. In his statement, Amos affirms the calling from God that prophets and preachers of any day must possess.

**7:16 - HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD.** Amaziah had attacked Amos with the most vicious charges one can level against the prophet of God. He had accused him of a conspiracy against the king and prophesying falsely in the name of God. Assuming the authority of a priest he had demanded, "You shall not prophesy against Israel nor shall you speak against the house of Isaac" (NNAS).

**7:17 - THEREFORE, THUS SAYS THE LORD.** Amos made no effort to defend himself against the conspiracy charge, preferring to explain the source of his message. But now he turns his attention to his accuser, and in doing so he delivers a smashing prophetic blow against the professional prophet who had demonstrated a greater concern for Jeroboam than for Jehovah. He will realize the veracity of the prophecy of Amos when the prophecy is fulfilled. (1) Amaziah will see his wife reduced to harlotry by invading soldiers; (2) his sons and daughters will be slain by the sword; (3) his property would be taken away; (4) Amaziah would be taken into captivity and die in a polluted land; and (5) Israel would go into captivity.

#### **E. Vision of the Summer Fruit, 8:1-14.**

1. The vision is revealed and explained, 1-3.

**8:1 - THE LORD GOD SHOWED ME.** Amos has already revealed three visions the Lord had shown him before he was interrupted by Amaziah, priest of the temple at Bethel. Since there are a number of messages in the Book of Amos, we cannot be sure that Amos would have continued the series of visions without a break, after the interruption, he shares two more visions which the Lord had shown to him.

**BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT.** The Lord showed Amos a basket of summer fruit. The vision was simple enough, but the interpretation is a little more difficult. It had been grown, picked, and put into a basket. This much is certain, but what is meant by "summer fruit?" What distinguishes summer fruit from any other fruit?

**8:2 - THE END IS COME.** The meaning, like the vision itself, is simple enough. The message is clear: "The end is come!" We are left, however, with the problem of linking the vision to the meaning with a lucid interpretation. Bible students offer several possibilities. To some, the summer fruit obviously signified that, as the fruit was ripe and ready to be consumed, the people of Israel were ripe for

destruction. The time (season) of the Lord's patience was almost over.

...summer fruits will not keep till winter, but must be used at once. Yet these judgments shall not draw from them any acknowledgment, either of God's righteousness or their own unrighteousness. Sinners put off repentance from day to day, because they think the Lord thus delays his judgments [17: MH].

If point is that the fruit was simply ripe and ready to eat, the obvious point is that Israel is ripe for judgment. But would this not apply to "spring" fruit as well as summer fruit?

Others have concluded that by summer fruit, he means that the fruit is overripe, or that it was fully ripe, would soon be overripe, and then spoil.

The summer fruit (i.e., overripe fruit) is the end-of-the-season fruit - there would be no more, and the ripe fruit would soon be over ripe, and then spoiled if not eaten soon. This fifth vision "points to the termination of the regular season of fruit; thus the end of the nation as predicted is practically upon them" [15: BSB].

If this is the idea, then the message is that Israel is filled with corruption (spoiled like rancid or sour fruit), and therefore deserving of destruction. All of which might have been true, but such an interpretation "assumes conditions that the vision does not describe. Not a word in the text indicates that the basket of fruit was beginning to spoil" [6: 33].

It is possible that the significance of the "summer fruit" is that it was the last fruit of the year, at which time they gathered grapes, pomegranates, and figs (Num. 13:23). Micah 7:1 seems to imply that the summer fruit is the last fruit (leftovers).

Americans in the south often grow fall gardens, and many homeowners put out fall tomatoes. The last tomatoes of the fall are often very small and slow to ripen because of cold weather. Growers watch closely because they want to pick them before frost, but they want to allow them as much time as possible to ripen.

To many people there is no fruit better than tree ripened peaches. They can hardly wait for the various species to ripen, but toward the end of the season they watch the trees, or farmer's markets, with disappointment, knowing that the end of the peach crop has come. Cotton is not an edible crop, but in the days before aerial application of defoliants and bowl openers, farmers would wait until most of the bolls were open and then pick the first time. When most of the rest was open then would pick a second time, and then when the last bowl opened, if the weather permitted, they would go back and pick the rest. The

last picking they called scrappin'. A farmer would ask his neighbor, "Got all your cotton out?" His neighbor might reply, "All but the scrappin'." Sometimes he might add, "But I'm not sure it's worth the time and effort it would take to pick it."

If this is the idea, Amos is saying, "We are down to the very last fruit of the last harvest - and that has already been picked and put in the basket. When it is gone there will be no more." Now look at Micah 7:1 in the King James Version:

Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the firstripe fruit.

There is another interesting point here. The Hebrew word for *summer fruit* rhymes with the Hebrew word for *end*. It is doubtful that Amaziah and others in the audience would have missed the word-play and the implied message: the end has come!

**8:3 - IN THAT DAY.** They had cried, "The Day of the Lord, The Day of the Lord," but as Amos had warned, the day of the Lord would not be a day to celebrate. This is what they can expect:

"The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day," declares the Lord GOD." Many will be the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence" (NNAS).

The Lord had been long-suffering in dealing with His chosen people, and there had been every opportunity for them to repent and avoid destruction. Now there is precious little time left. At first the songs of the palace will be replaced by uncontrolled wailing. In the next stage of their grief, as the dead bodies piled up, the wailing would cease and they would be carrying out the bodies of the dead in shocked silence.

Walter Cost was a World War I veteran who was fortunate to have battles and poison gas attacks. But he never completely got over one of these assignments. He was assigned to take dog tags from the soldiers who were killed in action, load the bodies onto trucks, and wagons, and haul them to a prepared pit for mass burial. He said the only way he could stand the odor was to stuff his mouth full of chewing tobacco. He got through the war, but he never really got over the war. He eventually got over most of the effects of the poison gas, but piles of dead bodies one can never forget.

2. The Reason is given, 4-6.

**8:4 - HEAR THIS.** Amos calls on the rulers and leading citizens of Israel to hear his further explanation of the vision of the summer fruit. That is, they are to hear with a mind to obey. When the

Lord says, "Hear this," He should have our undivided attention. But people who are guilty of the sins described here will listen to almost anyone but the Lord, and that applies to modern times as well as ancient Israel.

Two reasons for the coming judgment are mentioned: Sabbath hating and swindling. Sabbath abuse robs God and swindling robs man. In 7:10-17, there is a nonvisionary section which follows the third vision. Here a nonvisionary section follows the fourth vision (8:1-3). Billy K. Smith, pointing out that "the internal structure of the first four visions shows that they are paired, it is appropriate that the external structure should confirm that visions three and four go together" [12: 144].

**YOU WHO SWALLOW UP THE NEEDY.** The NRSV has, "Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land." "Make the poor of the land to fail" (KJV) is literally "cause to cease." The final result of their practices would have been the eventual elimination of the poor and the unprotected from Israel, a clear and arrogant violation of the law, which required them to deal generously with the needy (Deut.15:7-11; Ps. 72:12-13).

Who was swallowing up the needy? Who continually trampled the needy under foot? The rich and powerful, the most influential citizens of the land, were the ones who were most guilty of oppressing the poor. But they were still going to the temple (how else could Amos have called to them?).

**8:5 - NEW MOON...SABBATH.** These people faithfully observed the holidays of new moon at the beginning of each month (II Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13), and they observed the Sabbath, but the merchants among them could hardly wait until these days were over to get back to their business - and their business was cheating people. These people were religious, but they loathed the religion they practiced, which leads one to conclude that their religion was based more in superstition (and show) than love of God. Again, the rich and powerful are at the forefront in the false worship of the true God, as they were in the worship of false gods (idolatry). They were weary of the restraints placed on them by the new moons and Sabbaths. They could hardly wait for them to end because of the restraints they placed on their business, and in their business they were dishonest.

Christians today reflect the same philosophy and character when they abuse the Lord's Day and commercialize holy days (Christmas, Easter). While the believer looks with reverence on the Lord's Day, the unsaved person may violate it without giving it a thought. Unfortunately, the Sabbath can also be a burden to a carnal believer.

It will either be profaned or be accounted a dull day. But can we spend our time better than in communion with God? When employed in religious services, they were thinking of marketings. They were weary of holy duties, because their worldly business stood still the while. Those are

strangers to God, and enemies to themselves, who love market days better than Sabbath days, who would rather be selling corn than worshipping God [17: MH].

It is interesting that these people never ceased to go through the motions of worship. Their worship, however, was superficial and hypocritical. "Merchandising was their priority - selling, not worshipping. Those who focus intently on what they will do after worship is over are not apt to be engaged in true worship and enter into 'the joy of these festive occasions' [12: 145].

The Lord's Day is sadly neglected and grossly abused in post-Christian America. There have always been people who used the excuse that the ox was in the ditch to justify their working on Sunday. During my lifetime I have seen a disturbing change in the attitude of church members toward the Lord's Day. I have in mind those who abuse the Lord's Day for their pleasure and those who choose to work on Sunday for personal profit, rather than those involved in an essential service, or for other reasons have no choice in the matter.

The Lord's Day is abused by those who operate businesses on Sunday and by those who shop with them. Those who abuse the Lord's Day parrot the same old timeworn excuses: "That's no worse than..." Or, "If your church members didn't shop with on Sunday we would have to close." Some are quick to point out that their competitors are open on Sunday.

There may be a greater evil associated with Sabbath breaking than working on Sunday; and that is Sunday recreation. Americans have more leisure time than any other people in history. The poor in America have more leisure time than the wealthy in other times and places. Of course, some of the poor have more leisure time than some of the wealthy in the United States. First, professional teams began scheduling ball games on Sunday, and then colleges joined them, and finally high schools and little leagues began playing play-off games on Sunday. Then, they started holding regular practices on Sunday.

There have always been some people who hunted and fished on Sunday, but today with recreational vehicles (RV's), travel trailers, motor homes, campers, and special accommodations for campers, more and more church members are seen less and less. Parks, movies, and automobile shows compete with arts and crafts meetings and flea markets for our church members' time and money. A Christian lady visited a church member who had not attended services in a long time. She said, "I would like to ask you something. You used to come to church all the time and I would like to ask you why you do not come anymore." The reply was simple, but revealing: "We just didn't have anything else to do back then."

A century and a half later, the prophet Jeremiah would be writing to the people of Judah about the same sin (Jer. 17:21-25, 27, NRSV).



Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction. But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever... But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and to carry in no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.

Blue laws were repealed across the country because of merchants who believed that Sabbath laws hindered interfered with sales, and because of shoppers who liked the convenience of being able to shop on Sunday. The simple fact is that if all nonessential businesses closed on Sunday no one would have lost any business. And if all stores were closed on Sunday shoppers would do what they had always done - they would shop another day.

My older son, John, a student at Mississippi College, was working at a store in a large modern mall when Blue Laws were repealed in Jackson, Mississippi. He was unable to persuade them to let him off on Sundays, so he was forced to resign. It cost us a lot of money and became a factor in his decision to transfer to another college. My younger son, Mark, was forced to give up a job while he was in college when he learned that he was going to be required to work on Sundays during the Christmas season. Again, it cost us and it cost him quite a bit to keep him in school without that job. Contrary to the health and wealth gospel preached by some television personalities, no great windfall came their way as a result of their decision to honor the Lord's Day. However, if they had violated Scripture and rejected the leadership of the Holy Spirit with reference to the Lord's Day, the cost would have been far greater.

It would be interesting to know what would happen if all Christians suddenly refused to work in nonessential jobs on Sunday, and if all Christians made a commitment to shop only at businesses would not force Christians to work on Sunday. It would be interesting to know how many businesses have considered what it would be like if Christians, and Christian values, were eliminated from the work place.

As a pastor, I have observed the effects of Sunday work on young people and young adults in church. Young people need desperately to be in worship services on the Lord's Day. They also need to be in Sunday School every Sunday where they are taught the Word of God. Young adults need to worship, they need to be in a Bible class, and they need to be trained in their ministry for the Lord. Furthermore, they are the ones with the babies and young children.

One of the greatest sins of ancient Israel, and of Judah, was Sabbath abuse. Is it possible that this is one of the principal sins that have ushered America into this postmodern age? If there is to be a revival in America, there is going to have to be a change in the attitude of Christians toward the Lord's Day. Emphasis here is placed on the attitude of Christians. Lost people do not need revival. They need to be saved.

**MAKING THE EPHAH SMALL.** They were "skimping the measure" (NIV). An ephah was about half a bushel. Not only were they making the ephah small, they were also making "the shekel great" ("boosting the price," NIV). A shekel was four tenths of an ounce. It became the name of a silver coin of that weight. "An undersized container (bushel) plus a heavy shekel (against which the customer weighed his own money) gave the merchant an illegal double profit" [20: RSB].

**FALSIFYING THE BALANCES.** They were "cheating with dishonest scales" (NIV). A small boy often went with his parents to a country store. While they shopped for groceries he observed the merchandise and the other shoppers. One day he observed something he would never forget. As the manager weighed lunch meat for a customer he happened to look beneath the tray on which he placed the meat and was disturbed when he saw several large staples farmers used to attach barbed wire to fence posts on the mechanism. An adult customer would not see them, but a child could - if he happened to be in the right place. His impression was that the customer was being cheated. Later he realized that the manager might have been using the staples to balance his scales. He liked the man and wanted to give him the benefit of a doubt, but there was a doubt. Thinking about it later he said he would like to know if the Department of Weights and Measures uses staples today to balance scales.

When my wife, Becky, and I once we found a department store that had its own supermarket. They had better prices than most of the smaller stores and we drove to another city when we bought a larger supply of groceries. We were surprised when the news broke that the state inspectors had caught the store adding water to ground meat. The store was forced to close its supermarket.

As a teenager growing up on a cotton farm in the Mississippi delta, I often had to carry nine foot cotton sacks packed with cotton to the scales where my father or I would weigh them and record the weights. Some cotton pickers trusted us to keep up with the weights for the day. Others watched the scales as if they could not believe that we would not cheat them. At the end of the day some would get in

a small group and go over all the figures, often whispering about the totals, some helping others with their math. My father would often go over the figures with them. For these people to have been so distrustful, I wondered if they had been cheated by others. In all the years I spend on the farm and around our neighbors, I never knew of anyone who was deliberately cheated when the farmer paid at the end of the day. The figures were too easy to check, for one thing. For another, most would move the pea out on the scale until it balanced and then turn it and show it to those who stood by watching the procedure. But I am also aware of the fact that a thief will find a way to steal. It happens all the time, but today, with credit cards and computers the thieves use more sophisticated methods.

**8:6 - BUY THE POOR FOR SILVER.** In 2:6 the Lord condemns the selling of the poor. Here He condemns them for buying the poor and confiscating their property. They bought the poor for as little as the price of a pair of shoes. Once again, the prophet targets the rich and powerful. It is not that poor people are holy and righteous, while the wealthy and influential are greedy, covetous, and corrupt. Only the wealthy were in a position “to buy the helpless for money And the needy for a pair of sandals” (NNAS). The poor were often bought and sold throughout human history. In Chapter 7 of *Race and Culture*, Dr. Thomas Sowell, deals with race and slavery. He begins with a quote from David Eltis:

Slavery until recently was universal in two senses. Most settled societies incorporated the institution into their social structures, and few peoples in the world have not constituted a major source of slaves at one time or another [23: 186].

Sowell continues, “Although slavery in the United States was referred to as a ‘peculiar institution,’ slavery was in fact one of the oldest and most widespread institutions on Earth” [23: 186].

**REFUSE OF THE WHEAT.** Literally, this last line is, “Even the sweepings of the wheat we sell” (12: 146). “The refuse of the wheat” refers to the chaff, trash, and faulty or immature seeds that fell to the threshing room floor. They swept it and mixed it with the grain and sold it to the poor, thus cheating them from all directions. As Smith points out, the construction of verses 5-6 binds them together and the reference to the wheat after the reference to debt slavery has the effect of showing that “These people regarded cereal and human beings equally as stock for sale. Their practices were both dishonest and inhumane.’ To sell the sweepings with the wheat was as low as greedy merchants could go in their oppression of the poor. Putting chaff and trash with good grain to sell to desperately hungry poor people was the ultimate in greed” [12: 146].

3. Factors associated with this judgment are revealed, 8:7-14.

**8:7 - THE PRIDE OF JACOB.** The KJV has “The Lord hath sworn excellency of Jacob,” but the NKJV, NNAS, and NRSV correctly translate it “Pride of Jacob.” By this term here, God means Himself (far from the meaning in 6:8). The immutable God has sworn by Himself, saying, “Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.” Unforgiven sin is never forgotten, and all sin will be punished.

**8:8 - SHALL NOT THE LAND TREMBLE.** This denotes a cataclysmic upheaval throughout the land of such proportions that “everyone who dwells in it mourn...” (NNAS). The Lord will send an earthquake of such magnitude that the land will “rise up like the Nile” at flood stage, and then “it will be tossed about And subside like the Nile of Egypt” (NNAS).

**8:9 - THE SUN WILL GO DOWN AT NOON.** A total eclipse of the sun had occurred in Asia Minor in June, 763B.C. The Lord used that eclipse as imagery for His coming judgment on Israel.

**8:10 - I WILL TURN YOUR FEASTS INTO MOURNING.** The Lord had declared, “I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings” (5:21f, NASB). Their sinful celebration of His feasts will be turned to mourning.

**YOUR SONGS INTO LAMENTATION.** In 5:23, the Lord said through Amos, “Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps” (NNAS). Here He says, that He will turn their hymns of praise into lamentation;

And I will bring sackcloth on everyone's loins  
And baldness on every head. And I will make it like a time of mourning  
for an only son, And the end of it will be like a bitter day (NNAS).

**8:11 - I WILL SEND A FAMINE.** In the oracles against the nations of the world and against Judah the Lord had repeatedly said that He would use fire as an instrument of judgment. Famine would be used to punishment Israel: “But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities And lack of bread in all your places” (NNAS). We must not overlook the significance of the first person pronoun in verses 10 and 11: “I will,” “I will,” “I will.” God will be the source of the impending catastrophe.

How had Israel responded to the God-sent famine? “Yet you have not returned to Me,” declares the LORD (NNAS). And now the Lord was preparing a famine of a different kind.

The culmination of the terrors that awaited Israel is that a famine would descend upon the land. This famine was to be a famine of the word of God. Despite the fact that Amos is not welcome in Bethel at the moment,

the day will come when men will wander from sea to sea seeking some word from God [15: BSB].

The day would come, when they were in captivity, when the people would long for the words of the LORD, which they had either rejected or ignored during their prosperity.

Here was a token of God's highest displeasure. At any time, and most in a time of trouble, a famine of the word of God is the heaviest judgment. To many this is no affliction, yet some will feel it very much, and will travel far to hear a good sermon; they feel the loss of the mercies others foolishly sin away [17: MH].

Stuart Briscoe comments on a divine principle which emerges here. "God," he says, "will react to Israel's rejection. God will speak, his servants will echo his words, and the people will either hear or refuse to hear. But that is not the end of the matter. Jehovah has the final word. He will deal with the people's response, and we should never, ever forget that" [1: 49].

There are people who sit in worship services on a regular basis and hear the Word of God proclaimed from the pulpit. Yet they go out and live as though they have never heard it. While some people hang on to every word and pray for more, some simply ignore the Word of the Lord, and others deliberately disobey it. But, as Briscoe says:

That is not the end of the matter: The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will respond in kind to our reaction to his Word. Some will go on relentlessly hardening their hearts to what God is saying need to be alerted to the fact that they cannot do so with impunity. God could send them a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

Briscoe explains what he means:

Notice, I didn't say that he would send a famine of *the Word of God*. If I find myself in a situation where the Word of God is not available to me, that's a famine of that kind. But Amos is saying something different. It is possible to be where the Word of God is being proclaimed, where the Word of God is available, but as far as *hearing* it is concerned, the people may as well not have it anymore. The Bible doesn't register. They have resisted the Word so long

that they no longer hear it. A famine of hearing the Word of God has gripped the soul and it makes no impact at all [1: 49].

Based on (1) the ignorance of the Word of God, (2) negligence of the Word of God (apathy), and (3) rejection of the Word of God (disobedience) among those who profess to be Christians, can there be any doubt that we are seeing such a famine spread across America today?

**8:12 - TO SEEK THE WORD OF THE LORD.** During the captivity the captives “shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it” (NRSV).

For some seventy years people behind the Iron Curtain, those living in the former Soviet Union, understood this famine. There were individuals, and a few organizations that smuggled Bibles into Russia and other Soviet block countries. Those who visited the churches that survived atheistic, evolutionary humanism’s greatest war against God manifested a hunger for the Word of God people in the free world cannot comprehend.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, people began to beg for Bibles. High ranking officials pleaded with Christians in America to send Bibles. They were invited to pass them out in schools and encouraged to teach teachers and students the message of the Bible, including how to be saved. You cannot do that in America today! There was a time, however, when it was a common practice, as documented by Gary DeMar in *America’s Christian History*. Chapter 6 deals with Colonial Education. He states that:

Since the Protestant rebellion against Rome had arisen in part as a result of Biblical study and interpretation, it became obvious to Protestant leaders that if the Reform movement were to survive and flourish, widespread Biblical literacy, at all levels of society, would be absolutely necessary. The Bible was to be the moral and spiritual authority in every man’s life... [4: 98].

**8:13 - FAINT FOR THIRST.** In the day of God’s judgment the “beautiful virgins And the young men will faint from thirst” (NIV). If the young and the strong would faint for thirst, what would the very young, the elderly, and the infirmed do?

But when God visits a backsliding church, their own plans and endeavours to find out a way of salvation, will stand them in no stead. And the most amiable and zealous would perish, for want of the water of life, which Christ only can bestow. Let us value our advantages, seek to profit by them, and fear sinning them away [17: MH].

“The big question in interpreting these predictions is whether we should understand them as symbols for great calamity or as events that would literally occur” [6: 35]. Obviously, famine and drought, as well as mourning that accompanied them, were literal. If an earthquake of the magnitude described here is symbolic, it points to the invasion by the Assyrians and the consequent slaughter and deportation of citizens. If this earthquake is to be taken literally, one wonders if we must look beyond the earthquake of 1:1 to an earthquake that is coming at the end of time. See Is. 24:19f; Jer. 4:24; Zech. 14:4f; Rev. 6:12; 11:13; 16:18-20.

**8:14 - THEY THAT SWEAR.** The prevailing sin of Israel had been idolatry, but now, “Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ and, ‘As the way of Beer-sheba lives’-- they shall fall, and never rise again” NRSV). The NKJV reads “Those who swear by the *sin* of Samaria.” We must remember that God condemns both the worship of false gods and false worship of the true God. These people worshiped false gods, but they also came to worship at a temple God never authorized and offered sacrifices God would not accept, sang songs He loathed, and prayed prayers He refused to hear. For all forms of false worship the consequences would be disastrous.

This is no less true today. There are many who denied the existence of God and reject His Son. The atheist says, “There is no God;” but postmodern spiritualist responds, “of course there is a god, but whose to say that one god is right and another is wrong?” Some New Age religious groups actually preach and teach about Christ, but their Christ is radically different from the Christ of the Bible. As a matter of fact, to be consistent with New Age Monism, they would have you to discover that you are Christ.

In the coming Day of the Lord, they will all stand before the one true, living Christ and hear Him say, “Depart from Me, you worker of iniquity, for I never knew you.” They will be cast into the lake of fire with the prince of this world, who is their true god.

**NEVER RISE AGAIN.** The prophet concludes his explanation of the vision with a prophecy that these idolaters would fall and never rise again. The Nile might rise and fall, and land following an earthquake might rise and fall, but Israel would fall and never rise.

God had tried to reach them through blessings but they would not return to Him. They he tried punishment, but they still would not turn back to Him. Now, He says that the nation is going to fall and never to rise again. The nation fell and it has never risen. Only a small remnant of the people, those who joined themselves to Judah, would be spared.

#### **F. Vision of the Destroyed Altar, 9:1-10.**

**9:1 - I SAW THE LORD STANDING BEFORE THE ALTAR.** In this final vision the prophet Amos saw the Lord standing upon (or by) the polluted and defiled altar at Bethel. One would expect to see the Lord before a holy altar, but here He is standing upon a defiled altar at, of all places, Bethel (the word means *House of God*). Judgment of Israel will begin at the center of her idolatrous worship.

**SMITE THE CAPITALS.** "Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake" (NKJV). The coming judgment will be as exhaustive as it is catastrophic:

...Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and those who are left I will kill with the sword; not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape (NRSV).

The reference is apparently to ornamental capitals at the top of columns around the altar. The thresholds must have been the base of the columns. So, the Lord's command is to strike the capitals on top of the columns so hard that the foundations will shake. It is even more shocking than that: strike them so hard that the entire column will shatter and fall on the heads of the worshipers.

At the temple in Jerusalem, the worshipers did not enter the temple building. Only the priest could enter the temple. The people offered their sacrifices at an altar in the courtyard in front of the building. "The columns of the Jerusalem temple did not support the roof of the temple building. They were free-standing ornamental columns in front of the building (I Kings 7:15-22). Apparently, similar ornamental columns with highly decorative capitals stood in front of the Israelite temples" [6: 36].

We are not told to whom the command was given, so the obvious conclusion is that the person who is to strike the capitals is not the important thing. It was God Who commanded that someone strike them. The point is that God Himself had ordered the destruction of the altar at which false worship was practiced in His name. The shattered columns falling on and killing the worshipers symbolizes the destruction that will come when God sends His judgment upon them.

They have been thoroughly warned, and now they will be thoroughly destroyed, beginning with their place of worship. Anyone who escapes the falling columns will be slain with the sword. There will not be one, small or great, who will not be radically affected by the coming disaster.

The demolition of the altar simply means the removal of the altar from the temple to a point at which one could escape any threat. The removal of the horns of the altar from the temple, the place of refuge to escape an avenger, meant that the temple was no longer a place of refuge. Therefore, judgment will now fall upon Israel as upon other sinful nations [15: BSB].



**9:2 - THOUGH THEY DIG INTO SHEOL.** Wherever they go to try to flee from God's judgment, it will overtake them. They cannot dig too deep, nor climb too high for God's justice. Nothing, Sheol, nor heaven, nor any other place will be able to hide them from God's judgment. "Those whom God brings to heaven by his grace, shall never be cast down; but those who seek to climb thither by vain confidence in themselves, will be cast down and filled with shame" [17: MH].

**9:3 - THOUGH THEY HIDE.** They will attempt to hide, but wherever they flee God will bring them back, whether from the top of Mount Carmel or the depth of the sea.

**9:4 - I WILL SET MY EYES UPON THEM.** There will be no escape, either in Israel or any foreign nation, from the wrath of God. That which makes escape impossible and destruction certain is that God says, "I will set my eyes upon them for evil, and not for good." The God Who sets His eyes upon His people to bless and protect them has now set His eyes upon them for "evil" (punishment). When God sets His eyes upon a person, or a nation, for evil there is no way of escaping it. The prophecy of impending disaster may seem redundant, but obviously the Lord does not think the warnings are superfluous.

**9:5 - THE LORD OF HOSTS.** Make no mistake about it, it is "The Lord GOD of hosts, The One who touches the land so that it melts" (NNAS). The fire of divine judgment is so intense that when He touches the earth it melts like wax over a flame.

The Lord of Hosts is the One responsible for this punishment. A publication for Jewish Christians chronicled the record of atrocities against Jews from the earliest days of Hebrew history until the present.

I took a copy to a Jewish friend who accepted it without comment. A day or two later he came to me and said appreciatively that, this was the best treatment of anti-Semitism he had ever seen. Then I showed this time line of horrors against the Jews to one of my brothers. Mike is an attorney who loves Bible history, and prepares thoroughly for the Sunday School class he teaches. After looking at the list, which includes things the prophets dealt with in the eighth century B.C. He looked at it and then said, "Isn't it amazing that much of what God calls judgment, many Jews call anti-Semitism." He was right! That does not lessen the evil of anti-Semitism, but if one only sees anti-Semitism in the fulfillment of these prophecies, he is blinding himself to the role of God in the history of Israel.

**ALL...MOURN.** The NASB reads, "And all those who dwell in it mourn, And all of it rises up like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt." The Lord wants the people to understand that this disaster is not just falling upon their neighbors, and their neighbors' families. Every soul in Israel will be in mourning.

**9:6 - IT IS HE...THE LORD IS HIS NAME.** He who is responsible for their calamity is none other

than the One who had chosen them and nurtured them from the days of Abraham. The LORD (Yahweh) is His name. This is covenant name, and the most sacred name for the Lord. He is the great "I AM."

The One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens  
And has founded His vaulted dome over the earth,  
He who calls for the waters of the sea  
And pours them out on the face of the earth,  
The LORD is His name (NNAS).

**9:7 - ARE YOU NOT LIKE THE ETHIOPIANS.** All nations are under God's control, whether Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, or the Syrians or Philistines. The Israelites should not have thought, as they did, that they are the only people with whom God was concerned. Furthermore, they should have understood that He was just as willing to punish them as He was "the Philistines from Capthor and the Arameans from Kir." Capthor may have been Crete and Kir was probably some place in Assyria.

If God could bring the Israelites from Egypt, Philistines from Capthor, and the Arameans from Kir and bless them all with a new home, He could punish one as well as the other. Israel's special covenant relationship did not exempt her from punishment when she rebelled against the Lord. As a matter of fact, Israel, because of the relationship they had with the Lord and because of His purpose in choosing them, should have expected the Lord to act more quickly against them than against the heathen nations of the world.

**9:8 - THE EYES OF THE LORD.** The Lord focused His eyes upon sinful Israel with judgment in mind, a far cry from the care He promised His chosen nation in the beginning.

"But the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, "a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year (Deut. 11:11-12, NKJV).

**I WILL DESTROY IT.** Having perfect knowledge of the spiritual condition of Israel, He is now determined to wipe the northern kingdom off the face of the earth. This shocking prophecy should have brought Israel to her knees in repentance, but since the recognized prophets disputed Amos, and since the Lord did not act immediately, they disregarded the warning.

In 5:24, the Lord had urged them to "let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream." They had stubbornly refused. Before long they would see a mighty tide of judgment roll over them like a mighty stream.

**I WILL NOT UTTERLY DESTROY.** There are two possibilities: (1) He will spare a remnant from the northern kingdom, or, (2) He will preserve Judah, the southern kingdom. Whichever view one subscribes to, "The astonishing preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, seems here foretold" [17: MH].

This verse foretells in shocking words the end of the northern kingdom. This prophecy would be fulfilled in two dramatic stages. The first would be the Syro-Ephraimatic Crisis of 734 B.C., when Assyria would defeat the combined forces of Israel and Syria. The second would come in 722 B.C., when Sargon II of Assyria would conquer Israel and execute their program of transplanting groups from one nation to another.

But this judgment at the hand of the Assyrians would not completely destroy "the house of Jacob." In the first place the Lord would raise up Assyria to judge the northern kingdom. When He is finished with Assyria, he will break her power as one breaks a twig between his fingers. Judah would be given every opportunity to repent of her sins and return to the Lord. With the judgment of Israel as an example, it would be reasonable to expect Judah to return to the Lord. If she would not, He would raise up the Babylonians to conquer Judah and take her people into captivity for seventy years. Israel, the northern kingdom, would be wiped off the face of the earth, but a remnant from Judah would return from captivity to continue in a covenant relationship with the Lord. A small remnant from the northern kingdom would, in time, join themselves to the southern kingdom and be spared, but the nation would fall never to rise again.

From the remaining masses of Hebrews will yet come another organized government, and the time will come when the law will indeed go forth from Jerusalem. The immutable principle of the altar's role in atonement by the shedding of blood is not made ineffective by this temporary judgment on the altar as a place of refuge from an avenger. The scarlet thread through the Bible continues to be revealed [15: BSB].

**9:9 - I WILL SIFT.** The Lord is going to "sift the house of Israel among all nations." By the time of the destruction of Israel in 722 B.C., Assyria would have perfected their strategy of transplanting conquered people. They would gather up pockets of people from one nation and resettle them in another nation. This served a practical purpose. Because the transplanted people spoke a different language and worshiped a different God (or gods) than the natives, they would not trust each other enough to enter a conspiracy against Assyria. As a matter of fact, any time they saw anything that they interpreted as a threat, they would report the activity to Assyria for their own protection.

The Lord would sift Israel among the nations, but sifting the people, the righteous will remain in

the sieve and not fall to the ground. The remnant idea is implied here.

**9:10 - ALL THE SINNERS.** All those who set themselves against the Lord, those who reject this prophecy, will die by the sword. The coming disaster which will be devastating in intensity and broad in scope. Does He mean that every Israelite (“all have sinned” Rom. 3:23), will literally be slain with a sword? History reveals that this did not happen. The test for the true prophet is one hundred per cent accuracy. Do we have a contradiction here? No, because to die by the sword denotes death as a result of military action. Some would actually be put to the sword, others will be slain in other ways, and others would die of starvation, and others would live out their lives in a strange land as helpless subjects of a pagan empire.

**THE CALAMITY.** All those who say the calamity (“evil” in KJV) shall not overtake them, shall in fact die as a result of the calamity they deny.

"All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, Those who say, 'The calamity will not overtake or confront us' (NNAS).

#### **G. Vision of Restoration, 11-15.**

**9:11 - IN THAT DAY.** In what day? The day of the Lord in 5:18 was to be a day of darkness and not light. But here the day of the Lord would be a day of restoration, a day of light and not darkness.

**I WILL RAISE UP THE BOOTH OF DAVID.** Some see this aspect of the Day of the Lord as the administration of Christ at the time of His return. This is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant: "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (II Samuel 7:16, NNAS). See II Sam. 7:12-16. Here, the Lord says, "will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old" (NNAS).

**9:12 - THAT THEY MAY POSSESS.** "The dynasty of David, though humbled for a time, will be reinstated to rule over all the world (v. 12; see Acts 15:15-17)" [20: RSB]. Regardless of one's millennial views, it is obvious that the "preservation of the Davidic line will achieve fulfillment ultimately through Christ" [15: BSB].

**9:13 - THE DAYS ARE COMING.** These days have not yet come, but if there is anything the student of the Word of God may be sure of, it is that every word of it will be fulfilled. Therefore, we must look to a future fulfillment of this prophecy and no time fits this better than the administration of the returning King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Those who hold this to mean the millennial kingdom will see that time characterized by:

- (1) fertility (v. 13).
- (2) prosperity (v. 14).
- (3) security (v. 15).

We are told of a time when the earth will be so fertile and growing conditions so favorable that farmers will begin breaking up land for a new crop before they finish harvesting the current one. Modern cotton farmers spray a defoliant and bowl opener on their cotton in September and when all the bowls are open they send in mechanical cotton pickers to pick the cotton. It is dumped into module makers at the end of the row where it is compressed covered or hauled to the gin for ginning. Immediately behind the cotton pickers one often sees someone cutting the old stalks and another tractor coming behind that one with a disk, or chisel plows, and another with hippers preparing rows for the next crop. This, however, does not increase fertility, and it does not change growing seasons. Is it possible that this refers to a time when the growing season will be continuous, with no winter break?

Ancient Israelites anticipated The Day of the Lord, even though there is little in the Books of the Law (Torah), or the Books of History (Joshua - II Chronicles), or the Books of Poetry (Job - Ecclesiastes) upon which to establish a clear understanding of that day. The Book of Job was one of the earliest books, if not the first book written, and there is in it a suggestion that there was hope in a coming day of the Lord. Job exclaimed, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (Job 19:25). The believer today is blessed with an abundance of Scripture upon which to build an understanding of the coming Day of the Lord. We not only have the Books of Prophecy Scripture, but numerous passages in the New Testament to provide information about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, End Times, or the Day of Judgment. The Gospels (Matt. 24), Pauline Epistles (I Cor. 15), I Peter (ch. 3) and the Revelation provides a plethora of information to inform, heighten anticipation, and generate hope in that great and terrible day. The people of Amos' day had never read what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul and others to write:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:51-54, NKJV).

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the

heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (II Peter 3:10-13, NKJV).

Revelation 20 deals with final judgment and Revelation 21 reveals the glory of Heaven.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:1-3, NKJV).

Today, however, with the wealth of Scripture we have concerning Eschatology (the study of end times), there is a diversity of interpretations, an abundance of confusion, and disturbing disagreement among Bible students. It is sad that Christians are often hostile toward others believers who do not agree with them to the letter. It should be clear to every Christian that the Lord did not give us so much information about end times to either confuse or divide us. Our understanding of Eschatology should encourage the development of the fruit of the Spirit; "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23a, NKJV)), but never the works of the flesh; "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies" (Gal. 5:20).

The new believer should be both informed and assured by what Jesus told His disciples in His Farewell Discourse:

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there

you may be also (John 14:1-3, NKJV).

But even the most dedicated student of the Word should heed the note of caution with Jesus' "disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you (Matt. 24:3-4).

In our study of Eschatology we must avoid taking Scripture out of context and then putting it back together in a patchwork fashion. We must avoid attitudes of bitterness toward those who disagree with us. We must continue to grow in our understanding of that blessed hope, and we must continue to watch and pray. Finally, we must not become so caught up in that which is not clearly revealed that we forget, or neglect, that which is clearly taught. Until there is fuller understanding about the details of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we must concentrate on what He expects us to be doing in the mean time - loving, worshiping, serving, and witnessing for Him.

**9:14 - I WILL BRING AGAIN.** Israel would fall in 722 B.C. when Sargon II of Assyria invaded Israel and deported large numbers to be settled among the various nations, and import foreigners to be settled in the land that was known as the northern kingdom. Only a remnant from Israel was spared when some fled to Judah before it was too late. Judah was taken into captivity in three invasions and consequent deportations (606, 597, and 586 B.C.) After seventy years (corresponding to the number of Sabbath Years they had refused to observe) a remnant from Judah returned under Zerubabel to rebuild the temple. At that time a few of the descendants of the exiled people from the northern kingdom joined themselves to the returning remnant from Judah.

**THEY SHALL BUILD AGAIN.** They returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and to build again the waste cities and inhabit them. Following this there would be but one nation would be known as Israel, or Judea.

**PLANT VINEYARDS...MAKE GARDENS.** It was God's plan for them to return, having been purged of idolatry, and resettle the land and live in it. They were to: " plant vineyards and drink their wine, And make gardens and eat their fruit." They had refused to observe the Sabbath Year and let the land remain fallow, but God saw to it that it would lay fallow for seventy years, after which they would return not only to plant and cultivate, but to enjoy the fruit of their labor. There is in this verse the promise that God would bless the faithful remnant if they remained faithful to Him.

**9:15 - I WILL PLANT THEM.** Is it possible that Amos makes a transition between verses 14 and 15, from the promise of the return of His Chosen People in 536 B.C. to a final return of Israelites who have

been dispersed among the nations, never to be exiled again? Does this point to a future time when Israel would permanently possess the land promised them in Gen. 15:18-21?

God's past dealings and future plans for Israel have been favorite subjects for speculation among Bible students. Some claim that the modern state of Israel is fulfillment of this prophecy. Since 1948, when Israel was reestablished as a nation, students of prophecy have observed events concerning Israel with great interest. Many believe God is committed to national Israel and to the land He promised Abraham and his descendants. Accordingly, He will maintain national Israel until the end of time.

There are others who hold that the prophecy of Amos is fulfilled in the Church. They see the concept of the remnant being transformed into the Christian "remnant" (Rom. 11:27); thus that remnant inherits the gifts and call of God (Rom. 11:29). From the remnant that returned to the land from exile, through Christ, came ultimately the church. Thus the real Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) is the long line of all faithful believers from the exile through modern times and into the future [6: 40].

Some Bible students question this brief passage on the restoration and prosperity of Israel as being inconsistent with the message of judgment Amos has preached up to this point. Those who take this position overlook the fact that hope is a vital part of Hebrew literature, especially in the prophetic literature.

Hebrew prophets naturally follow a statement of condemnation with one of hope. The hope here envisioned is a millennial hope. When Israel's tabernacle of David is restored (v. 11), the results of God's blessings will be apparent in every phase of life. The earth will yield its harvest so abundantly that the reapers will scarcely be able to reap the fields before the plowmen come to begin planting for the next year (v. 13). Israel will never again be taken captive, and she will possess her God-ordained land (vv. 14, 15) [15: BSB].

There are those who question Amos' authorship of these last verses on the grounds that they find it difficult to believe that the same prophet would preach both judgment and hope. However,

For the true prophet, judgment was never God's ultimate purpose. God's acts in history are always for His greater redemptive purpose. The Book of Revelation serves as the final word on the relationship between judgment and hope QV - BSB].



**SAITH THE LORD THY GOD.** It is as easy to overlook the obvious as it is to overlook the repetitious. Frequent use of the words “says the LORD God” should never be viewed as redundant. Repetition in Scripture serves a divine purpose. In reading an English translation of the Old Testament, Like the KJV, it helps to pay careful attention to the name used for God. “God” is a translation of the Hebrew word Elohim, the more universal, or generic name for God, denoting power. He had the power to create the world and He has the power to sustain it. The word translated “Lord” is from the Hebrew word Adonai, which denotes lordship or sovereignty. He has the sovereign right to rule over all He has created. The word “LORD” (all caps) is from the Hebrew YHWH (the Tetragramaton), which may have been pronounced Yahweh and transliterated in the ASV as Jehovah.

Yahweh is the name by which the Lord identified Himself to Moses from the burning bush. The Lord told Moses He had heard the cry of His people from their bondage in Egypt and that He was going to send Moses to stand before Pharaoh and demand their release.

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (NNAS).

In the fullest sense he is saying, “I AM THAT I AM, I WAS THAT I WAS, AND I WILL BE THAT WHICH I WILL BE.” By using this name He is declaring, in essence, “I exist of Myself, and I am the cause or your existence.” This is the covenant name for God, the most holy name by which He is known.

When Hebrew scribes were copying Scripture and came to this name for God, left a blank out of reverence sacredness of the covenant name for God. In reading the Scripture, when they came to this name they would pause long enough for the listener to think of the covenant name for God. Thus, the name was never written, nor spoken and in time only the consonants YHWH were preserved. Vowels from the name Adonai

were inserted to give us the name Yahweh. It is no wonder that one of the Ten Commandments is:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (Ex. 20:7, NNAS).

One of the most awe inspiring scenes in the Old Testament is found in Exodus 34, when the Lord told Moses to “hew thee two tables of stone and “I will write upon these tables...” Moses hewed the stones.

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. Then the LORD passed by in front of him

and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" (Ex. 34:5-7, NNAS.)

## A WARNING FOR AMERICA

Chuck Colson began the Prologue of his book, *Against the Night*, with the words, "It was 146 B.C. and the sun was setting over the great city of Carthage..." Hannibal, the brilliant Carthaginian had crossed the Alps and assaulted the city of Rome and "Rome's mighty army was pushed to the brink of defeat." But in General Scipio Africanus, Rome found an answer to Hannibal. They fought back and eventually he led his army in an attack on Carthage. They fought fiercely for three years, and the 700,000 citizens of Carthage fought back just as fiercely. Finally, after losing legions to the Carthaginians, Rome prevailed and Scipio ordered the city of Carthage burned.

Scipio Africanus stood on a hillside watching Carthage burn. His face streaked with sweat and dirt of battle, glowed with the fire of setting sun and the flames of the city, but no smile of triumph crossed his lips. No gleam of victory shone from his eyes. Instead, as the Greek historian Polybius would later record, the Roman general "burst into tears, and stood long reflecting on the inevitable change which awaits cities, nations, and dynasties, one and all, as it does every one of us men" [3: 16].

Colson rightly concludes:

In the dying light of that dying city, Scipio saw the end of Rome itself. Just as Rome had destroyed others, so it would one day be destroyed. Scipio Africanus, the great conqueror and extender of empires, saw the inexorable truth: no matter how mighty it may be, no nation, no empire, no culture is immortal [3: 16].

This book was not written by some wild-eyed fanatic, but by a brilliant evangelical minister who has witnessed our society from the courtroom, the White House, and Colson, and from prison, as well as pulpit and pew. I have heard Colson speak and I have read his books and various columns in *Christianity Today* magazine. We would not be wise to dismiss his warning. He begins the first chapter as follows:

Two thousand years after Scipio Africanus's empty victory at Carthage, we, too, scan the horizon with unease. We sense that things are winding down, that somehow freedom, justice, and order are slipping away. Our great civilization may not yet lie in smoldering ruins, but *the enemy is within the gates*. The times seem to smell of sunset (italics added) [3: 19].

I believe Colson was right in warning that it seems toward sunset for America and for Western man. It may be more appropriate to say that it is toward sunset for the whole world, but his subject was America. His warning seems pungent, but the concern is real, and it is shared by many students of the Word of God, especially those who are concerned with Eschatology, or end-time studies. Alexander Solzhenitsyn warned in graphic terms of the "spiritual exhaustion" of Western man.

Malcolm Muggeridge, as always, paints it more colorfully: "Having educated himself into imbecility and polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, [Western man] keeled over: a weary, battered, old Brontosaurus, and became extinct" [3: 23].

Is he right? If so, is there any hope? Does the Lord have a message for us today? More than one hundred-fifty years after Amos delivered his messages in Israel, and over a century after the prophesied destruction of Israel, the Lord sent Jeremiah to warn Judah that He was going to use the Babylonians to take Judah into captivity. They rejecting the prophecy and threw the prophet into a dungeon.

When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days, then Zedekiah the king sent and took him out. The king asked him secretly in his house, and said, "*Is there any word from the LORD?*" And Jeremiah said, "*There is.*" Then he said, "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!" (NKJV, italics added).

There is a word from the Lord today for America and for any other nation, as there is for individuals, concerned with survival. It is not a new word, but it works - we have God's word on it.

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land II Chron. 7:14, NKJV).

Bible students should approach the Book of Amos with a sense of awe because the Author of this prophecy is none other than the LORD God. We should conclude our study with a greater sense of reverence than when we began. If there is genuine reverence for the LORD God, there will be a response of love, of praise, and of obedience. As you study God's Word, may

The LORD bless you, and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.  
Numbers 6:24-26, NNAS

## ABBREVIATIONS

### BIBLES:

KJV            King James Version  
  
NKJV    New King James Version  
  
NAC            New American Commentary  
  
NASB    New American Standard Bible  
NNAS    New New American Standard  
  
NIV            New International Version  
  
NRSV    New Revised Standard Version

### SOFTWARE:

BSB            Believer's Study Bible            Parsons Technology

HBD	Holmon Bible Dictionary	"	"
MH	Matthew Henry Commentary	"	"
PCBA	PC Bible Atlas	"	"
RSB	Ryrie Study Bible	"	"

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## APPENDIX

### NOTES AND QUOTES

#### NOTE 1

According to the Jerusalem Times, 25,000 Hamas supporters gathered (Dec., 1995) at an anti-Zion rally in Gaza. At the rally, Arafat promised them the city of Jerusalem. Signs read:

"We will make the land of Palestine a graveyard for the children of Zion."

"The bodies of Zion's children we will throw on the garbage dumps of Palestine."

"We will never change."

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#### NOTE 2

Within a period of one month two different senior adult men talked with me about deteriorating

moral conditions in America. One was a well traveled man with experience in aviation both at home and abroad. The other was a retired policeman from a large northern city. Both men assured me that moral conditions had gotten this bad a number of times in the past and they always improved. "Things will get better," one assured me. "They always have. People will get tired of the way they are living and they will start living better." The other asked if I did not think people always turn to the Lord in a time of trouble.

Were they right? On what grounds do they base such optimism? I pointed out that there have indeed been times when moral decline have been followed by spiritual renewal, or revival. But those revivals, or spiritual awakenings came when people were convicted of sin and repented. In the first place, those revivals were not the result of moral reform but spiritual revival; not the work of man, but the work of God.

In the second place, when people turned to the Lord in time of trouble, it was during the Christian era of America's history, not during the post-Christian era. For example, during the World War I and World War II people went to church and called on the Lord. But when we were at war in Viet Nam, masses behaved as though they had never heard of God.

Is there any hope for America? Yes, but the Lord is our only hope. It will not come simply because man gets sick of his sinfulness. The moral climate aul describes in the first chapter of Romans is proof of that. Think of conditions in Russia following seven decades of Communist rule. Russia is a nation in a state of moral degeneration, with wide spread corruption, graft, and various forms of organized crime. Murder had reached epidemic proportions.

Moral relativism stands in the way of repentance and repentance must precede revival. The Scriptuer is clear:

If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (II Chron. 7:14).

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### NOTE 3

The Book of Amos speaks to modern day America. Moral, social, and spiritual circumstances are disturbingly analogous. Politically, in spite of differences in the forms of government, problems are



remarkably similar.

1. **GOVERNMENT.** Israel was governed by a monarch who had brought prosperity and security to the land. Even though neither the king nor the people could foresee it, both were in grave jeopardy. America is a republic, a representative democracy which is the envy of the world. We have known both prosperity and security, but there are signs that democracy as we know it may not survive another generation. Both our security and our prosperity are at risk.

2. **SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS.** A secular writer might list moral problems, or social problems, but in reality all moral and social problems are spiritual in nature.

Ancient Israel was guilty of greed; so is America.

Ancient Israel was guilty of immorality; so is America.

Ancient Israel was guilty of substance abuse; so is America.

Ancient Israel was guilty of class strife; so is America.

Ancient Israel was guilty of violence; so is America.

Ancient Israel was guilty of idolatry; so is America.

Ancient Israel denied guilt; so does America.

3. **SOLUTIONS.** In the eighth century BC Israel continually looked to answers in all the wrong places. So it is with America at the turn of the twenty-first century. They looked to the king and his policies, to political alliances and military power. Many looked to false gods.

As America entered the post-Christian era, she naturally began to look more to government to solve problems, and less to God and the church. We have applied the most sophisticated educational programs, the most advanced technical training, the most highly developed social programs, and most finely tuned political programs in history in an effort to solve our problems.

4. **RESULTS.** In ancient Israel, their political and religious leaders could produce temporary outward results, but did not solve the problems at their source. They did not change the inner man and until you change the inner person you do not produce lasting results that God will approve. The land was filled with religious leaders who polluted worship and political leaders who defiled the name of God.

America is guilty of many of the same sins. The fall of a few televangelists has been well publicized and the failure of the church to curb crime, or reform society has received a lot of attention. Politicians use God's name when they determine that it is good for their political careers, but avoid it when

they are afraid it will be a liability. The "elite" in both the media and academia often express hostility toward God and Christianity.

Polls indicate that a very high percentage of Americans believe in God (or a god-presence, or some higher spiritual power), but America grows more and more ungodly. Belief in God is not impacting the lives of those who profess to believe. Moral relativism seeks to erase sin from the dictionary and eradicate guilt from the heart.

The church has failed, and is failing, God in America. New buildings are being built, the most beautiful facilities with adequate space. We offer programs, gymnasiums, sermons, and concerts. But something is missing. We report record numbers in the area of nickels and noses (attendance and offerings), but something is missing. That something is POWER. The power that is missing is the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), Whose ministry is quenched by the faithlessness of those who profess to know Him.

The church has watered down Scripture, neglected doctrine, forsaken godliness, and disdained holiness. We have let the world shape the church. The church is not impacting the world. More and more groups like the ACLU are putting the church in what they consider to be its place - in the home and in the church building, and out of the market place and the public arena. Christians are letting it happen and we are not fighting back - better to be respectable than in jail!

**5. HOPE.** Is there any hope? In the first place, people should ask, "Is there a problem?" There are major problems - more than most church members can see. But there is hope. That hope is the same hope that has always been held out to those who will repent and commit themselves to the Lord.

There are more churches than at any time in history. There are more preachers, ministers of music, youth, activities, ministers to seniors, evangelists and missionaries than ever. There are more sophisticated programs, greater budgets, and better facilities than ever before. There are more Christian publishers and book stores, Christian book clubs, music stores, audio and video tapes, radio and television programs than ever. There are many godly Christians and many ministers who do preach the Gospel without compromise. Why, then, are we not reaching America for Christ?

Either God has lost His power to act, or we are doing something wrong! Since God cannot fail and His power cannot be diminished, we must be at fault. What do we do? The church must rediscover the Bible. Scripture. The Word of God. If we love Him we will love His Word and if we love His Word we will study it and apply it. The more we use it the more we will love it. The church needs to rediscover the power and blessings of prayer. We are invited to call on the name of the Lord. Herein is the answer: prayer and Bible study; ministry and witnessing.

## NOTE 4

### JUSTICE

**“WHAT’S HAPPENING TO THE TRUTH?”** That question appears on the front of the November, 1995 *Limbaugh Letter*. An article under the same title deals with justice in California courtrooms following the O. J. Simpson trial in 1995. Rush Limbaugh quotes Simpson attorney, Johnnie L. Chchran: “Someone has taken these children’s mother,” thundered Johnnie L. Chchran, Jr. to the O. J. Simpson jury. “I hope your decision doesn’t take their father.”

This moment of attorney posturing reminded me of the old Yiddish definition of *chutzpa*: Someone who kills his mother and father and then throws himself on the mercy of the court because he’s an orphan. For decades, this aphorism was always said in jest, the humor to be found in the absurdity and the hyperbole of the fictional courtroom image. The unspoken assumption was, *Ha! That could never happen.*

Until the 1990s that is - when fiction became fact, and absurdity became standard operating procedure in some California courtrooms. Because then came the Menendez brothers, and the *chutzpa* defense actually worked --- with two juries. “Yeah, we killed our parents, we shot our mother in the face, but look at us now - we’re all alone in the world.” And enough of he jury wept: “Those poor boy!” To render them unable to reach a verdict.

No wonder Rush Limbaugh asked, “What’s happening to the truth?” He asks:

Where does this come from? I am convinced that it emerges naturally, as night follows day, from the tenets of liberalism. Judgment, you see, is an ugly word to liberals. Judgment is the ability to pronounce one thing better than another to make evaluative distinctions, to declare one thing right and another wrong.

*The Limbaugh Letter (“what’s Happening to the Truth?”), November, 1995.*

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## NOTE 5

### LYING

Columnist William Safire caused quite an uproar across America when he called the first lady, Hillary Clinton, “a congenital liar.” William Buckley, Jr. followed with an editorial in which he pointed out that Safire proved that she is a liar but he could not prove that she was a congenital liar. Following congressional hearings on the Clinton’s involvement in the Savings and Loan scandal, Whitewater scandal, and questionable handling of evidence in the Vince Foster case, many people are making the same charges.

Hillary Clinton, upon her arrival in New Zealand on a tour, mentioned Sir Edmond Hilary, New Zealand’s favorite son who was the first to climb Mt. Everest. Mrs. Clinton told New Zealanders that her father had named her after Sir Edmond Hillary. Mrs. Clinton was born in 1947. At the time Hilary was a simple beekeeper in New Zealand. He climbed Mt. Everest in 1953.

Rush Limbaugh is one of President Clinton’s most severe critics. He has published lists of lies told by President Bill Clinton and others in the White House. He has exposed lies in his administration by simply playing clips in which the president, the first lady, or another official says one thing at one time and right the opposite a little later - often after the next poll results are published. A special four page insert in a *Limbaugh Letter* was entitled, “How Can We Fool ‘Em Today?” Limbaugh points out that one political party has refined deception to an art and used the lie as a common political method of operation. My concern is that in this postmodern, post-Christian period, misrepresentation and deception may becoming a standard method of operation for many in politice, regardless of party affiliation.

A number of “Talk Radio” personalities have made a strong case against the dominant media for using their space and time to promote their own agenda, even if it means cooperating with liberals in high places when they know they are not telling the truth. Brent Bozell heads up a group that monitors news agency for fairness. They have found the “elite” in the media to be decidedly biased against conservatives and for liberals. It has often been suggested that if Ronald Reagan had conducted himself the way Bill Clinton has, the media would have attacked him like sharks in a feeding frenzy.

To illustrate the way politicians can use the lie as a tool to promote themselves or their agenda, consider Vice President Al Gore claim that the Clinton administration has re-invented government in two ways; by eliminating government job, and cutting cost of government by \$108 billion in five years. At the

half-way point in their administration. Gore claims that they are ahead of schedule. Byron York, (*The American Spectator*, "Big Al's Big Scam," Feb., 1996, pp 39-43) points out that the administration has claims credit for eliminating 160,000 federal jobs. What they do not point out is that most of those whose jobs were eliminated were either civilian defense jobs that were being eliminated because of down-sizing of the military following the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the last year of the Bush administration 41,000 civilian defense jobs were eliminated.

A significant number of the jobs cut were with the Resolution Trust Company which was created to "clean up the savings and loan scandal." It went out of business at the end of 1995. According to York, "the administration has cut a grand total of 16, 100 jobs - less than one percent of the work force." They also added 3000 jobs in other areas.

York points out similar discrepancies in the claim that the administration has cut the cost of government. Others might defend the vice president on the grounds that he was merely revising his estimates.

My point is not that it is wrong for Al Gore to tell a lie, for for Bill Clinton to tell a lie. My point is that a lie is still an abomination to the Lord and God will not bless a nation whose leaders (of any party) freely practice what God loathes.

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## NOTE 6

### SIN

Of the three words used in the Old Testament for sin (sin, transgression, and iniquity), sin is the most common. By definition, sin means to miss the mark. If an archer shot an arrow at a target and it fell short of, or sailed to either side of it, it was said that he had missed the mark. We sin when we fall short of God's sovereign will, and His perfect character - His holiness, His impeccable righteousness.

When I was a youth and a young man, I loved the out of doors, especially hunting, fishing, and shooting. I enjoyed challenging shots with a rifle or handgun. After I graduated from seminary I bought a new rifle with a 3 X - 9 X variable scope. On my next trip to visit my parents and younger brother, and sister (Mike and Linda) on our Mississippi Delta, I took my new scoped rifle. At the first opportunity I took Mike, my younger brother, out side to shoot my new rifle. I chose a target, set my scope on 9 power and leaned over and rested the rifle on one side of the bed of Daddy's bright shinny yellow chevrolet pick-

up. I was amazed at the clarity of the scope and cognizant of the fact that because I was resting the rifle on the side of the truck, the cross-hairs seemed frozen on the target.

I squeezed off my shot and heard the impact of the bullet; but I was absolutely amazed. I had not hit the target! I knew I had heard the bullet hit something but it was not the target. As I surveyed the area around the target there was no indication that I had hit anything around it. Still puzzled, I straightened up a little and moved the rifle. There, to my absolute amazement, was a perfectly round hole just below the top of the opposite side of the bed of the truck. I had not taken into account the height of the scope above the rifle.

Not only had I missed the mark, I had hit something I should not have hit. I was embarrassed as I told my father I had shot a hole in the side of his truck. His amusement at my blunder outweighed any problem he had with the hole in the truck.

But everytime I went home I saw the hole and was reminded of my error.

That is the way it is with sin. We do not have to list a whole catalog of sins we have committed. We do not have to be guilty of gross immorality, murder or robbery to be guilty of sin. All we have to do is miss the mark, fall short of God's holiness and His glory. And you can be sure of this one thing: your sin is not amusing to God. The Holy Spirit will convict you of sin and convince you of the righteousness God makes available to you through faith in Jesus Christ, His Son.

Once you are forgiven, you should never look back on your sin with amusement. Both Isaiah and Paul were sickened and repulsed by their sin. They were not amused by their sins and they did not entertain others with stories of their sins. That should be a lesson for us today.

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## NOTE 7

### HOMOSEXUALITY

In *The Family Under Siege*, George Grant chronicles the encouragement of homosexuality by President Bill Clinton and his administration through actions, and through appointments. Some churches now affirm homosexuality by marrying and ordaining homosexuals.

In Monroe, Louisiana, the daily paper has a religious section each Saturday. The "Accent" section

features articles on religion on the front page and church news on the following page. During 1995 and in the first two weeks of 1996 the paper featured articles and pictures dealing with shamanism (sweat tent), Wicca (witchcraft), Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. I counted the listings of churches in the area and found in one directory something like 980 listings for churches and related institutions. They capped all this with a picture and story about a homosexual wedding in some church in the northeast. We are in the post-Christian era in the Bible Belt!

In the Old Testament, when God's people sought revival and restoration, one of the things they did was to attack homosexuality.

And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel (I Kings 14:24).

And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made (I Kings 15:12).

And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he took out of the land (I Kings 22:46).

And he brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove (II Kings 23:7).

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## NOTE 8

### God's Messenger Opposed By Officials

PAUL HARVEY asks, "What did Pastor Joe say?" The following is his Creator Syndicate article in its entirety.

"Man, oh man! They won't invite Pastor Joe to the Kansas State Legislature again! They invited Pastor Joe Wright of Wichita's Central Christian Church to deliver the invocation - and he told God on them! Now, God knows what they've been up to! No sooner had their guest chaplain concluded his prayer than three Democrats on the state legislature

were on their feet at microphones protesting, 'He can't talk like that about us!' Rep. Delbert Gross considered the invocation gross, calling it 'divisive,' 'sanctimonious' and 'overbearing.' Rep. David Haley called it 'blasphemous and ignorant.' Rep. Sabrina Standifer echoed the indignation.

What in the world did Pastor Joe say in Topeka that incited the righteous wrath of three Democrats from Hays and Kansas City? I've secured the entire text of the invocation so you can evaluate it for yourself:

*Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask Your forgiveness  
to seek Your direction and guidance.* **d**

*We know Your word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that  
exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium  
values.* *s*  
and inverted our

*We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your word in  
name of moral pluralism.* **h**

*We have worshiped other gods and called it 'multiculturalism.'  
We have endorsed perversion and called it 'an alternative lifestyle.'*

*We have exploited the poor and called it 'a lottery.'*

*We have neglected the needy and called it 'self-preservation.'*

*We have rewarded laziness and called it 'welfare.'*

*In the name of 'choice', we have killed our unborn.*

*In the name of 'right to life,' we have killed abortionists.*

*We have neglected to discipline our children and called it 'building  
esteem.'*

*We have abused power and called it 'political savvy.'*

*We coveted our neighbors' possessions and called it 'taxes.'*

*We've polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it  
'freedom of expression.'*

*We've ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called  
'enlightenment.'* *t*

*Search us, oh God, and know our hearts today. Try us, and show us any  
wicked in us. Cleanse us from every sin, and set us free.*

*Grant them Your wisdom o rule, and may their decisions direct us to  
center of Your will.* **h**

*I ask it in the name of your son, the living savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*



## QUOTES

### 1. **DICK ARMY** (House Majority Leader from Texas):

There's a big difference between conservatives and liberals in (Washington). Conservatives live with the chronic fear that the public won't understand; liberals live with the chronic fear that the public will understand. So liberals immediately jump out front with their false information and misrepresentations (*The Limbaugh Letter*, Feb, 1995, p. 7).

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