

Amos: The Shepherd Prophet (Part VII)

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] We will finish chapter 6 tonight, which is finishing up the first of two major divisions of the book.

The first division, I have called what Amos said, what he said. So these are the words of Amos that we've been looking at and we'll be looking at tonight and finishing that up as we get to the end of chapter 6.

But of course, we know that these aren't Amos' words, these are God's words through His prophet Amos and carry the full authority of God.

But these are things that are being said that we're considering. And then when we start chapter 7 and on through the end of the book, then we'll be looking at what he saw, his visions.

And so we'll get into that hopefully next time. Now, we didn't finish chapter 5. There aren't 21 chapters in Amos.

[1 : 31] At least as far as I know, there aren't. Anyway, so starting with chapter 5 and verse 21 and really continuing on to the end of the chapter, Amos is going to consider, well not to the end of the chapter, here for several verses.

He's going to be considering three elements of Israel's worship, their worship. He's identifying a problem with their worship and it's pretty clear when you read the passage.

It begins by God saying, I hate, I despise. That's double whammy on their worship. And by the way, the word despise, I didn't go back and check, but I think there are some other translations that may use the word reject.

And that really is the idea. He not only hated their worship, but he rejected it. Totally rejected their worship. And it's going to be very profound.

He's going to state his rejection of their worship very strongly. And we're not talking about false worship at this point, though that does come into play.

[2 : 47] And he's going to deal with that a little bit later in this chapter. We are talking about correct worship in the sense of going through the steps of worship, the requirements for worship given in the Old Testament law.

So it's not that their worship was a wrong type of worship. It is that he hated it and rejected it.

And so, I said that there are three elements of it. And they're very straightforward here in the passage. When you look at verse 21, he says that he hates their feast days.

Let me just go ahead and get the text up here. Verse 21, I hate, I despise your feast days. He hated their feast days. That was a part of their worship.

Their feast days. And then he hated their offerings. Their offerings. That, too, was a very instrumental part or very significant part of the Old Testament worship.

[4 : 02] Feast days. Feast days. And they had a number of those. And offerings. And they had a number of those.

We're not going to look at the passage, but you could jot down there Leviticus chapters 1 through 7. And you can read about the various offerings. There are five of them, actually, in the Levitical law.

And they are known as a pleasing aroma offerings. And they were doing those.

Just according to the law. You know, every jot and every tittle. They were making sure every T was crossed and I was dotted. They were doing all of that. But God hated it.

He rejected it. And then, the third one is their songs and melody.

[4 : 58] There in verse 23, he said, I hate, I despise your feast days. I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from me the noise of your songs.

Interesting how that's worded. The noise of your songs.

Their music. This was that part of their worship that involved music. Now, we don't know exactly what form that took. Jonathan probably knows better than I, maybe, on that.

But it was music and melodies. And he said they were just noise. I'm sure there wasn't anything wrong with the music. You know, they very likely were Davidic psalms, you know, and other psalms that were written by the music leaders of the day, of their day.

And scriptural, I'm sure. But God said they were just noise. And then the melody. He says the melody of your stringed instruments.

[6 : 09] So, you know, they weren't Church of Christ. They had instruments in their worship. Sorry about that. But God hated it.

It was noise. And He rejected it. So, He hated their worship. He rejected their worship. And what's interesting is God's reaction to Israel's worship is kind of threefold.

He shut His nostrils, closed His eyes, and stopped up His ears. And you have all three of those here in the passage. I hate, I despise your feast days.

I do not savor your sacred assemblies. That is, literally, I cannot stand the smell of them. It's what He's saying.

Though you offer me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings, and then take away from me the noise.

[7 : 17] So, by the way, when He says, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings, the word regard means I will not even look at them.

So, you brought these offerings. I won't even look at them. I shut my eyes. And then when you offer up your music, you know, in singing, in instrument, instrumentality, I'll close my ears, shut up my ears.

That's pretty strong. Now, God, of course, these are what are called anthropomorphisms. I mean, because God doesn't have physical eyes like we do.

He's not flesh and blood. Eyes, ears, you know, things like that. And so, it's a very strong statement that God is, every part of God, all the senses of God are closed off to their worship of Him.

And the question is, why? Well, He answers that. Why did God reject Israel's worship? And there are two reasons that are given here in the text.

[8 : 30] In verse 24, He says, but let justice run down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream. That sounds very positive, but the implication is there was no justice exacted in Israel.

No righteousness. That's the implication. Justice should run down like a water. In fact, the idea there is a waterfall that just continues to come.

I mean, you can't hardly imagine stopping up a waterfall. It just keeps coming. You can't hold your hand up. You can't dam it up, at least not where the water is falling. It's the idea of a continuous overflowing of justice.

And that's what God desires. That justice overflow. That nothing stop it. Nothing hinder it. And righteousness is like a mighty stream. And a mighty stream brings up an image of a mountain stream that just keeps running, keeps running, never seems to run out.

And you wonder, you know, I've done that many a time in the mountains when we would go camping and sit by a mountain stream. And, you know, we're kind of high up elevation already anyway.

[9 : 46] And I'm thinking, where's all this water coming from? It just keeps coming and keeps coming. But that's the image here. And so this is God's desire that justice would be like a waterfall.

Nothing could stop it. And righteousness, doing what is right before God's eyes, should be like a mountain stream that never runs out of water. But the implication is none of that existed in Israel.

And so how do you connect that with their worship? Well, you know, they were worshiping in the right manner and doing the right according to the particular procedures of law, of the law, the Mosaic law.

But because there was no justice and no righteousness, God rejected their worship. And that's a pretty important lesson. We'll talk about that a little bit more here in a minute.

But religious activity, no matter how zealous one might be, in religious activity, including worship, really that encompasses worship, there's no substitute for righteousness.

[11 : 00] Worship does not appease God if there's unrighteousness in your life. God rejects your worship. Religious activity may be a hindrance even to repentance.

And this quote, it was because Israel was so religious that they did not repent. Now, think about that for a minute and you might ask yourself, well, how does that work?

That you could be so religious that it would actually be a hindrance to getting right with God, to repentance. You see, Israel had heard the message from the prophet Amos and it was a message of judgment and a message of repentance as we've already seen.

And there's going to be more of that as we continue on in the book. But instead of repenting, what did they do? They became more religious. That is, in the form and ritual and those things prescribed by the law.

And the application for us is that we have a tendency to do the same thing. You know, that's true of a people, true of a denomination, true of us individually.

[12:21] There's an expression that... actually, not just an expression, a truism or an axiom. And that is that busyness produces barrenness.

When you apply that to the church, you can see this happening and maybe you've experienced this. You get so busy with the work of the Lord that you don't spend enough time with the Lord.

And so actually, your busyness in serving Him, busyness in the church, can result in a spiritual barrenness in your life because you have no devotion with God, no communion with Him, and you're not taking care of the most important thing, and that is your fellowship and relationship with God.

It's a truism. And I bet you've experienced it. You just get so busy that you kind of feel a dryness in your life spiritually. But I want to turn that around and say that much of the time, though, the opposite is true.

That is that barrenness produces busyness. That is, you know, it's kind of a vicious cycle. You get kind of busy, you know, and all in the name of serving the Lord, and you're there every time the doors are open to the church, and you teach Sunday school and serve on ten committees, and, you know, all these things, but you are neglecting your own spiritual, personal spiritual disciplines, not spending time with God in prayer, and a barrenness kind of starts creeping into your life, a spiritual barrenness.

[14:04] And so, then when the barrenness begins to creep into your life and you feel it and sense it and you don't do anything about it, what sometimes we do is we get busier.

We kind of fall into the trap of thinking that, well, I just need to redouble my efforts. You know, I feel a barrenness with God, a deadness, maybe a dryness, maybe He's not as near to me as He once was, or I'm not as near to Him.

And so, instead of just getting on our knees and praying and searching God's Word, we add more religious activity.

You know, so I've just got to get busier. And so, it's kind of a vicious cycle. So, think of that. Busyness produces barrenness. And if we're not careful, that barrenness will produce more busyness.

The other reason that God hated and rejected Israel's worship is found in verses 25-26, and it is that they were guilty of idolatry.

[15:13] Now, that's kind of a strange combination here. I just said, and I said it because it's clear from Scripture that Israel was very religious, and they were performing all of the rituals and ceremonies of worship that God had prescribed that they do, and yet at the same time, they were also involved in idolatry.

So, the two were happening at the same time. In that passage, in fact, let me go ahead and read, I think I put the verses there in your notes.

In verse 25, did you offer me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness? In the wilderness 40 years, O house of Israel?

And what's that a reference to? It's a reference to the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness by the Israelites because they did not trust God, did not believe God, and so he said, none of you will enter into the promised land.

So they wandered for 40 years. And apparently, in that 40 years, there are several references in Scripture that they were involved in idolatry in those times.

[16:37] And I put down, I think, did I give you Leviticus 17.7? You can look at these on your own. There are some references there. One, a couple in the Old Testament, one in the book of Acts, references to Israel's idolatry during the 40 year wilderness before they finally entered into the promised land.

So you've got Joshua 24.23 and Acts 7.42. Acts 7.42 is Stephen's reference to their idolatry. Alright, so he's saying, you know, here's my problem with you and why I've rejected your worship.

It's because there's no justice, no righteousness going on in the nation. And in fact, injustice is taking place all around and unrighteousness.

And not only that, but you've also allowed there to be this combination of right worship and false worship. Idolatry. And he references to the 40 years of wilderness wandering.

And then in verse 26, he says, you also carried Siketh, excuse me, Siketh, your king, and Chion, your idols, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

[17 : 59] Now that's a reference to now. Not only were they in idolatry during the 40 years and he's just reminding them of that time, but he's saying the same thing is going on in the nation Israel now.

Idolatry. And these references here are a little difficult to identify. These names like Siketh and Chion.

But then the reference there to the stars of your gods means very likely these were what they call astral idols, deities, false deities.

and they were worshipping them during this time and because of that God would not accept their worship. In fact, He hated it, despised it, rejected it.

God does not accept divided loyalties from His people. Verse 27 describes Israel's coming destruction.

[19 : 07] And He says in verse 27, therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is God of hosts. The God of hosts.

I say here once again, because we've already had several already references to God's judgment upon them. And so, there's kind of a formula here.

There is the statement of the sin and the problem and God's reaction to their sin. and then a restatement in various ways of the judgment that God is going to send upon them.

And so, in verse 27, we have that. Now, He says, into captivity beyond Damascus. And that's a clue on who the invading empire will be and it will be Assyria.

If you look at a map, I think I've put a map there in your notes. Damascus is quite a bit north, northern part of Israel.

[20 : 14] And you see, during the time, in that dark green there, from 824 B.C., that was the size of the Assyrian army. And this, that was, not the Assyrian army, the Assyrian empire.

And this was how large they were prior to their invasion of Israel out of the northern kingdom, conquering them and taking them away captive, which, by the way, took place, I think, started in 600, or excuse me, 700, 740 B.C.

and was completed in 722. You know, you have to work backward in your numbers when you're talking about B.C. So by 722, Israel was, was, was captive and by the time of 671, the Assyrian empire took up that huge area in that, the lighter green, which would include also the darker green. So, they became the superpower of the day and the northern kingdom was taken captive by them. You see, Judah is still there and they would not be conquered by the Assyrians.

It would be the Babylonians that will eventually conquer and conquer them. Alright, chapter 6. In chapter 6, we have the second of two woes.

[21 : 43] I don't know if you remember, but when we started chapter 5, we started with a woe and not a woe stop, but a woe to you, you know, a condemnation upon you.

And here's the second one in chapter 6. The first woe was back in 518 and it was addressed to those who desired the day of the Lord.

We talked about that already. The second woe here in 6.1 is addressed to those who are at ease in Zion. There's that famous passage you probably have heard before.

Those who are at ease in Zion and trust in Mount Samaria. So this is the second woe. And what is this referring to?

Well, there are two senses in which to understand this woe. There's a literal meaning and then there is also a spiritual application.

[22 : 48] In fact, I would say that the spiritual application is so broad that it would encompass believers today as well. God's people today. The literal, literally speaking, literally speaking rather, Zion, that's mentioned there in verse 1, woe to you who are at ease in Zion, refers to Jerusalem.

Because Zion is referenced to Jerusalem and I specifically put in there the wall of the city of Jerusalem as a fortress. It sat on top of a mountain.

And was walled. It was quite a fortress. Very difficult to conquer. And so Zion is a reference to that. And so then the spiritual application, spiritually speaking, is that Israel felt that because they were God's people, God would always protect them.

That in a sense, they were like in Zion in a walled city and there was no way that any conqueror could come and destroy them. Again, literally speaking, because you have a second phrase there, trust in the mountain of Samaria, carries the same idea.

Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom and it was a great walled city. So this is parallelism. He's using both these two literal places to convey the idea to His people Israel that their confidence is misplaced or their confidence is shallow.

[24 : 34] God's not going to protect them when they sin. And so spiritually speaking, then, the woe here is directed to both Israel and Judah.

And I would say beyond that, it's directed to all of God's people. Because every one of us can be at ease in Zion in the sense that we think no matter what we do, God's not going to divorce us, that God's not going to kick us out of the family.

And we can almost find ourselves, sometimes find ourselves making an excuse for ourselves because of our quote, eternal security, end quote. And I put it in quotes not because I don't believe it, I believe in eternal security.

But that's not a license to sin. And then there are other applications to that. We can just get so comfortable, comfortable in our life, in our service of the Lord, in our quote, Christianity, that we just get lax, get lazy.

And I think that's somewhat the idea, ease in Zion and thinking that God won't shake us up sometimes. And when we do get shook up by some event in our life, we instead of seeing God's hand in that because we were getting too comfortable, too lazy, instead of that we complain against God and gripe and complain.

[26 : 08] Amos calls upon Israel to compare themselves to three nearby cities. I've got a head ahead of myself and got my notes behind.

Colne is a city and it was a mighty Assyrian city. And so God is, through Amos, is telling Israel, I want you to compare yourself to these cities, these great cities.

And then Hamath was a very wealthy, materially wealthy Aramean city in the empire of Aram, which was northeast of Israel.

And then Gath, which was a magnificent Philistine city, one of their chief cities in Philistia, southwest of Israel. So, he's just telling Israel, I want you to just take note, look, compare yourself to these great empires.

And God asked then, are you better than they? Are your borders greater? And the implied answer is no.

[27 : 34] And so, you're not going to find any confidence there. And then verse 3, which is still a part of the woe, this second woe, verse 3 says, woe to you, and matter of fact, woe to you is only found in the New King James version.

It's in italics, not in the original text. Most versions start out with, you who put far off the day of doom.

So, this is a continuation of the same woe, not a new woe, a third woe. He says, who put off the day of doom, who caused the seat of violence rather than justice to come near.

The point being that they had denied that judgment was fast approaching. God's judgment that had already been pronounced upon them and the prophet had already informed them of God's judgment, but they denied that, denied any judgment.

That's what it means when it says you put far off the day of doom. You just kind of put it out of your mind. A lot of people do that today. They don't want to deal with what the Bible says about a day of accounting, a day of judgment.

[28 : 53] And so they say well that's just never going to come. They just put it out of their mind.

That's what Israel had done. And not only had put out the judgment of God, put that judgment out of their minds as if it was never going to happen, but they just continued on in the kind of injustice.

In fact, when it says there who caused the seat of violence, it is you would normally find the seat of justice.

So what he's doing there is saying your seat of justice is no more, it's a seat of violence rather than justice. That is, you are violent toward those who are in need, not issuing just laws and judgments,

and instead you are issuing violence against those who are in need.

Verses 4-6 describe the luxuries Israel's elite were enjoying at the expense of the poor. And we've already dealt with this in the book.

that was one of God's chief problems with Israel. Much of the injustice and unrighteousness was being done at the hands of the elite and wealthy.

[30 : 24] And so they're oppressing the poor and needy among Israel, and at the same time building luxurious houses and so forth.

And so verses 4-6 give a pretty good description. He's talking about the elite, he says, who lie on beds of ivory. So they had the best beds.

I don't know what the mattresses were like, but the frames were pretty expensive. Ivory. Stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stalls.

So they had the best beds and the best food. In fact, it says calves there, it's fatted calves.

They're especially bred and fattened and the very best. Today we would call it veal. And so it would be very expensive. So they lived on, ate the best food.

[31 : 26] Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments. So they had an easy lifestyle. Just rest and relaxation and didn't really accomplish anything.

They didn't have to do anything. Just sat back and enjoyed life. And invented for yourselves musical instruments like David who drink wine from bowls.

And that's a rather interesting expression. You don't normally drink from bowls. But it's a reference to the excess. I mean, they drank so much, they drank it out of bowls.

And anoint yourselves with the best ointments. so they had the most expensive of perfumes and other kinds of ointments. But are not grieved for the afflicted of Joseph.

So all throughout this, I mean, they're living in luxury and, you know, of course, on the backs of the poor and those that have not been treated justly.

[32 : 32] So they're living all that way and so busy with their pleasures and their wealth and so forth, their wealth and prosperity, that they were not even concerned about the ruin of Israel.

It describes a lot of people in our country who don't care where our country is going. You know, as long as they can have all the good best things and make money and so forth, and that's what was going on in Israel.

And they didn't even have time to grieve over the ruin of Joseph, is what he said. That means the northern kingdom. That's a reference to the northern kingdom. The sons of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

And they did not even believe any such ruin was possible for them. So, hence the idea they were at ease in Zion.

verse 7 promises that the elite will be the first to go into captivity.

[33 : 44] So, here they are living in luxury and best of everything and a life. They don't even have to work or do anything.

They just drink and eat and have fun. and yet God says you're going to be the first ones to go. When the Assyrians came into Israel to conquer the northern kingdom, it didn't happen all at once. Parts were taken and then later and eventually it was all done. But they, he says, will be the first ones to go. They're going to be the first ones to taste judgment.

Verse 8 is God's promise of judgment. And the Lord God has sworn by Himself, the Lord God of hosts, He says, I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his palaces.

Therefore, I will deliver up the city and all that is in it. So, that's a promise. He's going to bring judgment.

[34 : 57] Verses 9 through 10 reveal the extent of that judgment. And it's rather interesting how it is put there. Let me go ahead and read those few verses.

Then it shall come to pass that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. A little confusing in the interpretation because when you get on into verse 10 you understand there's still one alive.

The idea being that the majority are going to die. So, you get into verse 10, when a relative of the dead with one who will burn the bodies picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, so there's still one in the house, are there any more with you?

Then someone will say none and he will say, hold your tongue for we dare not mention the name of the Lord. Now, what's all this about? Well, the simple answer is that if there's ten in the house, when the army attacks, only one's going to be left.

And so then when a relative comes to see what's happening in the house, you know, bury the dead, there's one left, and then finds out that everyone else is dead, and then says, thou hold your tongue, you're not going to even mention the Lord.

[36 : 29] And that sounds strange. So, what in the world is all that about? Well, the idea is that we're not going to have any kind of funeral service for these people.

that's what he means when he says we're not going to mention the name of the Lord. Literally, we're not going to have a time of remembrance.

We're not going to have a funeral service. And there are several possible reasons why that would be the case. Number one, it could be that the conquerors would forbid it.

They're going to conquer, but they're not going to allow the people who survived to give all of their dead a proper burial. It could be that the conquerors would not allow it. Second possibility is that because of the situation, it being the judgment of God, maybe it would be inappropriate for them to have a funeral service where they honor God as they are remembering the dead because it was done by God.

It's His judgment. So, maybe they just felt like it was inappropriate to have any kind of special service or ritual. It could be, and this is probably more likely, there are just too many dead people to have any funerals.

[37 : 53] There just wasn't any way to get that done. But the idea behind all that is almost total destruction. And not just simply people being led away and captive, but many, many, many being put to death as a result of an invading army.

Verse 11 reveals the divine source of the judgment, which we've known all along, because there are a number of references to this in the book of Amos.

For behold, the Lord gives a command. Who's the divine source then of this judgment? It's God. It's Yahweh God. He will break the great house into bits and the little house into pieces.

So, it's going to touch the rich and the poor, and it's going to be complete destruction. Verses 12 through 13 reveal some what we would say making a point through absurdities.

Things that are just ridiculous, absurd. and it's meant to get Israel's attention. Like the first one, do horses run on rocks?

[39 : 16] Now, the implied answer is no, they don't, but horses run on rocks, don't they? Well, the word rocks probably means like crags, crevices, cliffs, it can be even a word that refers to a cliff.

Canyons. The idea being that this is not where horses run. And it would be absurd to think that you could get on a horse and jump cliffs and canyons and crevices, at least big ones.

So, it's meant to be an absurdity. The second question is similar. Does one plow there with oxen?

So, if he's talking about still this craggy area, cliffs, crevices, canyons, then not only would you never ride a horse there, but you're not going to plow there with oxen.

It would be ridiculous. So, both of those, the answer to both questions is no. So, what's the point? Well, these self-evident absurdities, and they are, I mean, they're just clearly meant to be absurd.

They're meant to highlight Israel's behavior. It's equally absurd. Their absurd behavior. And so, that's detailed for us. First of all, in their courts, it's like belaboring the point, we keep coming back to this, he said, yet you have turned justice into gall, or poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, we saw that word last time, it's a plant that's just bitter, very bitter.

[41 : 02] So, their justice and righteousness, their justice is more like poison, and their righteousness is bitter to the people. So, that's just as absurd as what God is saying, or it ought to be.

We ought to think of it in those terms, just as absurd as trying to plow a field on the edge of a cliff. You're just not going to do this.

It's absurd, also absurd for God's people to turn justice into something that's poisonous, and righteousness into something that's bitter.

Second, in their pride, in their pride, you who rejoice over Lodebar, Lodebar, which is a word that means no thing, not just nothing, no thing, it's a no thing, or it could be translated nowhere.

Lodebar, matter of fact, appears in 2 Samuel 9, remember the story of Mephibosheth, Mephibosheth was crippled, and he was an heir in Saul's family, and so he thought, David is now on the throne, remember this story, David is on the throne, he'll surely want to annihilate all of Saul's descendants, and so he went into exile in a place called Lodebar.

[42 : 39] So there's a real place called Lodebar, and the name means nowhere, or no thing, insignificant. And, alright, so he's highlighting here their pride, you rejoice, that is, you're prideful about things that are worthless, which is meant to be an exaggeration, you know, we can be prideful, and often are prideful about things that, that, you know, other people would think are great and wonderful.

And they were doing that too, they were just filled with pride. They were even prideful about things that don't even matter. And so, it's absurd, I mean, to be prideful about something that's worthless, insignificant.

And then he says, who also say, this is the second part of that, have we not taken carnaim for ourselves by our own strength. Carnine.

Carnine. In fact, the King James, I think, translates it horns. In the Bible, horns typically use symbolic of power.

Power, you'll see that in the book of Revelation. The horns, they mean authority, power. power. And so, they are taking power for themselves, doing everything in their own strength, in their own power.

[44 : 21] And God says, that's absurd. I think you could accomplish anything that I would honor, anything of any value, that you could accomplish any of that in your own strength.

So, just as it is absurd that you could ride a horse and jump cliffs, it's just as absurd to think that you can do anything in your own strength.

Just as it's absurd that you wouldn't plow a piece of property that's just nothing but crags and crevices and cliffs and so forth.

It's just absurd to act unjustly toward your fellow man. Verse 14 reveals why their confidence was illogical and absurd.

Their confidence that God's not going to judge, why that's absurd. And he says, Behold, but behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel, says the Lord God of hosts, and they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath, which is the most northern boundary, to the valley of Araba, which is the most southern boundary, meaning, you know, your confidence is absurd because I'm going to send a conqueror and this conqueror is going to devastate and destroy the entire nation from the most northern part to the most southern part.

[46 : 02] Thank you.