

Amos

Chapter 6

Woe to Those at Ease in Zion

“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! 2 Pass 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, 3 O 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 mention 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.”

6:1 *woe* – This Hebrew expression was used as a wail of grief over the dead. Prophets used it to predict divine judgment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

in Zion ... on Mount Samaria. Although Amos spoke primarily to Israel, Judah (Zion) also deserved his rebuke (cf. 2:4–5), for Israel properly comprised all 12 tribes. (CSB)

Hill on which the Jerusalem temple stood. Here, it stands for the whole Southern Kingdom. (TLSB)

Those who are apparently without a care as they occupy their mountain dwellings where they consider themselves safe. (Kretzmann)

Samaria. Capital of Israel. Here, it stands for the whole Northern Kingdom. (TLSB)

notable men – Literally, designated, named as if they are household names. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Those to whom the people came for advice, leadership, and an example to follow. It is doubtful that they were advising as they ought, i.e., the nation needed to heed Amos’s warnings and repent. (TLSB)

first of the nations. In Israel’s self-complacent eyes in this time of her newly recovered power and prosperity. (CSB)

6:2 Perhaps Calneh and Hamath had fallen in Jeroboam II's campaign (2Ki 14:28), and the wall of Gath had been broken down by Uzziah (2Ch 26:6). These words may have been spoken by the "people of Israel" (v. 1) who, when they came before their notables, flattered their vanity and thus reinforced their arrogant complacency. (CSB)

If these three powerful city-states suffered military incursions and defeat, how can Israel expect to be spared the same fate, since by then they were hardly in a better position? *Calneh*. Syrian city north of the bend in the Orontes River. *Hamath*. Important Syrian city north of Damascus. *Gath*. One of five royal cities of the Philistines on the coastal plain west of Judah. (TLSB)

go – There are many imperatives in this verse and the next. All of them will lead to the people discovering the trouble they are in. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

better...greater – Israel thus ranking at that time with the first of the nations, unexcelled by any of their heathen neighbors. But for this very fact, on account of their reliance upon their prosperity and power, the Lord pronounces a woe upon them. (Kretzmann)

6:3 *bring near* – Literally, "You bring close a seat of violence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

That violence and oppression come ever nearer to them, that they become guilty of these transgressions with ever-increasing frequency. This ignoring of the Lord and His holy will was apparent particularly in their luxurious feasting. (Kretzmann)

bear the seat of violence – *mos* repeats his charge about Israel's pervasive injustice and their oppression of the poor (e.g., 2:6–7; 5:11–12; 8:4–6). As a result of their callous and even brutal behavior, Israel's leaders will bear a special responsibility for precipitating the very disaster they claim will never occur. (TLSB)

6:4 *ivory*. Symbols of luxury. Numerous pieces of furniture inlaid with ivory in the Phoenician style have been unearthed in Israel. (TLSB)

These were wooden bed frames which were decorated with ivory inlays. This is the first historical reference to the practice of reclining at a banquet in Israel, adopted by the upper classes from a foreign innovation. Later this became customary, e.g., John 13:23–25. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

eat lambs...calves – This choice meat was normally eaten only at feasts. Extravagance points to misplaced priorities and hearts far more concerned with opulence than righteousness. Luther says, "The Lord is not condemning the possession of wealth but the misuse thereof" (AE 18:170). (TLSB)

6:5 *sound of the harp* – But only for the gratification of their own vanity and sensuality, instead of for the glory of God, as did David. (Kretzmann)

The idle rich frittered away their days singing and making merry. (TLSB)

like David. See 1Sa 16:15–23; 2Sa 23:1. (CSB)

An ironic comparison, since David was renowned for his contributions to sacred music, i.e., the compositions he dedicated to the Lord and the provisions he made for the temple worship (1Ch 23:5; 2Ch 29:25–26). (TLSB)

6:6 *wine in bowls* – Literally, “with bowls of wine.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Not just cups, but bowls of wine were consumed. Bowls mentioned here were used in the temple for sprinkling sacrificial blood on the altar, which implies abuse by the priests or Levites. (TLSB)

finest oils – Literally, “with the first (best of oils they anoint themselves.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Hebrew *mashach*, associated with ritual anointing. Hedonistic excesses were ironically dressed up in religious garb. (TLSB)

not grieve – Literally, “are not sickened over the shattering.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Joseph. Because of their misplaced priorities, the rich pamper and indulge themselves while ignoring the spiritual depravity and impending destruction of their nation. (TLSB)

Literally, “the breach of Joseph,” that is, the impending calamity, the destruction of the northern kingdom. This same fact stands out time and again in the history of nations, namely, that they indulge in wanton luxury even while their country is hastening to its ruin. (Kretzmann)

6:7 *first of those who go into exile* – While they think they are the first/best, Amos turns the phrase to say that their pride has earned them first place among the exiles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Additional irony. The rich, whose attitude was famously “me first,” will have the distinction of being punished first. They will be at the head of the column of deportees, leading the march into exile. (TLSB)

revelry – This appears to be associated with pagan funeral revelry in Jer 16:5, the only other place in the OT it occurs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Near Eastern version of a drinking party (compare to Gk *symposium*). Cf Jer 16:5, which describes a funeral. Such gatherings were associated with the cult of the dead in other cultures. (TLSB)

This opulent class, though at ease and seemingly without a care in the world, will soon stop its partying. (TLSB)

6:8 *sworn by himself*. cf. Heb 6:13–14. By this oath God declares that the verdict is final. (CSB)

abhor ... hate. Because Israel’s “strongholds” have become a symbol of the people’s prideful self-sufficiency, the Lord is revolted by them. (TLSB)

6:9 *they shall die* – No matter how large the number, not one would escape. (Kretzmann)

Impending disaster will be unprecedented. No one will escape unscathed. (TLSB)

6:10–11 A fearful scene: Apparently a survivor is cowering inside the house, the relative forbidding him even to pray because God’s wrath had fallen on the city. (CSB)

6:10 *relative* – Literally, "his cousin and his burier," that is, a near relative who had the duty of providing for his burial. (Kretzmann)

A family member comes to empty the house of its dead because none at the house are able or willing to perform the duties of burial. (TLSB)

innermost parts. Back room of a pillared house, dark and good for hiding. (TLSB)

still anyone with you? So many have died that the burying relative has lost track. (TLSB)

Silence! Rather than invoking God's name in prayer (as we respond, "Oh, my God" when surprised), they are afraid to speak it, knowing God has brought the punishment. (TLSB)

not mention the name of the Lord – He should not utter Jehovah's name, lest, by doing so, he call the Lord's attention and bring down judgment upon himself. (Kretzmann)

6:11 *great house ... little house.* Cf. perhaps the "summer house" and "winter house" of 3:15. (CSB)

Neither rich nor poor will be spared. Significantly, Amos repeats why this all-encompassing tragedy came: fed up with Israel's apostasy, the Lord has commanded this destruction. (TLSB)

So that it would be reduced to splinters. Such would be the punishment which would strike the people, which they would not be able to avert by any reliance upon their own might. (Kretzmann)

6:12 *plow there with oxen.* The Hebrew for this phrase is sometimes translated (with a slight textual change) "plow the sea with oxen." Israel's perversion of justice flies in the face of even common human wisdom about the right order of things. (CSB)

Absurd rhetorical questions. Israel's injustice and unrighteousness are so extreme they go against nature. (TLSB)

As little as either feat is possible, so little is it possible that one, by perverting right and justice into the opposite, can bring deliverance to himself and his country. (Kretzmann)

righteousness into wormwood. Israel's wickedness is so perverse that it unnaturally corrupts what is good. (TLSB)

6:13 *Lo Debar ... Karnaim.* They seem to have been regained from Hazael by Jehoash (2Ki 10:32–33; 13:25), then taken by the Assyrians ("a nation," v. 14) soon after Amos's day (2Ki 15:29)—beginning the sequence of events that would lead to the loss of all territory conquered by Jeroboam II. (CSB)

Lo-debar. Ammonite city in northern Gilead. Sarcastic wordplay; vanity of Israel is such that they rejoice at nothingness. (TLSB)

Karnaim. Aramean city north and east of Lo-debar. Also wordplay; lit, "two horns"; symbolically represents military might. Amos criticizes Israel for placing its trust in human strength rather than in God. (TLSB)

6:14 *I will raise up.* For the third time, the Lord repeats that Israel's crushing defeat is in accord with His plan (vv 8, 11). (TLSB)

from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah. From the Orontes River in north Lebanon to the Dead Sea—thus the whole land (cf. 2Ki 14:25). (CSB)

Lebo-hamath. City in northern Lebanon, beyond Israel's northern border. (TLSB)

Brook of the Arabah. Lower border of Northern Kingdom, not far from northern end of the Salt Sea. By means of these geographical references, Amos conveys yet another way that the impending devastation will be all-encompassing. (TLSB)

Literally, "the brook of the desert," here most likely that which formed the boundary between Moab and Edom, on the southeastern corner of the Dead Sea. Warfare is one means in the hands of the Lord by which He punishes the pride of nations. (Kretzmann)

Ch 6 Many in Israel made pampering themselves a full-time occupation, smugly imagining that material wealth was clear-cut proof that they were right with God. People today make the same mistake, interpreting their material prosperity as a sign that they need not humble themselves and turn away from complacency. However, God desires to give Himself to us. This is why His Son became incarnate for us and for our salvation. • Keep us, dear heavenly Father, from greed and sinful presumption upon Your grace. Lead us to humbly repent of all our sins and to set our hearts on Your Son, Jesus, whose blood cleanses us of all sin and restores us to eternal fellowship with You. Amen. (TLSB)