

## RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS REPENTANCE— LUXURY LEADS TO INDOLENCE

TEXT: 6:1-8

- 1 Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!
- 2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: are they better than these kingdoms? or is their border greater than your border?
- 3 —ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;
- 4 that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
- 5 that sing idle songs to the sound of the viol; that invent for themselves instruments of music, like David;
- 6 that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
- 7 Therefore shall they now go captive with the first that go captive; and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away.
- 8 The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by himself, saith Jehovah, the God of hosts: I abhor the excellence of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

### QUERIES

- a. Why refer the covenant people to Calneh, Hamath and Gath?
- b. What is "putting far away the evil day?"
- c. Is the use of musical instruments contrary to God's will?

### PARAPHRASE

Alas, alas, for those who are lounging in luxury and false security in Jerusalem and Samaria; alas for those reknowned leaders of the reknowned nation of Israel, to whom all the people of Israel come for counsel. Go over to Calneh, Hamath and Gath and you will find that your land is just as prosperous and great as theirs. In spite of My blessing you and making you chief of the nations you have remained ungrateful and unmindful of My warnings. You insist that calamity will not come to you yet you bring the Day of Judgment nearer each day by your violent

deeds! You sprawl yourselves luxuriantly upon expensive couches and take for your gluttonous feasts only the choicest lambs and calves; you sing frivolous, nonsensical and lustful songs to the accompaniment of the harps; and, as David invented musical instruments to worship his God, you invent musical instruments to worship your god, your belly; you drink wine from sacrificial bowls of silver in adoration of your god, and, instead of being grieved for the spiritual downfall of the nation, with unbridled rejoicing you anoint one another with the most expensive oils and perfumes. On account of this, these sensual leaders of the people shall be the first ones taken into captivity where they shall no longer lounge in luxury for that will cease. The Lord Jehovah has sworn an immutable oath upon His own immutable Name, saying, I despise the false pride and glory of Israel and hate its luxurious homes. I will give up this land into the hands of its enemies including all the people and everything else in it.

### SUMMARY

A false sense of pride and position has drugged Israel into a false feeling of security which in turn has led her to luxury, gluttony, indolence and lethargy. God promises judgment and captivity.

### COMMENT

v. 1 WOE TO THEM THAT ARE AT EASE IN ZION . . . AND . . . SECURE . . . IN . . . SAMARIA . . . Amos directs his warning from God to the whole nation. Especially to the "notable" men—the reknowned leaders. These public leaders had allowed themselves to be lulled by luxury into a false ease and security. They, in turn, had counseled all the people who came to them that peace, prosperity and safety were the watchwords of the day (Jer. 6:14). They were confident that God would not allow anything bad to happen to the chief of nations (Jer. 7:4ff), after all, had not God chosen this nation above all the others (Jer. 2:3; Ex. 19:5; II Sam. 7:23ff; Amos 3:2). Prosperity is dangerous. It may be either blessing or curse, according to the way it is received by those to whom it may come. If the one who prospers receives it with thankfulness to God constantly aware of his dependence upon God and uses it to the glory of God it can be a wonderful blessing and a great source of joy. But if the one who prospers is ungrateful and makes his riches his whole aim in life he falls into a snare, into many hurtful lusts, and drowns in perdition (cf. I Tim. 6:6-10; Deut. 4:9; 6:10-12; 8:11-20; 32:15; Psa. 9:17; Prov. 1:32; 30:9; Jer. 3:21; Dan. 4:30; 5:20; Hosea 10:13; 13:6; Lk. 12:16-19).

v. 2-3 PASS YE UNTO CALNEH, AND SEE . . . ARE THEY BETTER THAN THESE KINGDOMS? Calneh was a city in the land of Babylonia (Calno of Isa. 10:9) one of the four cities founded by Nimrod (cf. Gen. 10:10). Hamath is one of the most ancient surviving cities on this earth located in upper Syria on the Orontes river. The "entrance of Hamath" (Num. 34:8) was to be the northern limit of Israel, but God left some of the Hivites there to be a test to the faithfulness of Israel (Judg. 3:3). Calneh and Hamath were two of the 19 city-states that rebelled against mighty King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria (745-727 B.C.) and were subdued only after several campaigns and it is no wonder Amos calls it "Hamath the great." Gath was one of the five royal cities of Philistia (Josh. 13:3; Judg. 3:3; I Sam. 4:4, 16, 18), destroyed by Uzziah (II Chron. 26:6) with a history of greatness and influence in the days of Amos. Amos has selected these three rich, powerful, influential cities to compare Israel, in her greatness, to, and thus emphasize Israel's ingratitude! These three cities were powerful, yet none of them was better than Judah or Israel. In spite of God's blessing the once insignificant Hebrew nomads until their prosperity exceeded that of these three rich metropolises, this generation of Hebrews remained an ungrateful people, unmindful of the Rock that begat them (Deut. 32:6-18).

v. 3 —YE THAT PUT FAR AWAY THE EVIL DAY, AND CAUSE THE SEAT OF VIOLENCE TO COME NEAR . . . These people were just like those of a 150 years later in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel crying "Peace, peace, when there is no peace," (cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; Ezek. 13:10, 16). How could Amos preach to them "hard times," when all was well—politically and economically? They refused even to think of hard times, judgment, retribution of God for their sins. But by their very acts of impenitence and refusing to see anything "wrong" with their excesses and injustices they were hastening the day of God's judgment upon them! They were ripening fast (as Amos later pictorializes with the basket of summer fruit). They were actually rotting. In just 40 years the northern kingdom would be overthrown completely by the Assyrians and as a nation it would disappear from the face of the earth.

v. 4-6 . . . THAT LIE UPON BEDS OF IVORY . . . EAT THE LAMBS OUT OF THE FLOCK . . . SING IDLE SONGS . . . INVENT . . . INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC . . . DRINK WINE IN BOWLS . . . BUT ARE NOT GRIEVED FOR THE AFFLICTION OF JOSEPH. We wish to quote extensively here from, *The Bible Commentary, The Minor Prophets*, by T. Laetsch, pub., Concordia, pp. 170-171:

". . . In the homes of the rich were found all the conveniences and luxuries of the day. There were 'beds,' or divans, of ivory, richly decorated with ivory plaques and panels . . . on which Mr. Richman sprawled; luxuriant couches, on which the lady of the house stretched out her weary limbs after having returned from a stroll through the avenues of the city where she had exhibited her beauty, enhanced by many an artificial means (Isa. 3:18-23). The less fortunate sisters, the common rabble, the dames of the underworld, the flappers of 750 B.C., admired their richly attired sisters and ran to the next bazaar to buy some cheap bauble, some of the latest beauty helps, in order to look like their more favored sisters. In the elegant homes of the rich and in the temples of their idols (ch. 2:7, 8) riotous feasts and banquets were held. Only the most dainty meats were served, lambs selected from carefully tended flocks, calves from the midst of the stall (cp. Mal. 4:2), kept in special stalls, fed with special feed. At these banquets men and women idled away their time by "chanting" crooning to the sound of the 'viol,' the harp (v. 5). They also invented for themselves, not to God's glory, instruments of music. The better such noisemakers suited the intention of their inventors, to affect the nerves, create excitement, stir up passions, the higher was the inventor honored. He was likened to David, who had introduced many musical instruments in the Temple service (I Chron. 23:5; II Chron. 29:25-26) . . . Amos, of course, uses these words in bitter irony. Such crooning, accompanied by jazzy instrumental music, was regarded as the highest 'superart' by the delighted audiences. The heads and bodies of the assembled guests were anointed with 'the chief ointments,' the finest and most expensive perfumeries, filling the ball with their intoxicating odors. The passions kindled by the voluptuous music and suggestive dress were nourished by the rich food and fanned into irrepresive ardor by large bowlfuls of wine freely making the rounds (v. 6). The term used here for 'bowls' in all other passages denotes ritual bowls used in the Temple for sprinkling the sacrificial blood upon the altar. Were they used at these banquets in the homes and the idol temples in order to give a semblance of piety to these orgiastic festivals, as the saying of grace before modern family dinners ending in drinking bouts? We are reminded of Belshazzar's feasts (Dan. 5:1-5)."

The Arabic and Greek words translated "idle" mean literally, "to throw or strew many useless words about, to gossip," and this describes the singing at the banquets as frivolous nonsense. The sin is not, per se, in the use of instruments of music in religious worship (David was commanded to invent instruments of music to be used in God's temple in worshipping the One, True God), but the use of instruments to sing vain and idle songs in a perverted religious ceremony. As David made instruments of music to worship the true God, these idolators made instruments to accompany their stupid songs as they worshiped their god, the belly! Amos 6:5 cannot be used to condemn the use of an instrument in New Testament church worship—to do so is wresting the scriptures! It could be used to show God's displeasure with a great amount of the silly, nonsensical, and immoral music which has been invented today by those whose god is still their physical lusts!

The word used by Amos to describe the bowls out of which the gluttons drank their wine has special reference to the silver sacrificial bowls made by the tribe-princes at the consecration of the altar to Jehovah (Num. 7). Amos does this to show that the people in Moses' day manifested their zeal for Jehovah by so doing, and these people of Israel, of Amos' own times, showed just as much zeal is their care for their god, the belly.

And the greater crime than all this gluttony and idolatry is, as Amos states in v. 6, "they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." They were blind, deaf and dumb to the spiritual rotteness then prevalent. They were not the least concerned that this nation whose destiny was holiness and truth was sick unto death with the leprosy of sin. The injustice, cruelty, decadence did not bother them. They were perfectly satisfied as long as they had food and drink and were rich enough to satisfy their desires.

v. 7-8 THEREFORE SHALL THEY NOW GO CAPTIVE WITH THE FIRST THAT GO CAPTIVE; AND THE REVELRY OF THEM THAT STRETCHED THEMSELVES SHALL PASS AWAY . . . THE LORD JEHOVAH HATH SWORN BY HIMSELF . . . Jehovah makes a solemn, terrible vow. Those who spent their time luxuriating and satisfying every selfish whim—who had no time for God—will be the first taken captive. They will be the first to be made slaves of a foreign despot. They will have no time henceforward for revelry. That will come to a sudden end. From that time onward they will be an enslaved people. God cannot make His vows any more emphatic than by swearing by His own name, for there

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is nothing greater in existence than God. Since He has the authority and power to carry out His threats it is not at all evil for Him to swear by His own Holy Name. It *is* vain for man to swear by anything, either heaven or hell, or by the hairs on his head since he has no control over any of it (cf. Matt. 5:33-37; Jas. 5:12). Hebrews, in that glorious passage emphasizing how God demonstrated the immutability and finality of His promise-keeping, in 6:13-17 tells us that "God interposed Himself with an oath." We believe the interpretation of how God "interposed Himself" is found in II Cor. 5:19 where we are told, "God was *in* Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself . . ." and in II Cor. 1:20, ". . . For all the promises of God find their Yea in Him" (that is, in Christ). So, when God swears by Himself, rest assured, it is certain to come to pass!

### QUIZ

1. Why was Amos against the "ease" those in Zion and Samaria were having?
2. Why refer the people of Israel to the cities of Calneh, Hamath and Gath?
3. What does Amos mean by saying they were "putting far away the evil day"?
4. What sort of society does Amos describe in verse 4-6?
5. May Amos 6:5 be used against the use of instruments in religious worship? Explain your answer!
6. Why condemn them because of their lack of grief for the affliction of Joseph?
7. How emphatic is the phrase "The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by himself" to be taken?

## RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS REPENTANCE— FALSE PRIDE TURNS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO BITTERNESS

TEXT: 6:9-14

- 9 And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die.
- 10 And when a man's uncle shall take him up, even he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto

him that is in the innermost parts of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No; then shall he say, Hold thy peace; for we may not make mention of the name of Jehovah.

- 11 For, behold, Jehovah commandeth, and the great house shall be smitten with breaches, and the little house with clefts.
- 12 Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? that ye have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood;
- 13 ye that rejoice in a thing of nought, that say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?
- 14 For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah, the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entrance of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah.

### QUERIES

- a. Why should a man's "uncle" burn him and question him about anyone remaining in the house?
- b. Why could they not make mention of the name of Jehovah?
- c. What is the "thing of nought"?

### PARAPHRASE

So thorough shall be My destruction of this nation then, even if there are ten in one house they will all perish. And when the kinsman comes to take care of the dead there will be such a multitude of dead corpses he will have to burn the bodies instead of burying them. This relative will call to see if there is one last living person who has gone way back in the very back of the house in order to save his life. If there is one the kinsman will ask, Is there anyone else besides yourself alive in this house? If the answer comes back, No, the kinsman shall then call, Keep quiet then, and do not even speak the name of God lest His attention be drawn towards this place and He smite this house until there is not one left alive! The perversion of righteousness into false pride can no more save you than horses can run on rocks or oxen can plow the sea. You have bragged that you have, by your own doing, built an invincible military power but I tell you that you are putting your hopes on that which is nothing in My sight. I am going to bring against you an enemy nation, says the Omnipotent God, which will crush you down throughout the whole length and breadth of this land of Promise.

SUMMARY

The judgment will be complete. False pride, a perversion of righteousness, will not save them from God's judgment.

COMMENT

v. 9-11. . . IF THERE REMAIN TEN . . . THEY SHALL DIE . . . EVEN HE THAT BURNETH HIM, . . . IS THERE YET ANY WITH THEE? . . . HOLD THY PEACE . . . THE GREAT HOUSE SHALL BE SMITTEN . . . AND THE LITTLE HOUSE . . . Jehovah is going to bring such destruction and death to Israel that even in the palaces of the rich and houses of the largest families where some may escape seige, famine and disease, even those who remain will die. Then where a near kinsman (Ex. 13:19; Josh. 24:32; II Kings 13:21) comes to inter the dead he will find so many corpses that he will be forced to burn them instead of bury them in order to quickly dispose of the possibility of contagion and stench. Only extreme emergencies made it necessary to burn a corpse, which in Israel was a penalty for extreme wickedness (cf. Lev. 20:14; 21:19; I Sam. 31:11-13). When this awful task is finished the kinsman calls, either to his helper or a survivor hiding in the farthest corner, Is anyone left alive. When the answer comes back, No! the kinsman hastens to warn the answerer not to mention the name of Jehovah (either in prayer or oath) lest the attention of Jehovah be drawn to this particular place and the one mentioning His name and he also be slain. Of course, God's attention is at all times everywhere present! He needs no such drawing of His attention. Whether the people of the northern kingdom had fallen to such superstitious regard for Jehovah by associating Him with heathen gods or not we are not told. Amos paints this picture in order to show the complete hopelessness and despair that will grip the hearts of those very few survivors when God's judgment begins to fall! Rich and poor alike have been guilty of turning away from Jehovah to serve their appetites and so the houses of the great and small will be destroyed alike!

v. 12-14 SHALL HORSES RUN UPON THE ROCK? . . . YE HAVE TURNED JUSTICE INTO GALL . . . YE THAT REJOICE IN A THING OF NOUGHT . . . I WILL RAISE UP AGAINST YOU A NATION . . . That they will be able to avert the judgment of God was as incongruous as their actions which were, in turn, as inconsistent as a horse running full speed upon rocks or as oxen plowing the sea. The fruit of their "righteousness" was wormwood, bitterness (see our comment on wormwood at 5:7).

Their "righteousness" was false righteousness which led to false pride. They perverted justice and proudly bragged of their military and economic power. But what they were putting their hopes in (military and economic power, and religious heritage) was "nothing"—vain and powerless. "Horns" symbolize military power. They forgot and denied that God had anything to do with their prosperity and boasted that they attained it by their own abilities. This God-denying pride is enmity against God. When man declares war on God there is nothing left for God to do but uphold His holiness and omnipotence. So God, as in this case, often uses secondary agents and agencies to carry out His will (cf. Isa. 10; 45; Jer. 27; Dan. 2:36ff; 4:19ff, etc.). Here, Israel is warned that God is going to raise up against them "a nation." We know that nation to be Assyria (Hosea was the first to mention this enemy of Israel by name). This nation crushed the Land of Promise (including both Israel and Judah) from north to south—from one end to the other which is where Hamath and the Arabah would be located—the extreme northern and southern boundaries of the whole land of promise, see II Kings 17. While Israel had more common sense than to run horses over rocks and plow seas with oxen—while they acted so responsibly in the common things of life, they exhibited such irresponsibility in the most significant areas of human conduct—righteousness and justice. So *the Lord caused* (as the original text emphasizes) a nation to rise up against this ungrateful, irresponsible, arrogant, sensual people. The message of Amos is still quite relevant and contemporary. Our society is almost a sister to that one in its ingratitude, irresponsibility, arrogance, sensuality. Amos was not able to call men back to God in his day, but he was willing to lay down his life if necessary to give God's call to repentance. Can prophets of today succeed where Amos did not? Time alone will tell!

## QUIZ

1. What is the significance of "ten" remaining in the house?
2. Why does the near kinsman come to "burn" the bones?
3. Why does he tell the one answering him not to mention the name of Jehovah?
4. Why the figure of speech of horses running on rocks and oxen plowing the seas?
5. What was Israel rejoicing in that was called "nought"?
6. Whom did God raise up against Israel?
7. Why is the message of Amos so relevant? why is it so imperative?