

A Prophet for Today

At Ease in Zion

Amos 6:1-14

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Introduction

The title of this sermon is “At Ease in Zion.” It comes from Amos 6:1a, which states, “Woe to those who are *at ease in Zion*.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines “ease” as “the state of being comfortable.”¹ So why would Amos pronounce a “woe” on those who are at ease? The *New International Version* of the Bible gets to the problem as it translates this line as, “Woe to you who are complacent in Zion.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines “complacent” as “self-satisfied” and “unconcerned.”²

There is an “ease,” however, that the Bible commends. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 11:28–29, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” The book of Hebrews speaks of a Sabbath rest in Hebrews 4:9–11, “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” The Apostle John writes in Revelation 14:13, “ ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!’ ” And since we are told in Isaiah 57:20 (*NIV84*) that “the wicked are like the tossing sea, which

¹ Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

² Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

cannot rest,” there is clearly a right kind of rest for the people of God.

On the other hand, there is a wrong kind of rest or ease. This is what Amos is talking about in Amos 6. It is the ease of complacency. The people who professed to belong to God were self-satisfied and unconcerned about where they stood with God. After all, their country was prosperous and they were at peace with the surrounding nations. Surely, that was a sign of God’s blessing on them as a people?

Amos was sent by God to present an indictment to the people who professed faith in God. He showed them the many ways in which they had perverted righteousness. And he indicated how God was going to punish them.

Scripture

Let us read Amos 6:1-14:

¹“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
and to those who feel secure on the mountain
of Samaria,

the notable men of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel comes!

²Pass over to Calneh, and see,
and from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

Are you better than these kingdoms?

Or is their territory greater than your territory,

³O you who put far away the day of disaster
and bring near the seat of violence?

⁴“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock

and calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves
instruments of music,
⁶ who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first of those
who go into exile,
and the revelry of those who stretch
themselves out shall pass away.”

⁸ The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the
Lord, the God of hosts:

“I abhor the pride of Jacob
and hate his strongholds,
and I will deliver up the city and all that
is in it.”

⁹ And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.

¹⁰ And when one’s relative, the one who anoints him for
burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the
house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts
of the house, “Is there still anyone with you?” he shall
say, “No”; and he shall say, “Silence! We must not men-
tion the name of the Lord.”

¹¹ For behold, the Lord commands,
and the great house shall be struck down into
fragments,
and the little house into bits.

¹² Do horses run on rocks?
Does one plow there with oxen?
But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into
wormwood—

¹³ you who rejoice in Lo-debar,
who say, “Have we not by our own strength
captured Karnaim for ourselves?”

¹⁴ **“For behold, I will raise up against you a nation,
O house of Israel,” declares the Lord,
the God of hosts;
“and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath
to the Brook of the Arabah.”** (Amos 6:1-14)

Lesson

Amos 6:1-14 shows us the perversions and punishment of people who profess to belong to God.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Perversions of Those Who Profess to Belong to God (6:1-6, 12-13)
2. The Punishment of Those Who Profess to Belong to God (6:7-11, 14)

I. The Perversions of Those Who Profess to Belong to God (6:1-6, 12-13)

First, let’s look at the perversions of those who profess to belong to God.

Amos sets down five perversions of those who profess to belong to God.

A. They Are Complacent (6:1-3)

First, they are complacent.

The first word in chapter 6 is the word **“woe.”** It is addressed to both Judah in the south (**“Zion”**) and Israel in the north (**“Samaria”**). Amos says in Amos 6:1a, **“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria.”** Both nations were complacent

about themselves. They called themselves **“the notable men of the first of the nations,”** and had unwarranted false confidence for several reasons.

First, they were complacent because of their geography. **Zion** (which was another name for Jerusalem) and **Samaria** were both built on hills that were considered impregnable.

And second, they were complacent because of their military strength. But Amos shatters that illusion. He mentions **Calneh** in south-central Mesopotamia, **Hamath the great** in Syria, just to the north of Israel, and **Gath of the Philistines** in the southwest of Israel and west of Judah. Each of these cities had fallen, despite its might and power. So, no city in the region could claim immunity to destruction.

The only hope for Judah and Israel was in the power of God that was made available through repentance. However, Israel, at least, saw no need for such a thing.

You and I profess our faith in God. However, we need to ask ourselves: have we become complacent and no longer think that we need God or that we need to repent for our sins?

B. They Are Indulgent (6:4-5)

Second, they are indulgent.

Instead of repenting of their sins, the people professing to belong to God were treating themselves to the best of life's pleasures. The nation was experiencing significant prosperity and the people believed that it was because God was smiling on them. Amos said in verses 4-5, **“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music.”**

Now, I want to be clear that prosperity may be a sign of God's blessing. The problem with the Israelites is that they had a wrong view of God, as seen in their worship. We even see it in verse 5 because rather than singing the rich songs of their Psalter they were singing **"idle songs."**

You may not think that you are affluent. But let me assure you that you and I are affluent by every standard of measure in the world. Are we indulgent of what God has given to us? Or do we see what we have as a blessing from God and praise him for it and use what he has given us to expand his kingdom?

C. They Are Drunkards (6:6)

Third, they are drunkards.

Amos notes in verse 6a that the people who profess to belong to God **"drink wine in bowls."** The same Hebrew word for **"bowls"** is used for the large bowls before the altar at the temple (cf. Numbers 7:13; Zechariah 14:20). So the people were drinking from large bowls and getting drunk. Amos' hyperbole vividly portrays the excesses of the people who profess to belong to God.

Contrary to prohibitionists, God does not forbid the consumption of wine. What God does forbid is the excessive consumption of wine (or alcohol). So, if you do partake of alcohol, do you do so in moderation?

D. They Are Unjust (6:12)

Fourth, they are unjust.

Amos asks in verse 12a, **"Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen?"** Clearly not. A horse cannot run on rocks without losing its footing and hurting itself.

And plowing on rocks is an attempt at futility.

The reason Amos raised this illustration is to point out that Israel's justice is just as absurd, as he goes on to say to them in verse 12b, **“But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.”** *The ESV Study Bible* notes that **“wormwood** is a plant native to Europe, Asia, and northern Africa, with a bitter-tasting and poisonous extract.”³ The people who profess to belong to God have turned **justice** and **righteousness** upside down.

What about you and me? Are we unjust in our dealings with others? Have we taken that which does not belong to us? Do we give our employers an honest day's work? Are our dealings with others right and fair and just?

E. They Are Arrogant (6:13)

And fifth, they are arrogant.

Amos says of the people who profess to belong to God in verse 13, **“you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, ‘Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?’ ”** Their arrogance is on vivid display for all to see. They boasted of their military victories at **Lo-debar** and **Karnaim**. We are not sure when Israel captured these cities but that is not important. What is important is that they were proud of their achievements and confident that no one could defeat them. But **Lo-debar** in Hebrew means “nothing,” and that is what God thought of their victory! And **Karnaim** in Hebrew means “horns,” which is often used as a symbol of strength. Their conquests amount to nothing and their strength will melt away before the Lord's impending punishment of them.

³ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1666.

Are we arrogant? Do we think that what we have is because of our strength and ability? Do we think that we have accomplished all that we have because we are so great?

I hope we always recognize that whatever good we have in life is because of the grace and mercy of our great God.

Well, Amos set down five perversions of those who profess to belong to God. They were complacent, indulgent, drunkards, unjust, and arrogant. Let us now turn to the punishment of those who profess to belong to God.

II. **The Punishment of Those Who Profess to Belong to God (6:7-11, 14)**

And second, let's notice the punishment of those who profess to belong to God.

Amos goes on to show that there are two kinds of punishment that God will impose on those who profess to belong to him but who have perverted righteousness.

A. God Will Destroy Them (6:8-11)

First, God will destroy them.

Amos begins in verse 8a with these words, **“The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts.”** Typically, when you and I swear an oath we do so in the name of God. We are invoking a power higher than ourselves to hold us accountable to the oath that we are swearing. However, there is no one or nothing superior to God and that is why he swears by himself, as he does on other occasions (*cf.* Genesis 22:16; Exodus 32:13; Isaiah 45:23).

God announces that he will destroy them in verse 8b, **“I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I**

will deliver up the city and all that is in it.” The phrase **“the pride of Jacob”** is used in Psalm 47:4, where we read, “He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.” The “pride of Jacob” in Psalm 47:4 is a reference to “the Promised Land.” So, God pronounced that he abhorred the land of Israel and that he would **“deliver up the city and all that is in it”** to destruction.

Verses 9-10 suggest a siege in which famine and plague have killed many. Death carts have become a familiar sight. The sole survivor of a family acknowledges that there is no one else in the house. But before such news can receive a response involving the name of God, his mouth is stopped. The sense of alienation from God is so great that his name must not even be mentioned.

Amos notes in verse 11, **“For behold, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits.”** God will destroy those who profess to belong to him.

B. God Will Exile Them (6:7, 14)

And second, God will exile them.

Amos wrote in verse 7, **“Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”** And he also wrote in verse 14, **“For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel,’ declares the Lord, the God of hosts; ‘and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.’ ”** Lebo-hamath was in the far north of Israel and **the Brook of the Arabah** was in the far south between the Dead Sea and Gulf of Aqaba. Less than 40 years later, in 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered the entire land

of Israel and took them into captivity, never to return. God sent those who professed his name into exile.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of God's indictment of people who profess to belong to him in Amos 6:1-14, let us examine ourselves to make sure that we belong to him.

Jesus once told the people of God a parable. He said, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

The rich man in Jesus' parable is just like the people in Israel and Judah. In their case, because they were rich, they were complacent, indulgent, drunkards, unjust, and arrogant.

God has blessed us far beyond what we deserve. Let us not take his blessing for granted. Instead, let us make sure that we really do belong to Jesus. That is, are we daily repenting of all our sins? And are we daily trusting in Jesus for the gift of eternal life?

If we are repenting of our sins and trust in Jesus, then we may have the right kind of ease and rest in Jesus. Amen.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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