THE LION ROARS

A Guide for the Interpretation of the Book of Amos

By William H. Lawson

The title is a conflation of Amos 1:2, "The LORD roars from Zion," and depictions of the LORD as a lion in the Book of Amos, especially Amos 3:8, "A lion has roared, who will not fear?" The Book of Amos is dominated by prophecies of judgment that were intended to strike fear in the hearts of his sinful people like the roar of a lion.

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This book is dedicated to my students and colleagues in Asia. May the Lord bless you as you seek to hear him speak through his word.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF AMOS

CHAPTER TWO: FOR THREE SINS . . . EVEN FOR FOUR (Amos 1:3-2:16)

CHAPTER THREE: YOU HAVE I CHOSEN . . . THEREFORE I WILL PUNISH YOU (Amos 3:1-15)

CHAPTER FOUR: YOU COWS OF BASHAN (Amos 4:1-3)

CHAPTER FIVE: GO TO BETHEL AND SIN (Amos 4:4-13)

CHAPTER SIX: SEEK THE LORD AND LIVE (Amos 5:1-17)

CHAPTER SEVEN: WOE TO YOU WHO LONG FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD (Amos 5:18-27)

CHAPTER EIGHT: WOE TO YOU WHO ARE COMPLACENT IN ZION (Amos 6:1-7)

CHAPTER NINE: I ABHOR THE PRIDE OF JACOB (Amos 6:8-14)

CHAPTER TEN: I WILL NOT SPARE THEM AGAIN, PART I (Amos 7:1-9)

CHAPTER ELEVEN: GO, YOU SEER (Amos 7:10-17)

CHAPTER TWELVE: I WILL NOT SPARE THEM AGAIN, PART II (Amos 8:1-14)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: I WILL SHAKE THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL (Amos 9:1-15)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
PREFACE

Christians often struggle to hear God speak through the Bible. Even Christian ministers sometimes struggle to understand the message of the Bible. The problem in part is that sound principles and methods for interpreting the Bible are not known or practiced. Instead, everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

In *Ears to Hear: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Bible* I provide principles, methods, and procedures for Christians and ministers as they seek to hear God speak through the Bible, apply the message of the Bible to the modern context, and communicate the message of the Bible to those who need a word from God. This guide supplements *Ears to Hear* by illustrating the principles, methods, and procedures introduced in that guide through practicing them on the Book of Amos. This guide is not intended to be a detailed commentary on the Book of Amos. Instead, it contains the results of my personal struggle to hear God speak through the Book of Amos and determine the best way to communicate its message. Therefore, its value is primarily as an example for you as you undertake a similar struggle. Biblical interpretation is best learned by practice. The Book of Amos has been chosen because it is a manageable study that provides ample material for illustrating the methods described in *Ears to Hear* as they are applied to the Old Testament. A companion volume is also available that illustrates these principles, methods, and procedures on a New Testament book—*Obedient unto Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. In addition, other guides to a variety of biblical books are also available with more coming in the future.

The first chapter contains my introductory study of the Book of Amos and illustrates the method and procedures introduced in Unit Two of *Ears to Hear*. Chapters Two through Thirteen contain my interpretations of the individual passages in the Book of Amos and illustrate the methods and procedures introduced in Unit Three through Unit Six of *Ears to Hear*.

It is my earnest desire that you would not only benefit from my interpretation of the Book of Amos but that you would also use the methodologies illustrated within this book in your own interpretation of the Bible.

William H. Lawson
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF AMOS

Background and Purpose

Authorship

The prophecies in the Book of Amos are identified as being from Amos in the very first verse. Little is known about Amos apart from what is revealed in the first verse and 7:10-17, which records the account of an encounter between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Amos was apparently not part of the prophetic establishment, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son" (7:14). Instead, Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa in the Southern Kingdom and a tender of sycamore fig trees. Verse 1 identifies Amos as "one of the shepherds of Tekoa," and in 7:14 Amos states, "but I was a shepherd, and a tender of sycamore-fig trees" (7:14). Nonetheless, Amos was called by God to prophesy, "But the LORD took me from behind the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (7:15).

Place and Date of Writing

The actual place and date for the writing of the prophecies of Amos and compiling them into a book is impossible to establish with any certainty. However, the place and date of Amos' prophetic ministry can be determined at least to a degree. The place of Amos' prophetic ministry is identified in the first verse as Israel, probably meaning the Northern Kingdom since the prophetic words contained in the Book of Amos are almost exclusively addressed to that nation. The date of Amos' prophetic ministry is also identified in the first verse, albeit not very precisely. Amos' prophetic ministry coincided with the reign of Uzziah in Judah and the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel. Uzziah reigned from 791-740 BC, while Jeroboam II reigned from 793-753 BC. Therefore, Amos' prophetic ministry occurred sometime between 791 BC and 753 BC. The date of Amos' prophecies is more specifically defined in the first verse as occurring two years before the earthquake, but the date of the earthquake cannot be determined with certainty.

Situation and Purpose

The first verse of the Book of Amos identifies the recipients as Israel, probably the Northern Kingdom. However, a closer examination of the content of the Book of Amos reveals that Amos' prophecies are primarily addressed to the affluent Israelites of the Northern Kingdom. During the reign of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom was left undisturbed by the major powers of the region and was able to expand its borders to include all those territories that once belonged to Israel during the reign of David. At the same time Israel was undergoing a radical change in its social structure from a homogeneous society based on agriculture and livestock to a stratified society based on commercial development. The result was a small group of wealthy landowners and merchants that lived affluent and the masses that lived in poverty. The affluent were evidently oppressing the masses and perverting the legal system in order to attain and maintain their opulent lifestyle. For example, in the name of the LORD Amos accuses, "They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the ground and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (2:7).
In addition, the affluent were proud and complacent. They arrogantly boasted of their religion, wealth, and might and were oblivious to the threat of God's judgment. Amos frequently announces God's judgment on their religion, wealth, and might to undermine their misplaced pride and confidence (See 2:6-16; 3:1-15; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9; 8:1-14; and 9:1-10). Amos condemns their worship at Bethel and Gilgal in 5:4b-6, "Seek me and live. Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be nothing. Seek the LORD and live, or he will advance through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel." Amos condemns their strongholds in 6:8, "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his own life—a declaration of the LORD God of Armies, 'I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and its fullness.'" As a result, they did not heed God's discipline and were unreceptive to Amos' prophetic warnings. In Amos 4:4-13 the prophet identifies God's disciplinary judgments of the past and repeatedly rebukes them in the name of the LORD for their stubborn refusal to repent, "Yet you have not returned to me,' declares the LORD" (vs. 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11).

Furthermore, rather than being irreligious, the affluent were hyper-religious. They attended worship services; made frequent pilgrimages; joyously offered their tithes and sacrifices; and longed for the Day of the LORD. However, their religious zeal was only superficial and corrupted by oppression, pride, paganismand politics. The superficiality and corruption of their religion by oppression is revealed by Amos through putting words in their mouths in 8:5, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain and the Sabbath that we may open wheat?" They were much more concerned about business than holiness. The corruption of their religion by pride is revealed in Amos' sarcastic call to worship in 4:4-5, "Go to Bethel and sin; to Gilgal and multiply sin. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every third day. Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving, and announce freewill offerings—proclaim them, sons of Israel, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD." The corruption of their religion by politics is revealed through Amaziah's exhortation to Amos in 7:12-13, "Go, you seer! Flee to your own, to the land of Judah. Eat bread and prophesy there. But you are not to prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." Evidently the king used their religion to unify the kingdom rather than to promote the worship of God. The corruption of their religion with paganism is revealed in Amos' accusation in 5:26, "You have lifted up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your idols, the star of your god, which you made for yourselves." Though Amos is more concerned with social justice, he also is concerned with religious corruption. Hosea's prophetic ministry in the Northern Kingdom nearly coincided with Amos' prophetic ministry and he condemns the worship of Israel because of its corruption by the fertility cults of Canaan. Evidently, the priests and other religious leaders failed to confront them with their religious hypocrisy because they benefited from their religious fervor.

The primary purpose of the prophecies of Amos seems to have been to announce God's judgment on the Northern Kingdom since announcements of judgment dominate the Book of Amos. However, the occasional appeals for the affluent of Israel to repent and seek God and the allowance for some hope suggests that the ultimate purpose of the Book of Amos was more redemptive (See especially 5:1-17 and 9:1-15). The purpose of the Book of Amos was to exhort the affluent of the Northern Kingdom to repent of their oppression and injustice, arrogance and complacency, and religious corruption and seek God and live righteously for him.

Biblical Context and Role
The Book of Amos is part of the fourth division of the Christian canon of the Old Testament, the Prophetic Books. Actually, the Prophetic Books of the Christian canon are a composite of books from two divisions of the Hebrew canon, the Prophets and the Writings (Daniel and Lamentations). The Prophets of the Hebrew canon are divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are historical books, whereas the Latter Prophets are prophecies. In the Hebrew canon the Latter Prophets are further subdivided into the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and the Minor Prophets. Though not a formal division of the Christian canon, the distinction between Major and Minor Prophets is normally recognized with Daniel and Lamentations from the Writings augmenting the Major Prophets. The distinction between Major and Minor Prophets was not intended to minimize the importance of the Minor Prophets in any way. Instead, the distinction seems to be based solely on the size of the written prophetic works.

The Prophetic Books serve within the canon to confront the unfaithful with their sin and warn them of God's judgment so that they will repent and comfort the faithful and encourage them to remain faithful based on assurances of God's faithfulness. The Prophetic Books reinforce and supplement the Pentateuch, which reveals God's gracious purpose and promises for the people of Israel and warns them of God's judgment if they are unfaithful. In addition, the Prophetic Books reinforce and supplement the Historical Books, which illustrate God's graciousness to the faithful and judgment of the unfaithful.

The Book of Amos predominantly contributes to the warning of God's judgment of the unfaithful in the Prophetic Books. However, the Book of Amos also contributes to a limited degree to the assurance to the faithful in the Prophetic Books. The Book of Amos was included in the Minor Prophets because of its size. The books in the Minor Prophets are arranged in chronological order. Amos was placed third among the Minor Prophets because Amos delivered his prophetic message in the 8th century. The distinctive contribution of the Book of Amos to the Prophetic Books and the Old Testament is its emphasis on social justice. The Book of Amos frequently alludes to the Pentateuch. In addition, the Book of Amos is related to Isaiah 1-39 and Hosea by historical context.

**Genre and Function**

The Book of Amos can be generally classified as prophetic literature. There is a considerable amount of diversity in prophetic literature; however, the basic form is prophetic exhortation. In addition, prophetic literature sometimes employs vision reports, allegories, actions, and narratives. Furthermore, prophetic literature contains some prophecies directed at foreign nations. The Book of Amos shares all of these characteristics to one degree or another.

**Prophetic Exhortation.** Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments for obedience are dominated by assurances and warnings. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations with warnings but no direct commands or prohibitions. However, these warnings imply that the readers should heed the warnings and repent. For example, in 6:1-7 Amos
announces God's judgment upon the elite of the Northern Kingdom because they "are complacent," "thrust away the evil day," and "are not sickened over the shattering of Joseph." The implication is that they should repent of their complacency, stop procrastinating, and grieve. Sometimes more specific responses are either stated indirectly or commanded directly. For example, in 5:18-27 Amos announces God's judgment against the elite of the Northern Kingdom because of their corrupt worship and commands them in verse 24, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" Sometimes the Book of Amos also contains assurances. These prophetic assurances are concentrated in 5:1-17 and 9:11-15.

**Prophetic visions, allegories, actions, and narratives.** Prophetic warnings and assurances are sometimes conveyed through vision reports, allegories, actions, and narratives. Prophetic vision reports employ a picture or story from the world of dreams to illustrate the warning or assurance. Prophetic allegories employ a picture or story from imagination to illustrate the warning or assurance. Prophetic actions employ the actions of the prophet to illustrate the warning or assurance. The use of prophetic vision report, allegory, and action requires that the reader be sensitive to what is conveyed through the illustration. Prophetic narrative employs the recounting of events surrounding the delivery of a prophetic exhortation to vividly illustrate the warning or assurance. Prophetic narrative must be evaluated as narrative as well as prophetic exhortation. The Book of Amos contains a prophetic narrative and several prophetic vision reports. Amos 7:10-17 contains a narrative in which Amos announces God's judgment against Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, because of his opposition to Amos and God's prophetic word. Through Amaziah the consequences of opposing God's prophetic word are illustrated. Amos 7:1-9 contains a succession of vision reports—locusts, fire, and a plumb line. The first two illustrate God's mercy when they are withdrawn, but the third warns that God ultimately holds his people accountable for their sin through the illustration of a plumb line. Amos 8:1-14 contains a vision of a basket of ripe fruit that warns of coming judgment by comparing Israel to a basket of ripe fruit. Amos 9:1-15 is a vision report of the Lord standing by the altar. However, it is essentially a prophetic exhortation, except in this case God gives the warning and assurance in the form of a vision.

**Prophetic words against foreign nations.** A final form of prophetic literature that stands in a class by itself is prophetic words against foreign nations. First appearances are deceptive with regard to these prophetic words. They appear to be prophetic warnings directed to the nations addressed. However, these prophetic warnings often stand with prophetic assurances for God's people. Therefore, it seems likely that these prophetic warnings to foreign nations serve as indirect assurances to God's people. By overhearing God's condemnation of their enemies the people of Israel are assured of their ultimate vindication. The Book of Amos begins with prophetic words announcing God's judgment against Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (1:3-2:5). These prophetic words against foreign nations seem to be used in a similar way to the general use of foreign prophecies described above, but with a twist. Amos condemns Israel's neighbors to build up the confidence of the elite in Israel so that his condemnation of them is that much more dramatic.

**Strategy and Structure**

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. The first half of the book is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6). The second half of the book is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective
these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for
the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a
considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment.
This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. From still another perspective
the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the
warning of judgment. A brief glimpse of hope is provided at the midpoint of the book (5:1-17)
and a fully developed assurance for the future is provided at the end (9:1-15 and especially vs.
11-15).

I. Preface (1:1-2)

II. Prophetic Exhortations
   A. For Three Sins . . . Even for Four—A Prophetic Warning to the Oppressive and
      Complacent (1:3-2:16)
   B. You Have I Chosen . . . Therefore I Will Punish You—A Prophetic Warning to the
      Oppressive and Complacent (3:1-15)
   C. You Cows of Bashan—A Prophetic Warning to the Oppressive and Complacent Wives
      (4:1-3)
   D. Go to Bethel and Sin—A Prophetic Warning to the Complacent (4:4-13)
   E. Seek the LORD and Live—A Prophetic Exhortation to the Oppressive and Complacent
      (5:1-17)
   F. Woe to You Who Long for the Day of the LORD—A Prophetic Warning to the
      Oppressive, Complacent, and Idolatrous (5:18-27)
   G. Woe to You Who Are Complacent in Zion—A Prophetic Warning to the Complacent and
      Irresponsible (6:1-7)
   H. I Abhor the Pride of Jacob—A Prophetic Warning to the Oppressive and Complacent
      (6:8-14)

III. Prophetic Visions
   A. I Will Not Spare Them Again, Part I—A Prophetic Vision Warning the Complacent (7:1-
      9)
   B. Go, You Seer—A Prophetic Narrative Warning the Complacent (7:10-17)
   C. I Will Not Spare Them Again, Part II—A Prophetic Vision Warning the Oppressive and
      Complacent (8:1-14)
   D. I Will Shake the House of Israel—A Prophetic Vision Warning Sinners and Encouraging
      the Faithful (9:1-15)

Message or Messages

The Book of Amos contains many overlapping messages. First, Israel's elite should repent of
their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency because they are more wicked than their
neighbors, they have neglected the privileges God gave them, and he is going to judge them (1:3-
2:16). Second, Israel's elite should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency
because being God's people does not exempt them from his judgment, their sin is apparent to all,
God is going to judge them, and their religion, wealth, and might won't be able to save them
(3:1-15). Third, Israel's elite women of Israel should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride,
and complacency because they will be judged (4:1-3). Fourth, Israel's elite should repent of their
pride and complacency because their proud worship is sin, they have persistently ignored God's
discipline, and he is going to judge them severely (4:4-13). Fifth, Israel's elite should repent of
their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency and seek God and good because God is the source of life, their religion will not deliver them from God's judgment, and they will come to lament their failure (5:1-17). Sixth, Israel's elite should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency and live righteously and justly because the Day of the LORD will be darkness rather than light, their worship is unacceptable because of their oppression and injustice, and their religion is perverted and they will be judged (5:18-27). Seventh, Israel's elite should repent of their pride and complacency because their city is no more secure than other cities that have fallen and they will be judged for their irresponsible failure to grieve over the condition of Israel or do anything about it (6:1-7). Eight, Israel's elite should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency because God abhors pride, their injustice and pride are foolishly dangerous, and God will stir up a nation to oppress them (6:8-14). Ninth, Israel's elite should repent of their pride and complacency because even though God is merciful, he is righteous and he will judge them (7:1-9). Tenth, Israel's elite should repent of their pride and complacency and heed Amos' warning because it is from God, those who oppose it will be judged, and it will be fulfilled (7:10-17). Eleventh, Israel's elite should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency because they are ripe for judgment, God will judge them, their celebrations will be turned to mourning, and they will perish for lack of a word from God (8:1-14). Twelfth, Israel's elite should repent of their sin and complacency because God will not regard them any differently than other nations, he will fix his eyes upon them for evil rather than good, they will not be able to escape his judgment, and there is still hope for sharing in the restoration of Israel (9:1-15). Though these message statements are diverse, they overlap considerably and can be summarized into a general message statement. Israel's elite should repent of their oppression, injustice, pride, and complacency and seek God and good so that they can realize his blessed promises rather than experience his judgment.
CHAPTER TWO

FOR THREE SINS . . . EVEN FOR FOUR
Amos 1:3-2:16

Though this passage as defined is rather large and contains prophecies to seven nations in addition to Israel, all the prophecies share a common form (See Form and Function) and the seven prophecies to other nations play a distinct role in the strategy with regard to the final prophecy to Israel (See Strategy and Structure). Therefore, I have chosen to interpret these verses as a single passage (See also Mays, 22-28; Smith, 43-46; and Stuart, 308-309).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

1:3 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn it back. Because she has threshed Gilead with sharp instruments of iron, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. I will break the gate bar of Damascus, and I will cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven and the one holding the scepter from Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir," says the LORD.

6 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn it back. Because they took captive whole communities and sold them to Edom, I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza and it will consume her fortresses. I will cut off the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the last of the Philistines will perish," says the Sovereign LORD.

9 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn it back. Because they delivered whole communities of captives to Edom, and disregarded a treaty of brotherhood, I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre and it will consume her fortresses."

11 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn it back. Because he pursued his brother with a sword, and ruined his compassion, because his anger tore continually
and its excess he retained forever,
12 I will send fire upon Teman
    and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah."

13 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of the sons of Ammon,
   even for four, I will not turn it back.
Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead
   in order to extend their border,
14 I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah
    and it will consume her fortresses
with war cries on the day of battle,
    with violent winds on a stormy day.
15 Their king will go into exile,
    he and his officials together," says the LORD.

2:1 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Moab,
   even for four, I will not turn it back.
Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime,
2 I will send fire upon Moab
    and it will consume the fortresses of Kerioth.
Moab will die in uproar
    with war cries and the blast of the trumpet.
3 I will cut off the ruler from her midst
    and kill all her officials with him," says the LORD.

4 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Judah,
   even for four, I will not turn it back.
Because they have rejected the law of the LORD
   and have not kept his decrees,
   because they have been led astray by their lies,
    after which their fathers walked,
5 I will send fire upon Judah
    and it will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."

6 Thus says the LORD: "For three sins of Israel,
   even for four, I will not turn it back.
They sell the righteous for silver,
    and the needy for a pair of sandals.
7 They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the ground
    and turn aside the way of the afflicted.
A father and his son go to the (same) girl
    and so profane my holy name.
8 They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge,
    and they drink the wine of those who have been fined
   in the house of their God.
9 "I* destroyed the Amorite before them,
   though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks.
I destroyed his fruit above
and his roots below.
10*I* brought you up out of Egypt,
and I led you forty years in the desert
to possess the land of the Amorite.
11I also raised up prophets from among your sons
and Nazirites from among your young men.
Is this not true, people of Israel?" declares the LORD.
12"But you made the Nazirites drink wine
and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.
13"Now then, I will crush your place
as a cart crushes when loaded with grain.
14Flight will perish from the swift,
and the strong will not muster his strength,
and the mighty will not save his life,
15and the archer will not stand his ground,
the fleetfooted will not get away,
and the horseman will not save his life.
16Even he who is stout of heart
will flee naked on that day," declares the LORD.

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English (See Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

Amos 2:6-16 reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were oppressing the poor and denying them justice. Their oppression and injustice is most clearly revealed in the accusation in 2:6-8 in which the LORD charges them with slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy. In addition, the passage reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were disregarding God's work of grace and not heeding his revelation. Their disregard for God's grace and revelation is revealed in the accusation in 2:9-12 where the LORD charges them with commanding the prophets not to prophesy and making the Nazirites drink wine. Underlying this inattentiveness of the elite of Israel to God's revelation was probably their pride and complacency. Though the pride and complacency of the elite of Israel are not directly addressed here, other passages specifically charge them with these sins. In addition, the pride of the elite of Israel is revealed indirectly in the strategy of the passage which uses their pride to ambush them and force them to consider that they may be even more wicked and deserving of judgment than their neighbors (See Strategy and Structure). The purpose of the passage was to undermine the pride and complacency of the elite of Israel, force them to recognize that they were even more sinful than their neighbors, and warn them of God's impending judgment. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, it probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sin and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 1:3-2:16 is in the first half of the book which is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book which is dominated by prophetic
visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations as well as the prophetic visions of the second half of the book address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. There is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 1:3-2:16 introduces the warning against oppression and injustice. This warning is reinforced especially in 3:1-15; 4:1-3; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:8-14; and 8:1-14. In addition, the passage anticipates the warning against pride and complacency. This warning is developed especially in 3:1-15; 4:1-3, 4-13; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos also seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. Though some element of hope is given at the midpoint and end of the Book of Amos (5:1-17 and 9:1-15, especially vs. 11-15), Amos 1:3-2:16 occurs at an early stage of the book's strategy and does not allow any room for hope.

Form and Function

Amos 1:3-2:16 can be classified generally as prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments for obedience. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in many cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments for obedience are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic warnings of judgment with few direct commands. Though no direct indication of the appropriate response is provided, the implication is that the readers should heed the warnings and repent. Amos 1:3-2:16 follows this characteristic form of a prophetic exhortation. The appropriate response is implied in the identification of their sin and the warning of their judgment. They should repent of their slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy as implied in the accusation in 2:6-8. They should repent of their ingratitude for God's grace and rejection of his revelation as implied in the accusation in 2:9-12.

In addition, Amos 1:3-2:5 contains a series of prophecies to foreign nations. First appearances are probably deceptive with regard to these foreign prophecies. They appear to be prophetic warnings directed to the nations addressed. However, these prophetic warnings often stand with prophetic assurances for God's people. Therefore, it seems likely that these prophetic warnings to foreign nations served as indirect assurances to God's people in most cases. However, Amos' use of foreign prophecies against Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (1:3-2:5) is distinct. These prophetic warnings to foreign nations seem to be used in a similar way to the general use of foreign prophecies described above, but with a twist. Amos condemns Israel's neighbors to build up the confidence of the elite in Israel so that his condemnation of them is that much more dramatic. Amos' use of these foreign prophecies may imply an additional command, especially since they are in the same form as his announcement of judgment against Israel. They should not proudly condemn others while complacently assuming that they will not be judged. The motivation for repenting of their sin is provided primarily by the warning of God's impending judgment in 2:6 and 13-16. In addition, Amos appeals to the dishonor that their conduct brings to God in 2:7-8 and the inappropriateness of their conduct based on their experience of God's grace in 2:9-12.
Strategy and Structure

Amos prefaces his announcement of God's judgment against Israel with seven announcements of God's judgment against Israel's neighbors. As the elite in Israel listened to Amos' announcements of God's judgment against their neighbors they would have enthusiastically agreed with his message and rejoiced that God was judging the wicked nations around them. When Amos then announced God's judgment against Israel they would be forced to see themselves as being even more guilty and deserving of God's judgment than their neighbors.

I. Announcement of God's Judgment on Neighboring Nations (1:3-2:5)
   A. Announcement of God's Judgment on Syria (1:3-5)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
      5. Identified as the word of the LORD
   B. Announcement of God's Judgment of Philistia (1:6-8)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
      5. Identified as the word of the Sovereign LORD
   C. Announcement of God's Judgment of Phoenicia (1:9-10)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
   D. Announcement of God's Judgment of Edom (1:11-12)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
      5. Identified as the word of the LORD
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
      5. Identified as the word of the LORD
   F. Announcement of God's Judgment of Moab (2:1-3)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
      3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
      4. Announcement and description of the judgment
      5. Identified as the word of the LORD
   G. Announcement of God's Judgment on Judah (2:4-5)
      1. Identified as the word of the LORD
      2. Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment
3. Identification of the sin and cause of judgment
4. Announcement and description of the judgment

II. Announcement of God's Judgment on Israel (2:6-16)
   A. Identified as the Word of the LORD (2:6a)
   B. Accusation of Excessive Sin and Announcement of Irrevocable Judgment (2:6b)
   C. Identification of the Sin and Cause of Judgment (2:6c-12)
      1. Slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy (6c-8)
      2. Ingratitude for God's grace and rejection of his revelation (9-12)
   D. Announcement and Description of the Judgment (2:13-16)
      1. The severity of the judgment (13)
      2. The inescapability of the judgment (14-15)
      3. The horror of the judgment (16)

Message or Messages

The elite in Israel should not proudly condemn their neighbors and complacently presume that they are in no danger because their sins are excessive and they will be irrevocably judged just like their neighbors. The elite in Israel should repent of their slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy because their conduct dishonors God and leads to his judgment. The elite in Israel should not neglect God's work of grace and disregard his revelation because doing so is ungrateful and foolish and leads to his judgment. The elite in Israel should repent of their pride and complacency, slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy and disregard for God's grace and revelation because he is going to punish them with a severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment.

Analysis of the Details

Announcement of God's Judgment on Neighboring Nations

Amos prefaces his announcement of God's judgment on Israel with seven announcements of God's judgment on Israel's neighbors. As the elite in Israel listened to Amos' announcements of God's judgment on their neighbors they would have enthusiastically agreed with his message and rejoiced that God was judging the wicked nations around them. In fact, the sins identified as the cause of judgment are almost universally sins against the people of Israel. Subsequently, when Amos announces God's judgment on Israel, the elite in Israel were forced to see themselves as even more wicked and deserving of God's judgment than their neighbors. Each of the announcements of judgment on the neighbors of Israel has the same structure. Each announcement begins with an identification of the announcement of judgment as a word of the LORD to stress its authority, "Thus says the LORD." Each has a general accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment, "For three sins of _______, even for four, I will not turn it back." Three was a complete number and four exceeds that number, implying that their sin had gone beyond what God could mercifully disregard. God's announcement that he "will not turn it back" indicates that it is too late for God to change his mind. Each has an identification of sin and cause of judgment. These are usually sins against Israelites to heighten their enthusiasm for God's condemnation of their neighbors. Each announcement of judgment concludes with an announcement and description of the judgment, frequently with another indication that the prophetic word comes from God to stress its authority. The announcement of God's judgment on Israel in 2:6-16 has this same structure, forcing the
elite in Israel to consider themselves in the same way as those nations that they were so quick to condemn.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Syria.** Amos' first announcement of judgment is against Damascus. Damascus was the leading city of Syria, Israel's strongest neighbor. The Syrians occupied the territory to the northeast of Israel. Israel and Syria had frequent border disputes over the region of Gilead. The sin of Syria and cause of her judgment is described metaphorically in the second half of verse 3, "Because she threshed Gilead with sharp instruments of iron." Threshing was the process of beating the wheat to separate the grain from the chaff. Using "sharp instruments of iron" would probably have been effective but excessive. Here this excessive means of separating the grain from the chaff is employed to emphasize Syria's harsh treatment of the conquered Israelites in Gilead. The judgment against Gilead is described as the fire and destruction of war, the fall of Damascus, the death of the leaders, and exile. Fire is a common way of describing judgment among the prophets and is frequently associated with warfare. Hazael was the founder of the dynasty that ruled over Syria at this time and Ben-Hadad was the current ruler. The Valley of Aven and Beth Eden were place names within Syria, but little is known of them. Valley of Aven means "Valley of Wickedness" and Beth Eden means "House of Pleasure." Aram is another name for Syria and Kir, according to 9:7, is the land from which the Syrians originated. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly have agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Philistia.** Amos' second announcement of judgment is against Gaza. Gaza was one of the five leading cities of the Philistine nation. The Philistines occupied the territory to the southwest of Israel along the Mediterranean coast north of the Egyptian border. Philistia had been the enemy of Israel from the time that the Israelites had conquered the land of Canaan. The sin for which the Philistines are condemned is the slave trade. The judgment of the Philistines is again described in terms of fire, the destruction of war, and the death of the ruler. Four of the five cities of Philistia are mentioned in the announcement of judgment (Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron). The remaining city, Gath, is omitted, perhaps because it has already been destroyed, which may be presupposed in 6:2. The announcement of judgment emphasizes God's complete eradication of the Philistines, "I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the last of the Philistines will perish." The anthropomorphic language, "I will turn my hand against Ekron," emphasizes God's direct role in this judgment. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would have certainly agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Phoenicia.** Amos' third announcement of judgment is against Tyre. Tyre was a great city located on a small island off the coast in the Mediterranean Sea and served as the capital of Phoenicia. The Phoenicians occupied the territory to the northwest of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea. Phoenicia was a great sea power and Tyre was a center of shipping and commerce. The sin and cause of the condemnation of Phoenicia was like Philistia, the slave trade. The sin of Phoenicia was compounded by the fact that they evidently had made a treaty with Israel. The announcement of judgment is similar to those that have preceded but in a much simpler form. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly have agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Edom.** Amos' fourth announcement of judgment is against Edom. Edom was a nation to the southeast of Israel near the Dead Sea. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Nonetheless, Edom and Israel had fought
constantly from the time of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. Edom was already associated with the slave trade in verses 6 and 9. However, the Edomites were not condemned because of their involvement in the slave trade. Instead, they were condemned for their indifference to their historical ties with Israel and violent treatment of the Israelites. As the second half of verse 11 emphasizes repeatedly, "Because he pursued his brother with a sword, perverted his compassion, because his anger tore continually, and its excess he retained forever." Again the fire of warfare is used to describe the judgment. Teman was a region in Edom that is employed here to represent the entire nation. Bozrah was the chief northern city. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly have agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Ammon.** Amos' fifth announcement of judgment is against Ammon. Ammon was also a nation of distant ancestors of the Israelites. According to Genesis 19:30-38 the Ammonites were the descendants of Lot. The Ammonites occupied the territory east of the Jordan and north of Moab and Edom. Ammon became an enemy of Israel during the time of David (See 2 Sam. 12:31). The sin of Ammon was cruelty to the innocent inhabitants of Gilead as the Ammonites sought to extend their borders into Gilead, a territory that Israel claimed as its own. The judgment is again described as warfare that results in great destruction and the exile of the nation's leaders. Fire is again used to describe the devastation of warfare. The war cries of the enemy were a terrifying sound to those who were being attacked and they are mentioned here to heighten the sense of despair. The reference to "violent winds on a stormy day" employs natural phenomena to further heighten the sense of despair. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly have agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Moab.** Amos' sixth announcement of judgment is against Moab. The Moabites occupied the land east of the Jordan, south of Ammon, and north of Edom. Except for the story of Ruth there seems to have been continual hostility between Israel and Moab. Second Kings 3 may provide the historical background for understanding the sin of Moab. Jehoram, the king of Israel, and Jehosaphat, the king of Judah, along with the king of Edom defeated Mesha the king of Moab. However, when Mesha offered his oldest son as a sacrifice to Chemosh they withdrew. Then Mesha apparently pursued the army of Edom and subdued it. He then burned the corpse of the king of Edom. Amos condemns Moab for this atrocity in the second half of verse 1, "Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime." The words "to lime" are employed to stress the magnitude of this atrocious deed (See Stuart, 315 for possible background explaining the nature of this atrocity). The judgment is described as war resulting in the death of the nation's rulers. Fire is again used to depict the horrors of warfare as well as the terrorizing war cries of the attacking enemy and the warning trumpet blast of the defenders. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly have agreed with these charges and heartily approved God's judgment of their enemies.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Judah.** Amos' seventh announcement of judgment is against Judah. Some have questioned why and even if Amos included a word of judgment against Judah, but there is no reason to doubt its authenticity and it fits very well into Amos' strategy. After the division of Israel into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah these two nations became political and religious rivals. For Judah the center of worship was Jerusalem whereas the center of worship for Israel was Bethel. The accusation is designed to fit into this climate of rivalry. Amos condemns Judah in the second half of verse 4,
"Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by their lies, after which their fathers walked." As in previous descriptions, the judgment of Judah is pictured in terms of fire and destruction of war. The Israelites hearing Amos' message would certainly agree to these charges and heartily approve of God's judgment of their religious rivals. In fact, at this point their enthusiastic response to Amos' message was certainly at its apex.

**Announcement of God's Judgment on Israel**

Having raised the enthusiasm of his listeners to a fever pitch as he condemned their neighbors, Amos dramatically announces God's judgment on Israel in 2:6-16. The announcement of God's judgment on the Israelites has the same structure as the announcements of judgment against their neighbors, forcing them to consider themselves in the same way as those nations that they were so quick to condemn. However, the announcement of God's judgment on the Israelites has an expanded identification of the sin and cause of judgment and announcement and description of judgment, forcing them to consider that they may be even more wicked and deserving of judgment than the nations around them.

**Identified as the word of the LORD.** As was the case in the announcements of God's judgment on Israel's neighbors, the announcement of judgment on Israel is introduced as a word of the LORD in the first part of 2:6, "Thus says the LORD." In fact, the Israelites are reminded two more times in this announcement of judgment that this announcement of God's judgment is the word of the LORD in 2:11 and 16. These reminders serve to encourage the Israelites to heed what is said because these are not the words of Amos, but the words of the LORD.

**Accusation of excessive sin and announcement of irrevocable judgment.** As was the case in the announcements of God's judgment on Israel's neighbors, the announcement of judgment on Israel has the same general accusation and announcement of judgment in the second part of 2:6, "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn it back." Just like the other nations that the Israelites were quick to condemn, Israel had sinned beyond what God could mercifully disregard. Just like the other nations that the Israelites were quick to condemn, Israel was going to be judged. This warning of judgment serves to encourage the Israelites to repent of their proud condemnation of their neighbors and complacent presumption that they are in no danger.

**Identification of the sin and cause of judgment.** The sins of Israel are identified in 2:6-12. Rather than a simple identification of sin as in the announcements of God's judgment against Israel's neighbors, this identification of sin is much more thorough to convince the elite in Israel that they were even more sinful and deserving of judgment than their neighbors. These identifications of sin are grouped into two divisions. The first division in verses 6-8 contains accusations that focus on their sinful treatment of the poor and needy. The first sin that Amos identifies is slavery, "They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals" (2:6). The elite in Israel condemned their neighbors for slavery, but they themselves were also guilty. The reference to "a pair of sandals" probably indicates the low value they placed on people (Stuart, 316). The second sin that Amos identifies is oppression, "They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the ground and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (2:7). Their oppression of the poor and afflicted is described using two graphic images, trampling them into the dust of the ground and turning aside their way so that they cannot escape their plight. The second image may refer specifically to the corruption of the court system (Stuart, 317). Amos repeatedly accuses the elite in Israel of perverting justice at the gate where judgments were made. The third
sin that Amos identifies is sexual immorality, "A father and his son go to the (same) girl and so profane my holy name" (2:7). For a father and son to have sexual relations with the same girl was contrary to the covenant that Israel had with God (Ex. 21:7-11; Lev. 18:7-8; 19:20-22; 20:17-21; and 22:32). The result was that they "profane my holy name." God's reputation for holiness was slandered by their conduct. The fourth sin that Amos identifies is religious hypocrisy and corruption in 2:8, "They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge, and they drink the wine of those who have been fined in the house of their God (or "gods")." The law required that a garment taken as pledge be returned to its owner at sunset (Ex. 21:22 and Dt. 22:19). Here their failure to obey this law as well as their exorbitant use of fines is set over against their participation in worship to draw attention to their hypocrisy. However, Amos also includes some indication that their religion may already be corrupt. The profusion of altars was not in accordance with the covenant. Indeed, Amos' evaluation of Israel's religion elsewhere makes it difficult to determine whether they are worshipping "in the house of their God" or "in the house of their gods." This verse probably refers to their worship of God, but their worship had become so corrupt that Amos might have understood it otherwise.

Amos' identification of Israel's sin continues in 2:9-12, but these sins relate more to the Israelites' disregard for God's grace and revelation. Amos reminds the Israelites of their experience of God's grace in 2:9-10 using the words of the LORD. His intent was probably to establish that their sinfulness was an ungrateful and inappropriate response. He first reminds them of the LORD's grace in enabling them to conquer the inhabitants of Canaan in 2:9, "I destroyed the Amorite before them, though he was tall as the cedars and strong as the oaks. I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below." The Amorites were one of the peoples that inhabited the land of Canaan before them and they are used here as representatives for all the inhabitants of Canaan. The magnitude of God's grace is stressed by comparing the Amorites to a cedar, known for its great height, and an oak, known for its great strength. Despite the great height and strength of the Amorites, God destroyed them so that Israel could possess the land. The completeness of God's destruction of the Amorites is emphasized by the assertion that God "destroyed his fruit above and its root below." God destroyed them from top to bottom. The personal pronoun "I" is emphasized in the Hebrew text to stress that God was the one who made their conquest of the Amorites possible (Indicated in translation with bold print). Next, Amos reminds the Israelites of his grace in delivering them from Egypt and providing for them in the desert in verse 10, "I brought you up out of Egypt, and I led you forty years in the desert to possess the land of the Amorites." Even before God enabled the Israelites to conquer and settle the land of Canaan, God was at work among them. God's deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt is the event in Israel's history most frequently alluded to in the Bible. Though God had already called Abraham and had been at work among the Patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt founded Israel as a nation and established the Israelites as God's people. During the forty years in the wilderness God provided miraculously for the people of Israel. The personal pronoun "I" is again emphasized in the Hebrew text to stress that God was the one who delivered them from Egypt, provided for them in the desert, and gave them the land of the Amorites (Indicated in translation with bold print). The slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy of the Israelites certainly stand out as ungrateful and inappropriate responses to God's grace in delivering them from Egypt, providing for them in the wilderness, and giving them possession of the land of Canaan. Therefore, the implication of this identification of their sin and cause of their judgment is that they should repent of their slavery, oppression, immorality, and hypocrisy.
Amos rebukes the Israelites for their rejection of God's revelation through the prophets and Nazirites in verses 11-12. Amos begins by reminding them of God's provision of revelation through the prophets and Nazirites in verse 11, "I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men." The prophets were men especially chosen by God to speak his words of warning and assurance to the people of Israel and call them to live their lives in accordance with their covenant relationship with God. The Nazirites had a similar purpose, but served in a different way. The Nazirites were men who were especially dedicated to God, the outward signs of that dedication being their uncut hair and abstinence from wine (Stuart, 318-319 explains based on Num. 6:1-21, "They vowed not to cut their hair as a mark of separation, abstinence from wine as a mark of self-denial, and avoidance of the dead as a mark of purity"). The Nazirites were emblematic of the life of dedication that should characterize all of God's people. Next, Amos forces the Israelites to acknowledge the truth of this assertion using a rhetorical question from the LORD at the end of verse 11, "Is this not true, people of Israel?" This rhetorical question presupposes an affirmative reply. Amos concludes by rebuking the Israelites for their rejection and opposition to God's revelation through the prophets and Nazirites in verse 12, "But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy." By forcing the Nazirites to drink wine they destroyed the ideal of dedication portrayed through the Nazirites. By commanding the prophets not to prophesy they rejected God's word. This response to God's revelation through the prophets and Nazirites is again an ungrateful and inappropriate response not only to God's revelation, but also to God's deliverance of them from Egypt, provision for them in the wilderness, and conquest and settlement of them in the land of Canaan. Therefore, the implication of this identification of their sin and the cause of their judgment is that they should repent of their rejection of God's revelation.

Announcement and description of the judgment. Amos concludes his announcement of judgment on Israel with a description of the judgment in verses 13-16. This description of judgment is much longer than those used in the announcements of God's judgments against Israel's neighbors to convince the Israelites that they were even more subject to judgment than their neighbors. This description of judgment emphasizes that the judgment will be severe, inescapable, and terrifying. First, Amos stresses the severity of the judgment in verse 13, "Now then, I will crush your place as a cart crushes when loaded with grain." A cart fully loaded with grain does not express very clearly the severity of the judgment today, but at that time it was the heaviest vehicle on the road. Second, Amos stresses that the judgment will be inescapable in verses 14-15, "and flight will perish from the swift, and the strong will not muster his strength, and the mighty will not save his life, and the archer will not stand his ground, and the fleet-footed will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life." The swift and fleetfooted will not be able to outrun the judgment. Even if he is so fortunate as to have a horse he will not be able to save his life. The strong and mighty will not be strong enough to resist and save their lives either. Archers had the advantage of being able to fire their arrows from a safe distance. Nonetheless, even they will not be safe. They will have no workable options. Neither fleeing nor fighting will help. Finally, Amos emphasizes the terror of the judgment in verse 16, "Even he who is stout of heart will flee naked on that day." The judgment will be so terrifying that even the bravest of warriors will flee in terror without even taking the time to get dressed. Therefore, the implication of this announcement and description of judgment is that they should fear God's judgment and repent of their sin and rejection of his revelation.

Application of the Message
Establishing the Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to the situation in the modern church. All Christians have experienced God's gracious salvation through Jesus Christ like the Israelites experienced God's gracious deliverance from Egypt and provision in the desert. However, many Christians find it easier to proudly condemn others than acknowledge their own sin. These Christians often complacently assume that they are safe and secure—that God will never judge them no matter what they do. Their pride and complacency often lead to a permissive lifestyle that may include the mistreatment of others, sexual immorality, and religious hypocrisy as was the case with Israel. Their pride and complacency may also lead to a rejection of God's revelation, as was the case with Israel. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 1:3-2:16 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in the passage. Slavery is outlawed in most situations in the modern context so Christians are in no danger of selling the righteous and needy or having sex with a slave girl. In addition, the laws relative to taking garments in pledge were specifically relevant to Israel's social context. Furthermore, Israel's experience of God's grace and revelation took different forms than the church's experience of God's grace. Moreover, the announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

Applying the Message

Christians should not proudly condemn others and complacently presume that they are safe from God's wrath like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them for their excessive sin and condemned them just like their neighbors. Christians should not mistreat others, commit immorality, and act hypocritically like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them for their sin and dishonoring him and brought disaster on them. Christians should not neglect God's work of grace and disregard his revelation like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them for their ingratitude and foolishness and brought disaster on them. Christians should not proudly condemn others and complacently presume that they are safe from God's wrath, mistreat others, commit immorality, and act hypocritically, or neglect God's work of grace and disregard his revelation like the elite in Israel because the LORD punished them with a severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: For Three Sins . . . Even for Four

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and warn Christians not to proudly condemn others and complacently presume they are safe from God's wrath; mistreat others, commit immorality, and act hypocritically; or neglect God's work of grace and disregard God's revelation.
Proposition: Christians should not complacently condemn others, dishonor God with their hypocritical lifestyle, or disregard God's grace and revelation like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked, condemned, and severely punished them.

Introduction

Once I was preaching a sermon and I noticed one of the congregation was particularly attentive. He was smiling, nodding his head in agreement, and he even exclaimed "Amen!" a few times as I delivered the message. His response was very encouraging to me because he was one of those within the congregation that I thought of when preparing my sermon. He really needed to hear this message. However, I was chagrined when I greeted him at the conclusion of the worship service and he commented enthusiastically, "You really got them this time!" As he listened to the message he wasn't considering what God was trying to say to him, but what God was saying to everyone else. Indeed, many Christians find it easier to proudly condemn others than acknowledge their own sin. These Christians often complacently assume that they are safe and secure—that God will never judge them no matter what they do. Their pride and complacency often lead to a permissive lifestyle that may include the mistreatment of others, sexual immorality, and religious hypocrisy. Their pride and complacency may also lead to the neglect of God's work of grace in their lives and disregard for his revelation. The people of Israel had similar problems with complacency, sin, and neglect of God's grace and revelation. God used the prophet Amos to confront these Israelites in Amos 2:6-16. We need to hear the word of the LORD through his prophet Amos. Read Amos 2:6-16.

I. Christians should not complacently condemn others like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked and condemned them just like their neighbors.
   A. The elite in Israel proudly condemned their neighbors and complacently presumed that they were safe from God's wrath.
   B. Therefore when Amos came accusing their neighbors of excessive sin and announcing God's irrevocable judgment against them they were no doubt enthusiastically approving of his message.
   C. However, at the peak of their enthusiasm Amos dramatically rebuked the Israelites themselves for excessive sin and announced God's irrevocable judgment against them using the same language he had used to condemn their neighbors, "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back."
   D. Illustration of Complacency
   E. We could easily condemn the Israelites for their proud condemnation of others and their complacent presumption of their own security. However, if we do we may be falling into the same trap that ensnared the Israelites. You should not complacently condemn others like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked and condemned them just like their neighbors.

II. Christians should not proudly condemn others and dishonor God with their hypocritical lifestyle like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them brought disaster on them.
   A. The Israelites proudly condemned their neighbors and complacently presumed that they were safe from God's wrath.
B. Therefore, when Amos came accusing their neighbors of excessive sin and announcing God's irrevocable judgment against them they were no doubt enthusiastically approving of his message.

C. However, when Amos accused their neighbors of excessive sin, he seldom identified more than one sin, but when he accused the Israelites of excessive sin he included an extensive list, some of the sins being the same as those whom they condemned. A primary offense of the Israelites was their mistreatment of others.

D. In addition, God's added rebuke when accusing them of the mistreatment of a slave girl depicts well the result of their sinful conduct in general, "and so profane my holy name." Their conduct dishonored their God!

E. The clear implication of Amos' detailed accusation was that the proud and complacent Israelites were even more sinful and deserving of judgment than their neighbors.

F. Illustration of Hypocrisy

G. We could easily condemn the Israelites for their mistreatment of others, immorality, and hypocrisy. However, if we do we may be falling into the same trap that ensnared them. You should not complacently condemn others and dishonor God with your hypocritical lifestyle like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked and brought disaster on them.

III. Christians should not complacently condemn others and disregard God's grace like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them for their ingratitude and foolishness and brought disaster on them.

A. The Israelites proudly condemned their neighbors and complacently presumed that they were safe from God's wrath.

B. Therefore, when Amos came accusing their neighbors of excessive sin and announcing God's irrevocable judgment against them they were no doubt enthusiastically approving of his message.

C. However, when Amos accused their neighbors of excessive sin, he seldom identified more than one sin. But when he accused the Israelites of excessive sin he included an extensive list. Another primary offense of the Israelites was their neglect of God's work of grace and disregard for his revelation.

D. The clear implication of Amos' accusation is that the elite in Israel were ungrateful and foolish and even more deserving of God's judgment than their neighbors.

E. Illustration of Disregard for God's Grace

F. We could easily condemn the Israelites for their ingratitude and foolishness. However, if we do we may be falling into the same trap that ensnared them. You should not complacently condemn others and disregard God's grace like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked them for their ingratitude and foolishness and brought disaster on them.

IV. Christians should not complacently condemn others, dishonor God with their hypocritical lifestyle, or disregard God's grace like the elite in Israel because the LORD punished them with a severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment.

A. The Israelites proudly condemned their neighbors and complacently presumed that they were safe from God's wrath. The Israelites mistreated others, committed immorality, and acted hypocritically. The Israelites neglected God's work of grace and disregarded God's revelation.

B. As a result, the LORD condemned them for their excessive sin and announced his severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment against them in verses 13-16. The judgment would be severe. The LORD says, "Now then, I will crush your place as a cart crushes when loaded
with grain." The judgment would be inescapable. The swift and fleetfooted would not be able to outrun the judgment. Even if someone was so fortunate as to have a horse he would not be able to save his life. The strong and mighty would not be strong enough to resist and save their lives either. Even the archers who shot their arrows at a safe distance would not be safe. The judgment would be terrifying. The judgment would be so terrifying in fact that even the bravest of warriors would flee in terror without even taking the time to get dressed.

C. Illustration of Disregard for God's Revelation

D. We could easily condemn the Israelites for their pride and complacency, hypocritical lifestyle, and disregard for God's grace and revelation. However, if we do we may be falling into the same trap that ensnared them. You should not complacently condemn others, dishonor God with your hypocritical lifestyle, or disregard God's grace and revelation like the elite in Israel because the LORD punished them with a severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment.

Conclusion

Like most people, Christians find it easier to condemn others than to be honest with themselves. A popular psychological term is "denial." Simply defined, "denial" is rejection of reality because reality is unpleasant. The Israelites were in "denial." They refused to acknowledge that they were sinful and condemned because the reality of their sinfulness and condemnation was unpleasant. Instead, they condemned their neighbors for their sinfulness and rejoiced at their condemnation. We could easily condemn the Israelites. However, Christians also find it easier to criticize and condemn others than to be honest with themselves. You should not complacently condemn others, dishonor God with your hypocritical lifestyle, or disregard God's grace and revelation like the elite in Israel because the LORD rebuked, condemned and punished them with a severe, inescapable, and terrifying judgment. Let us hope it will not be necessary for God to send another prophet to proclaim, "For three sins . . . even for four, I will not turn back."
CHAPTER THREE

YOU ONLY HAVE I CHOSEN . . . THEREFORE I WILL PUNISH YOU
Amos 3:1-15

This passage as defined contains a number of diverse elements and could be divided further into verses 1-8 and 9-15. However, I have chosen to interpret the entire chapter as a unit because these diverse elements seem interrelated. The announcement of judgment in verses 1-2 undermines the complacency of the elite in Israel. The reasoned argument in verses 3-8 explains why they should not be complacent. The announcement of judgment in verses 11-15 undermines the bases of their complacency. Smith makes an argument for interpreting this passage as a unit (Smith, 69). However, Stuart deals with 3:1-2 and 3-8 separately and links 9-15 to 4:1-3 (Stuart, 321-333).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

3:1Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel—against the whole family I brought up from the land of Egypt:
2"You only* have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins."

3Do two walk together unless they meet by appointment?  
4Does a lion roar in the thicket when there is no prey for him?  
Does a young lion give a roar from his den if he has not captured?
5Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no snare for it?  
Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing?
6If a trumpet is blown in a city, do not the people tremble?  
If disaster happens to a city has the LORD not done it?
7Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.
8A lion has roared—who will not fear?  
The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who will not prophesy?

9Proclaim to the fortresses in Ashdod and to the fortresses in the land of Egypt
Say: "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the many tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst."
10"They do not know to do right," declares the LORD, "Those who store up violence and ruin in their fortresses."
11Therefore the Sovereign LORD says: "An enemy and encompassing of the land; he will bring down your strongholds from you and your fortresses will be plundered."
12Thus says the LORD: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth two legs or a piece of an ear,
so will the sons of Israel be saved, 
  those who sit in Samaria on the corner of a bed 
and on the fine cloth of a couch."
13"Listen and testify against the house of Jacob," 
declares the Lord, the L ORD God of the Armies. 
14"Because on the day I marshal the sins of Israel against him, 
  I will marshal (them) against the altars of Bethel; 
  and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. 
15I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; 
  and the houses of ivory will perish 
  and the great houses will come to an end," declares the LORD

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English (See Analysis of the Details).

**Situation and Purpose**

The passage reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were oppressing the poor and denying them justice. Their oppression and injustice are most clearly revealed in the call for the Assyrians and Egyptians to witness their wickedness in verse 9, "Proclaim to the fortresses in Ashdod and to the fortresses in the land of Egypt. Say: 'Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the many tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst.'" In addition, the passage reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were disregarding God's prophetic word. Their disregard for God's prophetic word is reflected most clearly in the series of rhetorical questions in verses 3-8 that accentuate their lack of fear of God's judgment and disregard for his prophetic word. Underlying this inattentiveness of the elite of Israel to God's revelation was probably their pride and complacency. Several bases of their pride and complacency are reflected in this passage. One basis of their pride and complacency was their special relationship with God. This basis of pride and complacency is revealed in God's warning through Amos in verses 1-2, "Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel —'against the whole family I brought up from the land of Egypt': 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.'" Other bases for pride and complacency are their wealth, power, and religion. These bases for pride and complacency are implied in God's announcement of judgment through Amos in verses 11-15 where these are singled out for judgment. The purpose of the passage was to discourage the elite of Israel from being proud and complacent because of their relationship with God, wealth, power, or religion and encourage them to fear God and listen to his prophetic word, and recognize their sin and the reality of God's impending judgment. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, it probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sin and turn to God for mercy.

**Literary Context and Role**

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 3:1-15 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chapters 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chapters 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the
problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 3:1-15 continues and reinforces the warning against oppression and injustice found in the preceding passage. This warning is reinforced further especially in 4:1-3; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:8-14; and 8:1-14. In addition, Amos 3:1-15 develops the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in the preceding passage. This warning is developed especially in 4:1-3, 4-13; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, Amos 3:1-15 does not allow much room for hope at this early stage of the book's strategy.

**Form and Function**

Amos 1:3-2:16 can be classified generally as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments for obedience. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments for obedience are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations with warnings of judgment and few direct commands or prohibitions. Though no direct indication of the appropriate response is provided, the warning implies that the readers should heed the warnings of God's judgment and repent. Amos 3:1-15 follows this characteristic form of prophetic warning. Verse 1 does contain a command, "Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you." However, it is introductory in nature and does not specify the appropriate response. Most of the appropriate response in this passage is implied. The rhetorical questions in verses 3-8 imply that the elite of Israel should not be proud and complacent, but fear God and heed his prophetic word. The announcement of judgment in verses 11-15 implies that the elite of Israel should repent of the sin identified in verses 9-10—oppression and injustice. Foreign witnesses should no longer be able to "see the many tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst." They should learn to do right rather than "not know to do right." In addition, the specific condemnation of their fortresses, wealth, and religion in verses 11-15 implies that they should not be proud and complacent because of these. The motivation for obedience to these direct and implied commands is provided by the warnings of God's judgment in verses 1-2 and 11-15.

**Strategy and Structure**

Amos begins dramatically by announcing God's judgment on the elite because of their unique relationship with him, undermining their complacent reliance on their covenant relationship with God (3:1-2). Next, Amos employs a series of rhetorical questions and an assertion to explain why the elite in Israel should fear God and his prophetic word of warning rather than complacently rely on their covenant relationship with him as a safeguard against his wrath (3:3-8). Next, Amos employs foreign witnesses and a divine accusation and warning to further undermine their pride and complacency (3:9-10). Finally, Amos employs an announcement of judgment against the elite of Israel and the bases of their pride and complacency to further undermine their pride and complacency and encourage them to repent (3:11-15).
I. Ironic Announcement of Judgment because of Israel's Unique Relationship with God (3:1-2)
   A. Command to Hear the Word of the LORD and Identification of Those Addressed (1)
   B. Acknowledgment of God's Unique Relationship with Israel and Ironic Announcement of His Judgment (2)

II. Questions and Assertion Challenging Complacency and Encouraging the Fear of God (3:3-8)
   A. Question Establishing the Covenant Relationship between Israel and God (3)
   B. Questions Establishing the Logical Relationship between Prophetic Warning and Danger (4)
   C. Questions Establishing the Logical Relationship between Danger and Those Endangered (5)
   D. Question Establish the Reasonableness of Heeding Prophetic Warning (6a)
   E. Question Establishing the LORD as the Cause of Disaster (6b)
   F. Assertion that the LORD Does Nothing without Revealing His Plans to the Prophets (7)
   G. Question Establishing the Reasonableness of Fearing God and His Prophetic Warning (8a)
   H. Question Establishing the Reasonableness of Prophesying when the Sovereign LORD Has Spoken (8b)

III. Indictment of the Elite in Israel for Wickedness and Oppression (3:9-10)
   A. Foreigners Confirm the Many Tumults and Oppressions in Israel (9)
   B. God Indicts the Elite in Israel for Not Knowing to Do Right (10a)
   C. God Indicts the Elite in Israel for Oppression (10b)

IV. Announcement of Judgment against the Oppressive and Complacent (3:11-15)
   A. Destruction of the Strongholds of the Oppressive and Complacent (11)
   B. Sarcastic Affirmation of the Salvation of the Oppressive and Complacent (12)
   C. Uselessness of the Religion of the Oppressive and Complacent (13-14)
   D. Destruction of the Great Houses of the Oppressive and Complacent (15)

Message or Messages

The elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath, but heed his warning because their covenant relationship with him requires that he punish them for all their sins. The elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath, but heed his warning because they have agreed to the obligations of their covenant relationship and fear is the logical response to his warning. The elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their strength or ill-gotten wealth to keep them safe from God's wrath, but heed his warning because their sin is so obvious it would even be acknowledged by the Assyrians and Egyptians and they are really only storing up violence and ruin for themselves. The elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their strength, wealth, or even their religion to keep them safe from God's wrath because their fortresses will be brought down and plundered, all that will be saved is the evidence of their destruction, their religious sanctuaries will also be attacked and provide no refuge, and their large and luxurious homes will be destroyed.

Analysis of the Details
Ironic Announcement of Judgment because of Israel's Unique Relationship with God

The people of Israel were sinning and complacently relying on their unique covenant relationship with God to protect them from his wrath. Amos undermines their complacency in verses 1-2 by announcing God's judgment precisely because of this unique covenant relationship. This announcement of judgment is characterized by irony—the description of a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what might be expected for emphasis. The elite expected that their unique relationship with God would save them from judgment. Amos maintains that their covenant relationship with God was precisely why he must judge them. Amos commands them to hear the word of the LORD, addressing them as the sons of Israel whom God delivered from Egypt, and quotes the word of the LORD, acknowledging his unique relationship with them but nonetheless announcing his judgment for their sin.

Command to hear the word of the LORD and identification of those addressed. Amos commands the people of Israel to hear the word of the LORD, addressing them as the sons of Israel whom God delivered from Egypt in verse 1, "Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel—against the whole family I brought up from the land of Egypt." The identification of the people of Israel as the "sons of Israel" is an allusion to the call of Abraham and the very beginning of Israel as the people of God. Their sense of identity as God's people was based on God's promises to make Abraham a great nation. As Amos further identifies the people of Israel as "the whole family I brought up from the land of Egypt" he already slips into the words of God. This identification is an allusion to the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt. This deliverance was the most significant event in Israel's history. They went into Egypt as a family, but were delivered from Egypt as a people. In fact, that deliverance eventually culminated in the conquest of Canaan and establishment of Israel as a nation. This heritage was what the people of Israel were relying on to exempt them from God's judgment.

Acknowledgment of God's unique relationship with Israel and ironic announcement of his judgment. Amos then directly quotes the word of the LORD, in which God acknowledges his unique relationship with the people of Israel, but also announces his judgment against them for their sin in verse 2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins." God's acknowledgment of his unique relationship with the people of Israel continues to confirm the reality of what the people of Israel were depending upon to exempt them from his judgment. This unique relationship is emphasized in the Hebrew text with an exclusive adverb translated "only" and an inclusive noun translated "all." Smith also notes that "You only" is in the emphatic position ahead of the verb in the Hebrew text for emphasis (Smith, 70). I have indicated this emphasis in translation with bold print. Stuart observes that the word translated "known" has a rich range of meaning, and that here it means in effect to be "specially related to" (Stuart, 322). They did have a unique relationship with him. However, the announcement of judgment that follows dramatically clarifies that this unique relationship did not exempt them from judgment. In fact, this unique relationship required that God judge them. As Mays suggests, Amos takes up the theological position of his audience "and traps them in the consequences of their own defense" (Mays, 58). Indeed, when the covenant was established, the people of Israel were warned of the dire consequences of violating their covenant obligations. Therefore, the elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath, but heed his warning because their covenant relationship with him requires that he punish them for all their sins.
Questions and Assertion Challenging Complacency 
and Encouraging the Fear of God

Amos continues to undermine the complacent dependence of the people of Israel on their 
unique covenant relationship with God in verses 3-8. These verses contain a series of rhetorical 
questions and one assertion that remind the Israelites of the obligations of their covenant 
relationship and present the case for fearing God when he warns them of judgment rather than 
complacently relying on their covenant relationship with him.

**Question establishing the covenant relationship between Israel and God.** Amos begins 
his argument by reminding the people of Israel of their covenant obligations with a rhetorical 
question in verse 3, "Do two walk together unless they meet by appointment?" This question 
presupposes the answer, "No, two don't walk together unless they meet by appointment." This 
question alludes to the giving of the covenant at Sinai and serves to remind the Israelites of the 
covenant obligations that they accepted at that time as well as the dreadful consequences of 
failing to live in accordance with that agreement.

**Questions establishing the logical relationship between prophetic warning and danger.** Next, Amos includes two questions that establish the logical relationship between prophetic 
warning and the danger of disaster in verse 4, "Does a lion roar in the thicket when there is no 
prey for him? Does a young lion give a roar from his den if he has not captured?" Lions 
characteristically roar just before they attack their prey and while they are devouring it. These 
questions presuppose the answer, "No, a lion does not roar in the thicket unless he has captured 
prey." However, Amos is not concerned about lions. He is concerned about God's prophetic 
warnings. Amos frequently used lions to illustrate the nature of God. The implication of these 
rhetorical questions is that God does not warn through the prophets unless there is a real danger.

**Questions establishing the logical relationship between danger and those endangered.** Next, Amos includes two questions establishing the logical relationship between danger and 
those endangered in verse 5, "Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no snare for 
it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing?" The first question 
presupposes the answer, "No, a bird can't fall into a trap on the ground unless a trap has been 
set." Though experience may indicate otherwise, the second question presupposes the answer, 
"No, a trap does not spring up unless it captures something." The implication of these rhetorical 
questions is that there is no real danger without someone being endangered.

**Question establishing the reasonableness of heeding God's prophetic warning.** Next, 
Amos includes a rhetorical question that establishes the reasonableness of heeding God's 
prophetic warning in the first half of verse 6, "If a trumpet is blown in a city, do not the people 
tremble?" The trumpet referred to here is clearly a trumpet warning of an attack on the city. 
This question presupposes the answer, "Yes, the people do tremble when a trumpet is blown in 
the city." Though this question may contain a veiled threat of attack by a foreign army, Amos 
was more concerned with the Israelites heeding God's prophetic warning. The implication of this 
rhetorical question is that fearing God's prophetic warning is reasonable.

**Question establishing the LORD as the cause of disaster.** Next, Amos includes a rhetorical 
question that establishes the LORD as the cause of disaster in the second half of verse 6, "If 
disaster happens to a city has the LORD not done it?" This question presupposes the answer, 
"Yes, if disaster happens to a city the LORD has done it." The implication of this question is
that God is the cause of disaster. This question combines with the assertion that follows in verse 7 and the final rhetorical question in verse 8 to establish a logical chain of events: God brings disaster>God reveals his plans to the prophets>the prophets must prophesy. The overall implication is that the people of Israel should heed prophetic warnings because they are the revelation of God's actual intention of bringing about disaster.

Assertion that the LORD does nothing without revealing his plans to the prophets. Next, Amos makes an assertion that the LORD does nothing without revealing his plans to the prophets in verse 7, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." The certitude of this assertion is emphasized in the Hebrew text with an emphatic conjunction translated "Surely." As was stated above, this assertion combines with the preceding rhetorical question in verse 6b and the final rhetorical question in verse 8b to establish a logical chain of events and implies the need to heed prophetic warning because of the disastrous reality underlying the threat.

Question establishing the reasonableness of fearing God and his prophetic warning. Next, Amos asks a rhetorical question that establishes the reasonableness of fearing God and his prophetic warning in the first half of verse 8, "A lion has roared—who will not fear?" The lion was the most feared animal on the plains of Palestine. This question presupposes the answer, "No, everyone should be afraid." The lion that Amos is referring to in this case is God and his roar is his prophetic warning. The implication of this rhetorical question is that fearing God's prophetic warning is reasonable.

Question establishing the reasonableness of prophesying when the Sovereign LORD has spoken. Finally, Amos asks a concluding rhetorical question that establishes the reasonableness of prophesying when the Sovereign LORD has spoken in the second half of verse 8, "The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who will not prophesy?" This question presupposes the answer, "Since the Sovereign LORD has spoken, no one can refuse to prophesy." The implication of this rhetorical question is that the prophets have no choice but to prophesy when God speaks. As was stated above, this rhetorical question combines with the rhetorical question in verse 6b and the assertion in verse 7 to establish a logical chain of events and implies the need to heed prophetic warning because of the disastrous reality underlying the threat. Therefore, the elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath, but heed his warning because they have agreed to the obligations of their covenant relationship and fear is the logical response to his warning. Fear is the logical response to God's warning of judgment because there is no warning unless there is real danger; there is no danger unless there is someone endangered; and when the prophets warn of judgment it is because God has revealed his plans to bring disaster.

Indictment of the Elite in Israel for Wickedness and Oppression

Having undermined the complacency of the elite in Israel in verses 1-2 and 3-8, Amos indicts them for wickedness and oppression in verses 9-10. Wicked foreigners are used to confirm the many tumults and oppressions in Israel and God himself charges them with the inability to do right and violence that causes the ruin of others. In addition, Amos probably also warns that God is aware of their sin and that they will be judged for the violence and ruin that they have done to others.
Foreigners confirm the many tumults and oppressions in Israel. God summons the Philistines and Egyptians to witness and confirm the wickedness of Israel in verse 9, "Proclaim to the fortresses in Ashdod and to the fortresses in the land of Egypt. Say: 'Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the many tumults within her and oppressions in her midst.'" God was not really commanding messengers to go to Ashdod and Egypt and enlist witnesses. This is a rhetorical device that Amos uses to make his point in a dramatic way that might have some hope of penetrating the pride and complacency of the elite in Israel. The summons is based on legal practice. Smith notes that two witnesses were required by Israel's law in cases where the death penalty was imposed (Smith, 77; see Dt. 17:6). The people of Israel regarded the Philistines and Egyptians as ungodly and wicked people. Therefore, when God calls upon them to confirm the tumults and oppressions in Israel, Amos is ironically emphasizing the extent of their sin. Their sin is so blatant that it is even apparent to the Philistines and Egyptians.

Godindicts the elite in Israel for not knowing to do right. Next, God indicts the elite in Israel for not knowing to do right in the first half of verse 10, "They do not know to do right," declares the LORD." Amos probably includes this indictment to emphasize further the extent of their sin. They have been so corrupted by wickedness that they are completely incapable of righteous conduct. Either they have no awareness of their responsibility to do right or they have no conception of how to do right or both. This indictment also may imply a warning that God is fully aware of their wicked character and conduct.

Godindicts the elite in Israel for oppression. Finally, God indicts the elite in Israel for oppression in the second half of verse 10 by identifying them as, "Those who store up violence and ruin in their fortresses." The words "violence" and "ruin" are metonyms for that which is gained by violence and ruin. In fact, the NIV translates, "Those who hoard plunder and loot in their fortresses." Therefore, this identification continues the preceding accusation by charging them with oppression that results in violence and the ruin of others. This ill-gotten wealth and the fortresses where they stored it were two bases of their complacency. However, this indictment probably also implies a warning. By violently oppressing others and bringing them to ruin they were also storing up that violence and ruin for themselves. Rather than a basis for security, their ill-gotten wealth would ultimately lead to their own ruin. Rather than their fortresses being secure, they already contained the seeds of their destruction. The reality of this implied warning is confirmed by the announcement of judgment that follows immediately, especially the announcement of the destruction and plundering of their fortresses. Therefore, the elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their military might or ill-gotten wealth to keep them safe from God's wrath, but heed his warning because their sin is so obvious it would even be acknowledged by the Assyrians and Egyptians and they are really only storing up violence and ruin for themselves.

Announcement of Judgment against the Oppressive and Complacent

Amos concludes by announcing God's judgment against the oppressive and complacent in verses 11-15. In fact, he not only announces God's judgment on them, but on all that they based their misplaced confidence. He announces the destruction and plundering of their strongholds; sarcastically affirms that they will be saved, but only like the shepherd saves the evidence that a lamb has been devoured by a lion; declares that their religion will also be attacked and prove ineffectual as a basis of security; and proclaims that their great houses will be destroyed.
Destruction of the strongholds of the oppressive and complacent. First, Amos announces the coming of an invading army and the destruction of the strongholds of the oppressive and complacent in verse 11, "Therefore the Sovereign LORD says, 'An enemy and encompassing of the land; and he will bring down your strongholds from you and your fortresses will be plundered.'" The elite in Israel were complacent in part because of their military might as well as the wealth that they had gained from their oppression. However, Amos reveals that their seemingly secure strongholds and fortresses would not be able to protect them from the army that God was bringing against them. In addition, the plunder that they have gained from their oppression and stored in their fortresses would in turn be plundered by others.

Sarcastic affirmation of the salvation of the oppressive and complacent. Next, Amos sarcastically affirms that the oppressive and complacent will be saved in verse 12, "Thus says the LORD: 'As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth two legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the corner of a bed and on the fine cloth of a couch.'" The people of Israel believed that they would be saved from any harm. Their complacency is revealed here by Amos' description of them as sitting on beds and couches. However, Amos maintains that the only sense that they would be saved is comparable to the shepherd who is able to save a few bones and a tattered ear after the lion is finished with his meal. This affirmation of their salvation is sarcastic. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a derisive emphasis. Amos sarcastically affirms their salvation to dramatically assert that they would not really be saved. Shepherds were required to produce evidence of the loss of any animal in their care to wild beasts. The animal was not really saved. Similarly, the people of Israel would not really be saved. All that would be left is the evidence of their destruction.

Uselessness of the religion of the oppressive and complacent. Next, Amos declares that their religion will also be attacked and prove ineffective as a basis of security in verses 13-14, "'Listen and testify against the house of Jacob,' declares the Lord, the LORD God of Armies. 'Because on the day I marshal the sins of Israel against him, I will marshal them against the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.'" The elite in Israel were relying on their religion, specifically their offerings on the altar as a safeguard against God's judgment. However, Amos announced that their religion would also come under attack. Rather than marshaling an army, Amos speaks of marshaling the sins of Israel against them in order to stress that their sins are ultimately responsible for the coming of an invading army. Altars were where sacrifices were offered as a provision of God's mercy for the forgiveness of sin. The horns of the altar were places of refuge from harm (See 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28). However, the altars would be torn down and the horns would be cut off and fall to the ground. Their religion would prove ineffective in protecting them from God's judgment.

Destruction of the great houses of the oppressive and complacent. Finally, Amos proclaims that the great houses of the elite in Israel will be destroyed in verse 15, "'I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish and the great houses will come to an end,' declares the LORD." The oppressive and complacent in Israel were relying on their wealth for security. Their wealth is depicted here in the types of houses they owned. They had different houses for different seasons. They had houses made of rare and costly materials. Their houses were "great," probably meaning they were very big. However, Amos reveals that their wealth would prove to be an inappropriate basis of security. Their large and luxurious homes would not be a secure refuge from God's judgment. He will strike them
and they will perish and come to an end. Therefore, the elite of Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their strength, wealth, or even their religion to keep them safe from God's wrath because their fortresses will be brought down and plundered, all that will be saved will be the evidence of their destruction, their religion will also be attacked and provide no refuge, and their large and luxurious houses will be destroyed.

Application of the Message

Establishing the Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to a situation in the modern church. All Christians have experienced God's gracious salvation through Jesus Christ and the New Testament teaches that Christians can feel secure in their relationship with Christ. However, some Christians become complacent, relying on their relationship with God through Jesus Christ to keep them safe from God's wrath even when they are living a life of sin. Some Christians also become lulled into complacency by the seeming security of their situation. For example, they may be healthy and feel that they have adequate resources to deal with any contingency. Some Christians also become complacent because by all outward appearances they seem to be religious. These Christians often complacently assume that they are safe and secure—that God will never judge them no matter what they do. Their complacency often leads to a permissive lifestyle. Their pride and complacency may also lead to a rejection of God's revelation. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 3:1-15 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Christians don't normally have fortresses, their worship does not center on an altar with horns, they do not usually own houses made of ivory, etc. In addition, the announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

Applying the Message

Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their unique relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath like the elite in Israel because God warned them that their covenant relationship with him required that he punish them for all their sins. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their unique relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath like the elite in Israel because Amos reminded them that they had agreed to the terms of their covenant relationship with God and explained that fear is the logical response to God's warning of judgment. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their wealth or strength to keep them safe from God's wrath like the elite in Israel because God warned them that their sin was obvious to everyone and they were really only storing up violence and ruin for themselves. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their strength, wealth, or even their religion to keep them safe from God's wrath like the elite in Israel because God declared that their fortresses would be brought down and plundered, their religion would also come under attack and provide no refuge, and their great houses would be destroyed.
Proclamation of the Message

Title: You Only Have I Chosen... Therefore I Will Punish You

Objective: The objective of this message is to forbid and discourage Christians from sinning and complacently relying on their unique relationship with God, strength, wealth, or religion to protect them from God's wrath.

Proposition: Christians should not become complacent and sin because their covenant relationship with God requires that he punish them for their sin; the logical response to their sin is to fear God's judgment; their sin is obvious and they are really only storing up ruin for themselves; and their power, wealth, and even their religion will not protect them from God's wrath.

Introduction

Christians sometimes are lulled into complacency and as a result drift into an undisciplined lifestyle. The potential reasons for complacency are many. Christians may become complacent because of their unique relationship with God. As Christians they are saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ and secure in their relationship with him. However, they sometimes misinterpret their security as a license for sin, presuming that God will never judge them. Christians may also become complacent because of their economic success and social power. They have come to believe that they are in an economically and socially secure position that nothing can threaten. Christians may even become complacent because of their pious practice of religion. The people of Israel had been lulled into complacency by their unique relationship with God as well as their military might, economic prosperity, and religious piety. As a result they had become undisciplined and wicked, thinking that God would never punish them. They were wrong! Amos confronts them with the word of the LORD in Amos 3:1-15. We need to hear this word of the LORD as well so that we do not make the same mistake. Read Amos 3:1-15.

I. Christians should not become complacent and sin because their covenant relationship with God requires that he punish them for their sin.

A. The Israelites were sinning and complacently relying on their unique relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath.
B. Indeed, they did have a unique relationship with God. Amos addresses them as "the sons of Israel." God chose and called Abraham, whom he renamed Israel, with the intent of making him into a great nation. They were the heirs of this selection and design. God addresses them as "the whole family I brought up from the land of Egypt." God acknowledges his unique relationship with them, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."
C. Nonetheless, God declared that he would judge them. In fact, God explains that it was precisely because of their unique relationship with him that he would judge them, "therefore, I will punish you for all your sins."
D. Illustration of Complacency Leading to Sin and Judgment
E. As a Christian you also have a unique relationship with God through Jesus Christ. However, you should not become complacent and sin because your covenant relationship with God requires that he punish you for your sin.

II. Christians should become complacent and sin because the logical response to sin is to fear God's judgment.
A. The Israelites were sinning and complacently relying on their unique relationship with God to keep them safe from his wrath.

B. Amos responded to them with a rhetorical question reminding them that they had agreed to the terms of their covenant relationship with God, "Do two walk together unless they meet by appointment?" This rhetorical question presupposes a negative reply. They had agreed to walk in covenant relationship with God.

C. Furthermore, Amos responded to them with several rhetorical questions and an assertion with which he presents the case for fear when God warns of coming judgment.

1. He asks two rhetorical questions that affirm that there is no warning unless there is danger of disaster, "Does a lion roar in the thicket when there is no prey for him? Does a young lion give a roar from his den if he has not captured?"

2. He asks two rhetorical questions that affirm that there is no danger of disaster without someone who is endangered, "Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no snare for it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing?"

3. He asks a rhetorical question that affirms that God is the cause of disaster, "If disaster happens to a city has the LORD not done it?"

4. He asks two rhetorical questions that affirm the logic of fearing when God warns of the danger of disaster, "If a trumpet is blown in a city, do not the people tremble? A lion has roared—who will not fear?"

D. Illustration of Complacency and Sin Resulting from Presuming on God's Grace

E. As a Christian you have a unique relationship with God through Jesus Christ. However, you should not become complacent and sin because the logical response to sin is to fear God's judgment.

III. Christians should not become complacent and sin because their sin is obvious and they are really only storing up ruin for themselves.

A. The Israelites were sinning and complacently relying on their strong defenses to keep them safe from God's wrath.

B. God called for witnesses to be summoned from the fortresses in Ashdod in Philistia and Egypt to confirm the many tumults and oppressions in Israel. The implication of this summons was that even the wicked people of Philistia and Egypt would acknowledge and condemn Israel for its iniquity.

C. In addition, God testified against their character himself, "They do not know to do right,' declares the LORD." They had become so corrupt that they had either forgotten their responsibility to live righteously or had forgotten how.

D. Furthermore, God warned them of the consequences of their actions by identifying them as "those who store up violence and ruin in their fortresses." They believed they were making themselves more secure by accumulating wealth and building fortresses through their exploitation of others. However, in reality they were storing up violence and ruin for themselves.

E. Illustration of Complacency and Sin Resulting from Wealth

F. You too may be lulled into complacency and sin through wealth and strength. However, you should not become complacent and sin because your sin is obvious and you are really only storing up ruin for yourselves.

IV. Christians should not become complacent and sin because their power, wealth, and even their religion will not protect them from God's wrath.
A. The Israelites were sinning and complacently relying on their strength, wealth, and religion to keep them safe from God's wrath.
B. God warned them that they would come under attack and their strongholds would be brought down and their fortresses plundered, "Therefore the Sovereign LORD says: 'An enemy and encompassing of the land; and he will bring down your strongholds from you and your fortresses will be plundered.'"
C. God warned them that nothing of their extravagant lifestyle would be saved but the evidence of their destruction, "Thus says the LORD: 'As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth two legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the corner of a bed and on the fine cloth of a couch.'" A shepherd was required to give evidence when one of the animals in his care was killed and eaten by a lion. Similarly, all that would be saved from Israel would be the evidence of their destruction. As God explains, "'I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish and the great houses will come to an end,' declares the LORD."
D. God warned them that their religion would come under attack as well and would be powerless to help them, "'Listen and testify against the house of Jacob,' declares the Lord, the LORD God of the Armies. 'Because on the day I marshal the sins of Israel against him, I will marshal (them) against the altars of Bethel and the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.'"
E. Illustration of Complacency and Sin Resulting from Strength
F. You too may be lulled into complacency and sin by wealth, strength, or religion. However, you should not become complacent and sin because your power, wealth, and even your religion will not protect you from God's wrath.

Conclusion

Christians sometimes are lulled into complacency and as a result drift into an undisciplined lifestyle. The people of Israel had been lulled into complacency by their unique relationship with God as well as their military might, economic prosperity, and religious piety. As a result they had become undisciplined and wicked, thinking that God would never punish them. They were wrong! Amos confronts them with the word of the LORD in Amos 3:1-15. We need to hear this word of the LORD as well so that we do not make the same mistake. You should not become complacent and sin because your covenant relationship with him requires that he punish you for all your sins. You should not become complacent and sin because the logical response to sin is to fear God's judgement. You should not become complacent and sin because your sin is obvious and you are really only storing up ruin for yourselves. You should not become complacent and sin because your power, wealth, and even your religion will not protect your from God's wrath.
CHAPTER FOUR

YOU COWS OF BASHAN

Amos 4:1-3

This passage as defined is rather brief. However, the passage is distinguishable from the passages that precede and follow by the identity of those who are addressed—the spoiled wives of the elite in Israel (See Situation and Purpose). In addition, the passage is self-contained with all the elements characteristic of a prophetic exhortation (See Form and Function).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

4:1 Hear this word, cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria,  
the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy,  
who are saying to your husbands, "Bring that we may drink!"
2 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness:  
"Surely days are coming upon you  
and he will take you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks.  
3 Breaches you will go out, each one right in front of her,  
and you will be cast out toward Harmon,\(^1\) declares the LORD.

\(^1\)"Harmon" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word employed here. However, no place is known by this name. Speculation abounds with regard to the original reading of the text. I have included a full analysis of this textual problem within the analysis of the details.

Situation and Purpose

The passage reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were oppressing the poor and denying them justice. However, in this case it is their wives who are singled out and condemned. Their oppression and injustice is most clearly revealed in Amos' accusing address in verse 1, "Hear this word, cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy, who are saying to your husbands, 'Bring that we may drink!'" Though women did not normally hold a prominent place in commerce, Amos accuses them of "oppressing the poor" and "crushing the needy." Probably they abused the poor and needy through the demands they placed upon their husbands as reflected in their command, "Bring that we may drink!" In addition, this passage reflects a situation in which these women felt secure and complacent. Their sense of security and complacency is reflected in Amos' identification of them as "cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria." The cows of Bashan were prized and pampered. Mount Samaria is frequently described in the Book of Amos as a place that the elite regarded as secure. The purpose of this passage was to announce God's impending judgment, undermine their complacency, and encourage them to heed God's word of warning. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, it probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sin and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role
From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 4:1-3 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 4:1-3 continues and reinforces the warning against oppression and injustice found in 1:3-2:16 and 3:1-15. This warning is reinforced further especially in 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:8-14; and 8:1-14. In addition, Amos 4:1-3 develops the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and introduced in 3:1-15. This warning is developed especially in 4:4-13; 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, Amos 4:1-3 does not allow much room for hope at this early stage of the book's strategy.

Form and Function

Amos 4:1-3 can be classified generally as prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. Though no direct indication of the appropriate response is provided, the warning implies that the readers should heed the warning of God's judgment and repent. Amos 4:1-3 follows this characteristic form of prophetic exhortation. A command is given in verse 1, "Hear this word, cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria." However, this command is introductory in nature and does not specify the appropriate response. The identification of these women as "the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy" indicates their sin. The announcement of God's judgment on these women in verses 2-3 because of their oppression of the needy as described in verse 1 implies that they should repent and provides the motivation for repenting. The announcement of God's judgment is introduced as a divine oath to emphasize the certainty of judgment and the need to heed the warning.

Strategy and Structure

The strategy of Amos 4:1-3 is very simple. Amos begins by commanding the wives of the elite in Israel to hear the word of the LORD. As he does so, he addresses them in such a way as to identify and rebuke them for their sin (v. 1). Amos concludes by announcing God's judgment against them, warning them of the consequences of their sin and thereby encouraging them to heed God's warning and repent (vs. 2-3).

I. Command to Hear and Rebuking Identification of Those Addressed (4:1)
A. Command to Hear
B. Rebutting Identification of Those Addressed
   1. Spoiled
   2. Complacent
   3. Oppressive
   4. Demanding

II. Announcement of Certain and Horrible Judgment (4:2-3)
   A. The Certainty of the Judgment (v. 2a)
   B. The Horror of the Judgment (vs. 2b-3)
      1. Inescapable death and humiliating treating of their bodies
      2. Complete destruction of Samaria
      3. Horrible and humiliating disposal of their bodies?

Message or Messages

The elite wives should repent of their spoiled, complacent, oppressive, and demanding lifestyle because Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness that days of judgment are surely coming when and Samaria will be destroyed, they will die, and their bodies will be treated disgracefully.

Analysis of the Details

Command to Hear and Rebutting Identification of Those Addressed

Amos begins by commanding the wives of the elite to hear God's word and addressing them in such a way as to identify and express disapproval of their conduct in verse 1, "Hear this word, cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy, who are saying to your husbands, 'Bring that we may drink!'"

Command to hear. With the command, "Hear this word," Amos was urging these women to take God's word of warning seriously. Though Amos' command does not indicate specifically what they were to do in response to God's word of warning, the implication of Amos' rebutting identification of those addressed is that they should repent of the offenses that he indicates.

Rebutting identification of those addressed. Amos identifies these women in four ways. First, he identifies them as "cows of Bashan." No woman enjoys being called a cow and the women of Samaria were no different. Of course they were not literally cows. Amos was being insultingly sarcastic. Bashan was a fertile region that "was noted for its lush pasturage and fine cattle" (Smith, 84). The implication of Amos' insulting identification of these women as "cows of Bashan" was that they have become pampered and spoiled by their husbands. Second, he locates these women "on Mount Samaria." By locating these women "on Mount Samaria" he was probably doing more than placing them geographically. Throughout the Book of Amos, Amos identifies "Mount Samaria" as a locale where the people of Israel felt secure. Samaria's geographical location made it easy to defend and many felt that it was impregnable. The implication of Amos' locating these women "on Mount Samaria" was that they had become complacent. Third, Amos identifies them as "the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy." These women were probably not directly involved in the oppression of the
poor. Women did not normally engage in business. However, Amos states his charge against them directly to emphasize their culpability. They were probably putting pressure on their husbands by their demands for more and more. The implication of Amos' charge is that they are just as responsible for oppression and injustice as their husbands. Fourth, Amos identifies them through their own words, "who are saying to your husbands, 'Bring that we may drink!'" Some suggest that this identification implies that these women have a drinking problem. However, Amos probably intended to illustrate how demanding these women were. The Hebrew text contains a form of the imperative verb that stresses the urgency of the command. The urgency of this command is expressed in translation with an exclamation point. This grammatical construction stresses the demanding character of these women.

Announcement of Certain and Horrible Judgment

Amos concludes by announcing the certain and horrible judgment that is coming upon them in verses 2-3, "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness: 'Surely days are coming upon you and he will take you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks. Breaches you will go out, each one right in front of her, and you will be cast out toward Harmon,' declares the LORD."

**The certainty of the judgment.** Amos stresses the certainty of the coming judgment in two ways. First, Amos introduces the announcement of judgment as a divine oath, "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness." Oaths were commonly used as a guarantee that a promise or obligation would be fulfilled. Amos' identification of the one making the oath as "the Sovereign LORD" attests to the authority of God to do whatever he says. The Hebrew word translated "Sovereign" is normally translated "Lord." Here it is translated "Sovereign" because it is used with the divine name that is normally translated "LORD." Rather than repeating the title, I have chosen to use an adjective that conveys the same sense of authority. In common practice, the greater security for the oath, the more certainty that the oath would be fulfilled. Here God swears by his "holiness"—his transcendent character that guarantees that his oath will be fulfilled. Second, the introductory words of the oath stress the certainty of its fulfillment, "Surely days are coming upon you." The translation "Surely" expresses the emphasis of a Hebrew conjunction and demonstrative particle that could literally be translated "For behold." Probably the idea behind this expression is that whatever is announced is so certain of happening that its coming is already in sight. Through Amos' stress on the certainty of the coming judgment the urgency of these women heeding God's word and repenting is accentuated.

**The horror of the judgment.** Amos stresses the horror of the coming judgment by describing the disposal of their bodies in verse 2-3. Each of the three elements in the description indicates something of the horror of the judgment. First, he indicates that the judgment will result in their inescapable death and humiliating handling of their bodies, "and he will take you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks." This description probably refers to the practice of dragging away dead bodies with a hook and line to a place of disposal to avoid defilement. The second line not only reinforces the first, it adds a new element. The words "the last of you" stress that none will escape. Second, he indicates that the judgment will result in the complete destruction of Samaria, "Breaches you will go out, each one right in front of her." The women "on Mount Samaria" were relying on the strong defenses of the city to keep them safe. However, Amos reveals that they have no reason for complacency. The walls of the city will have so many cracks that there is certain to be one at every location where they have fallen dead. The third description of the disposal of their bodies is unclear. I have translated the text literally,
"and you will be cast out toward Harmon." However, "Harmon" is just a transliteration of a Hebrew word of uncertain meaning. The presumption is that the word is a place name, but no place by this name is known. Consequently many suggestions have been made with regard to understanding or emending the text. The most likely proposal is that the text should read "toward Hermon." As Mays observes, this reading "would give an ironic twist to the line, because Mount Hermon is in the Bashan range. The Bashan-cows will end up as carrion on the mountains of Bashan!" (Mays, 73). Hayes' proposal that "the original reading was a rare word meaning 'the dungpit' or 'the garbage heap'" (Smith, 86) is unlikely because of the differences in the form and sound between that word and what is found in the text. However, it may be possible that the original reading was a word meaning "stronghold" or "fortification." If this alternative is accepted, Amos was probably ridiculing their complacent reliance on the security of "Mount Samaria" by describing the dumping of their dead bodies before that which they trusted. Another possibility is that the original reading was a word meaning "devoted to destruction." If that alternative is accepted, Amos was probably intensifying his warning that they would die. A final possibility is that the original reading was a word meaning "naked" or "ashamed." If that alternative is accepted, Amos was probably stressing the humiliating treatment that their bodies would receive. Though the final description of the judgment is unclear, clearly the implication is that the coming judgment will result in a horrible death and humiliation. Therefore, the wives of the elite in Israel should repent of their spoiled, complacent, oppressive, and demanding lifestyle because the Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness that days of judgment are surely coming when Samaria will be destroyed, they will die, and their bodies will be treated disgracefully.

Application of the Message

Establishing the Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to a situation in the modern church. Christian women today are sometimes enticed by the world's riches and pleasures and pressure their husbands to fulfill their desires. As a result, the husbands may oppress others so that they can satisfy the demands of their wives. In fact, women in the modern context are freer to pursue their ambitions themselves and may be directly involved in the oppression of the poor and needy. These Christian women may also become complacent, thinking that they are shielded from harm by their wealth and secure homes. As a result they may not be responsive when God disciplines them. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 4:1-3 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. As I have mentioned, women are freer today to directly participate in commerce. However, this difference only accentuates the message of the passage. In addition, the announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to the women of Israel. Men can be equally guilty of these sins. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing the women of Israel as warning examples.

Applying the Message
Christian women should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like that of the wives of the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD swore that horrible and humiliating judgment was surely coming upon them.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: You Cows of Bashan

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christian wives to avoid a worldly lifestyle that is pampered, complacent, oppressive, and demanding.

Proposition: Christian women should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like that of the elite women of Israel because the Sovereign LORD swore that horrible and humiliating judgement was surely coming upon them.

Introduction

Christian women today are sometimes enticed by the world's riches and live a self-indulgent lifestyle. The women of Samaria were pampered, complacent, spoiled, and demanding. Illustration of a Self-Indulgent Lifestyle. Amos addresses them directly and announces God's judgment against them in Amos 4:1-3. Read Amos 4:1-3.

I. Christian women should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like the elite women of Israel.
   A. Amos commanded the elite women of Israel, "Hear this word." The word translated "Hear" implies also the need to heed. But this is not Amos' word, but the word of the Sovereign LORD.
   B. Amos addresses the women of Israel as "cows of Bashan." Sometimes women are insultingly called cows today, but the implication is usually that they resemble a cow—fat and ugly. Though some of the women of Israel may have been fat and ugly, Amos was not denouncing them for that reason. Bashan was a region known for its fine cattle, which were extremely well cared for. Similarly, the husbands of the women of Samaria indulged their every desire. Amos was denouncing them for being pampered and spoiled.
   C. Amos locates these women "on Mount Samaria." However, he was probably doing more than merely identifying their geographical location. Amos frequently depicts the misplaced faith that the people of Israel had in the security of Mount Samaria. Indeed, Samaria's geographical location made it easy to defend. By locating these women "on Mount Samaria" Amos was rebuking them for their complacency. They believed that they were secure and nothing could harm them.
   D. Amos identifies these women as "the women who are oppressing the poor, who are crushing the needy." Women in that time and culture were not normally involved in business. However, Amos charges them directly with oppressing the poor and needy to stress their responsibility for putting pressure on their husbands to fulfill their insatiable need for more and more.
   E. Amos identifies these women through their own words, "who are saying to your husbands, 'Bring that we may drink!'" Some suggest that this identification indicates that these women had a drinking problem. However, Amos probably was just illustrating how demanding these women were. The wording of the Hebrew text stresses the urgency of their demand.
F. Christian women can also be enticed by the world and become spoiled, complacent, oppressive, and demanding. As Christian women you should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like the elite wives of Israel.

II. Christian women should avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like the elite women of Israel because the Sovereign LORD swore that horrible and humiliating judgment was surely coming upon them.

A. As we have already seen, the women of Israel were spoiled, complacent, oppressive, and demanding. As a result, God warned them of certain and horrible judgment.

B. Amos stresses the certainty of the coming judgment in two ways.

1. First, Amos introduces the announcement of judgment as a divine oath, "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness." Oaths were commonly used as a guarantee that a promise or obligation would be fulfilled. In common practice at that time, the greater the security for the oath, the more certainty that they oath would be fulfilled. Here God swears by his "holiness"—his uniquely righteous character. Certainly God's holiness guarantees that he will fulfill his oath of judgment.

2. Second, the introductory words of the oath stress the certainty of its fulfillment, "Surely days are coming upon you." The words translated "Surely" can be more literally translated "For behold." The idea behind this expression is that whatever is introduced with these words is so certain that its coming is already in sight.

C. Amos stresses the horror of this judgment by describing the disposal of the bodies of these women.

1. First, he declares, "and he will take you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks." Dead bodies were commonly hauled away with a hook and line so that those who had responsibility for this dreadful task could avoid ritual impurity. Here Amos is probably warning the women of Samaria that they would die and their bodies would be treated horridly. The words "the last of you" stress that none of them would escape.

2. Second, he asserts, "Breaches you will go out, each one right in front of her." The women of Samaria were relying on the strong defenses of the city to safeguard them from danger. Here Amos is probably warning them that the strong defenses of the city were not a reason for complacency. The walls of the city would have so many cracks that there was certain to be a split at a place convenient to the location of every one of their dead bodies.

3. Third, he avows, "and you will be cast out toward Harmon." Though it is unclear where their bodies will be thrown since there is no known place called Harmon, clearly Amos is warning the elite women of Israel that their bodies would be disposed of without burial. For their bodies to be disposed of this way would be extremely humiliating.

D. Though Amos did not specifically call the women of Samaria to repent, that is the clear implication of his warning of horrible and humiliating judgment. If someone came into the auditorium right now and yelled, "Fire!" none of us would wait for a command to vacate the premises.

E. Christian women can also be enticed by the world and become spoiled, complacent, oppressive, and demanding. As Christian women you should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like the elite women of Israel because the Sovereign LORD swore that horrible and humiliating judgment was surely coming upon them.

Conclusion
Christian women today are sometimes enticed by the world's riches and live a self-indulgent lifestyle. The women of Samaria were pampered, complacent, spoiled, and demanding. *Illustration of a Self-Indulgent Lifestyle.* Amos addresses them directly and announces God's judgment against them in Amos 4:1-3. Christian women should heed God's word and avoid a self-indulgent lifestyle like the elite women of Israel because the Sovereign LORD swore that horrible and humiliating judgment was surely coming upon them.
CHAPTER FIVE

GO TO BETHEL AND SIN
Amos 4:4-13

This passage as defined has a recognizable beginning and can be distinguished from the preceding passage because the wives of the elite are no longer addressed. Though the passage contains some diverse material, the different elements are united around a concern for religious pride that leads to complacency and unresponsiveness to God's discipline (See Situation and Purpose). In addition, the diverse elements are united by the announcement of God's judgment in verse 12 (See Form and Function). The inclusion of verse 13 in this passage may be questioned. However, verse 13 contains a hymn praising "the LORD God of Armies" that reinforces the announcement of judgment in verse 12 (See Strategy and Structure).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

4:4"Go to Bethel and sin;
to Gilgal (and) multiply sin.
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every third day.
5Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving
and announce freewill offerings—
proclaim them, sons of Israel,
for this is what you love to do,"
declares the Sovereign LORD.
6"I* gave you clean teeth in all your cities
and lack of bread in all your places.
Yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
7"I* also withhold rain from you when the harvest was still three months away.
I sent rain on one city, but did not send rain on another city.
One field had rain; and a field that did not have rain dried up.
8So two or three cities wandered to one city to drink water,
but they were not satisfied.
Yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
9"I struck you with blight and mildew,
multiplying (them) in your gardens and vineyards.
Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees.
Yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
10"I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt.
I killed your young men with the sword,
along with the capturing of your horses.
I caused the stench of your camps to go up and into your nostrils.
Yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.
11"I overthrew some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire.
Yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

12 "Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel,
and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, Israel."
13 For behold! He who forms the mountains, creates the wind,
and reveals his thoughts to man;
he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—
The LORD God of Armies is his name.

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English.

**Situation and Purpose**

Amos 4:4-13 reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. Their pride is reflected in Amos' sarcastic call to worship in verses 4-5, especially verse 5, "'Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving and announce freewill offerings—proclaim them, sons of Israel, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD." They were proud of their piety and wanted to impress others with their devotion to God. Their unresponsiveness to God's discipline is reflected in verses 6-10 where Amos catalogs God acts of discipline against them, concluding each act of discipline with, "'Yet you have not returned to me,' declares the LORD." Their pride in their religion probably made them complacent and unresponsive to God's discipline. The purpose of this passage was to undermine the complacency of the elite in Israel by warning them of God's displeasure with their worship and judgment for their unresponsiveness to his discipline. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, it probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sin and turn to God for mercy.

**Literary Context and Role**

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 4:4-13 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 4:4-13 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15 and 4:1-3. This warning is reinforced especially in 5:1-17, 18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, Amos 4:4-13 does not allow much room for hope at this early stage of the book's strategy.

**Form and Function**

Amos 4:4-13 can be classified generally as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as
an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the
motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert
sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby
encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby
encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have
warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. Though no direct indication
of the appropriate response is provided, the warning implies that the readers should heed the
warning of God's judgment and repent. Amos 4:4-13 follows this characteristic form of
prophetic exhortation. A command is given in verse 12, "prepare to meet your God, Israel." How
ever, this command does not indicate how they should prepare. Nonetheless, the sarcastic
call to worship in verses 4-5, condemning them for their religious pride implies that they should
repent of their pride. In addition, the rebuking refrain in verses 6-11, "Yet you have not returned
to me," implies that they should return to God. The announcement of God's judgment on them in
verse 12a provides the motivation for repenting of their religious pride and returning to God.
The hymn in verse 13 reinforces the need to prepare to meet God by emphasizing how awesome
he is. Sarcasm and irony play a significant role in this passage and will be discussed later (See
Analysis of the Details).

Strategy and Structure

The strategy of Amos 4:4-13 centers around the command in the second part of verse 12,
"prepare to meet your God, Israel." The sarcastically rebuking call to worship in verses 4-5
supports this command by identifying the worship of the elite as sin. The rebuking examples of
their unresponsiveness to the LORD's discipline in verses 6-11 support this command by
identifying the unresponsiveness of the elite as foolish. The announcement of judgment in the
first part of verse 12 supports this command by warning the elite of God's impending judgment.
The song in verse 13 reinforces the command by warning the elite of the awesome prospect of
meeting the LORD God of Armies.

I. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Worship (4:4-5)
A. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Worship/Sin at Bethel and Gilgal (v. 4a)
B. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Offer Sacrifices, Tithes, and Thank Offerings (v. 4b)
C. Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Announce and Proclaim Freewill Offerings (v. 5)

II. Rebuking Examples of Their Unresponsiveness to God's Discipline (4:6-11)
A. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Famine (v. 6)
   1. Description of judgment
   2. Rebuking refrain and identification as the word of the LORD
B. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Drought (vs. 7-8)
   1. Description of judgment
   2. Rebuking refrain and identification as the word of the LORD
C. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Pestilence (v. 9)
   1. Description of judgment
   2. Rebuking refrain and identification as the word of the LORD
D. Rebuking Example of Judgment by Plague and Warfare (v. 10)
   1. Description of judgment
   2. Rebuking refrain and identification as the word of the LORD
E. Rebuking Example of and Illustration of Cataclysmic Judgment (v. 11)
1. Description of judgment
   a. Example of Sodom and Gomorrah
   b. Illustration of a burning stick
2. Rebuking refrain and identification as the word of the LORD

III. Exhortation to Prepare to Meet God (4:12-13)
   A. Announcement of Judgment (v. 12a)
   B. Command to Prepare to Meet God (v. 12b)
   C. Hymn Describing the Awesome God They Will Meet (v. 13)

Message or Messages

The elite in Israel should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride because their religious pride is sin. The elite in Israel should prepare to meet God by repenting of their unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because their unresponsiveness is foolish. The elite in Israel should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because they will certainly meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment is a frightening prospect.

Analysis of the Details

Sarcastically Rebuking Call to Worship

Amos begins dramatically by rebuking the elite in Israel for their religious pride with a sarcastic call to worship. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. In this context Amos is clearly being derisive. Amos sarcastically calls them to worship at Bethel and Gilgal; offer sacrifices, tithes, and thank offerings; and announce and proclaim their freewill offerings. From the very outset Amos identifies their worship as sin. Only at the end does he reveal the nature of their sin, their love of announcing and proclaiming their offerings.

Sarcastically rebuking call to worship/sin at Bethel and Gilgal. Amos begins his sarcastic call of the Israelites to worship in the first half of verse 4, "Go to Bethel and sin; to Gilgal (and) multiply sin." Bethel and Gilgal were places where God had revealed himself in Israel's history and important centers of the worship for the people of Israel in Amos' time. Amos employs these geographical references to make the connection with the worship of the Israelites. The unacceptability of their worship is indicated by the word "sin." Through sarcastically calling the people of Israel to worship at Bethel and Gilgal, Amos was dramatically identifying their worship at these religious centers as sin and expressing God's displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God by repenting of their pride.

Sarcastically rebuking call to offer sacrifices, tithes, and thank offerings. Amos continues his sarcastic call to worship in the second half of verse 4 and the first line of verse 5, "Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every third day. Burn that which is leavened, a thanksgiving." Amos is again being derisively sarcastic. Numbers 28:3 requires that the people of Israel offer two lambs a year old without defect every day as a regular burnt offering. Deuteronomy 14:28 requires that the people of Israel bring their tithes of produce every three years. Leviticus 7:13 requires that the people of Israel present an offering with cakes of bread made with yeast along with their fellowship offering of thanksgiving. Amos employs these
literary allusions to make the connection with the worship of the Israelites. Amos has already identified the worship of the Israelites as sin in the first half of verse 4. Through sarcastically calling the Israelites to bring their sacrifices, give their tithes, and burn their leavened bread, Amos was dramatically identifying their worship practices as sin and expressing God's displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God by repenting of their pride.

**Sarcastically rebuking call to announce and proclaim freewill offerings.** Amos concludes his sarcastic call to worship in the second half of verse 5, "'and announce freewill offerings—proclaim them, sons of Israel, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD." Amos is again being derisively sarcastic. The words "announce" and "proclaim" in the context clearly refer to the Israelites' practice of declaring aloud their participation in worship. Rather than worshiping as an expression of their devotion to God, the elite in Israel were worshiping because of their desire to impress others with their piety. Their misplaced desire in worship is made clear with the explanation, "for this is what you love to do." Through sarcastically calling the Israelites to announce and declare their worship, Amos was dramatically identifying their religious pride as sin and expressing God's displeasure with their worship. In this way Amos was undermining their religious pride and stressing their need to prepare to meet God by repenting of their pride. The implication of this sarcastic call to worship was that they should repent of their religious pride because their religious pride is sin.

**Rebuking Examples of Their Unresponsiveness to God's Discipline**

Amos alludes to several judgments that God had brought against the Israelites in verses 6-11. These verses seem to stress the variety and severity of God's judgments. The variety of God's judgments is stressed by the diverse judgments described, including famine (v. 6), drought (vs. 7-8), pestilence (v. 9), plague and warfare (v. 10), and catastrophe (v. 11). The severity of the judgments is stressed at numerous points. The famines were so severe that the Israelites had no need to brush their teeth (v. 6). The droughts were so severe that even when the Israelites traveled to a city that had water they couldn't get enough to satisfy them (v. 8). The plagues were so severe that they are compared to the plagues with which God struck Egypt as described in Exodus 7-11 (v. 10a). The warfare was so severe that the stench of the rotting bodies was stifling (v. 10b). The catastrophes that struck some Israelites were so severe that they are compared to the utter devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah as described in Genesis 19 (v. 11a). Amos concludes his emphasis on the severity of God's judgments with a simile, "You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire." The Israelites had come so close to being consumed by God's judgment that they had already begun to burn. Through stressing the variety and severity of God's judgments, Amos emphasizes that God had done everything he could to warn the Israelites. Therefore, they had no excuse for their failure to respond.

Amos intertwines a refrain within his allusions to God's judgments in verses 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11, "'Yet you have not returned to me,' declares the LORD." This refrain is repeated five times for emphasis. This refrain is loaded with irony. Irony describes a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what one might expect, frequently to draw attention to its remarkableness, appropriateness, or inappropriateness. In this context Amos is clearly drawing attention to the remarkable inappropriateness of the Israelites' failure to heed God's warning judgments. God had done everything he could do to warn the Israelites through his diverse and severe judgments.
They should have heeded his warning. Through this rebuking refrain, Amos was forcing the Israelites to recognize the foolishness of their unresponsiveness to God's discipline. In this way Amos was undermining their complacency and stressing their need to prepare to meet God by returning to him. The implication of this rebuke is that they should repent of their unresponsiveness to God's discipline because it is foolish.

**Exhortation to Prepare to Meet God**

Amos exhorts the elite in Israel to prepare to meet God in verses 12-13. He announces God's judgment against them (v. 12a); commands them to prepare to meet God (v. 12b); and includes a hymn describing the God whom they will meet (v. 13).

**Announcement of judgment.** Amos announces God's judgment against the proud, complacent, and unresponsive Israelites in the first part of verse 12, "Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel." However, it is uncertain what Amos was referring to with these words. Some commentators think that a more specific announcement of judgment has been lost (Mays, p. 80). Stuart believes that the announcement of judgment refers back to the preceding descriptions of judgment that would be unleashed together without restraint (Stuart, 339). Another possibility is that Amos was pointing to some catastrophe as he was delivering this prophetic message as an illustration of God's judgment. Amos might even be using a rhetorical figure of speech known as aposiopesis or sudden silence, which is commonly used in a threatening way (See E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, 151). Whatever Amos is referring to, he announces God's judgment to reinforce the need to obey the command that follows.

**Command to prepare to meet God.** Amos states the implication of the warning of God's judgment in the second part of verse 12, "and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, Israel." Implied within the command is a call to repent of those sins that have previously been identified—religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's warning judgments. In addition, the command contains a warning that is developed in the subsequent verse. This warning is ironic. Irony describes a circumstance or result that is the opposite of what one might expect, frequently to draw attention to its remarkableness, appropriateness, or inappropriateness. The elite in Israel had been going to their centers of worship in Bethel and Gilgal. The correct reason for doing so would be to meet God in worship and to hear him speak. However, the elite had been worshiping to impress others with their piety and ignoring God's attempts to get their attention. Nonetheless, Amos warns that they would meet God anyway, but in judgment. It is remarkably appropriate that those who went to God for the wrong reasons would still meet him in judgment. Through this command, Amos was calling the Israelites to repent of their religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's discipline and reinforcing the need for them to repent by warning them of the danger of meeting God.

**Hymn describing the awesome God whom they will meet.** Amos concludes with a hymn of praise to God that reinforces his command to prepare to meet God in verse 13. Most of the elements of this hymn accentuate the awesome majesty and power of God as the Sovereign Lord of creation. God is the one who "forms the mountains," "creates the wind," "turns dawn to darkness," and "treads the high places of the earth." Amos employs an illustrative figure known as anthropomorphism in the last of these lines. Anthropomorphism is a type of metaphor that illustrates the divine nature by describing God in human terms. The metaphor exalts God literally by elevating him above everything on earth. A distinct element of the hymn is in the
third line, "and reveals his thoughts to man." This line serves in this context to emphasize that people are without excuse since God reveals his thoughts. The final line of the hymn is climactic, "The LORD God of Armies is his name." The Hebrew word translated "Armies" is frequently translated "Almighty" and emphasizes the unlimited power at God's disposal as the commander in chief of all the heavenly host. Through this hymn Amos stresses the frightening prospect of meeting the LORD God of Armies who is the sovereign Lord of creation for those who have violated his revealed will.

**Application of the Message**

**Establishing the Correspondence**

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to a situation in the modern church. Christians sometimes become proud of their faithfulness to the outward forms of Christianity. These Christians may become complacent, thinking that their lives are pleasing to God. As a result they may not be responsive when God disciplines them. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 4:4-13 to the modern situation.

**Distinguishing the Contextualized**

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. The places and forms of Christian worship are different than those of Israel. Christians don't go to Bethel or Gilgal and don't offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament law. In addition, the announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents.

**Applying the Message**

Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride because religious pride is sin. Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because unresponsiveness is foolish. Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because the LORD may judge them and meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment is a frightening prospect.

**Proclamation of the Message**

**Title:** Go to Church and Sin

**Text:** Amos 4:4-13

**Objective:** The objective of this sermon is to lead Christians to repent of their religious pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to God's discipline and dedicate themselves to living their lives wholeheartedly for God.

**Proposition:** Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because religious pride is sin, unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish, and if they do not return to him they may meet him in judgment.
Introduction

Why have you come to church today? A primary reason Christians should come to church is to encounter God and hear him speak. However, Christians sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God's attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13. Read Amos 4:4-13.

I. Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their religious pride because religious pride is sin.

A. A call to worship is a common element found in many worship services. One of the most frequently used calls to worship is the Doxology—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." However, it is clear that Amos is being sarcastic in his call to worship. Sarcasm employs statements that are the opposite of what is really meant with a humorous or derisive intent. Amos is not trying to be funny!

B. Amos rebuked and condemned the spiritual pride of the Israelites by sarcastically calling them to worship at Bethel and Gilgal and equating their worship with sin—"Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more."

C. Amos rebuked and condemned the spiritual pride of the Israelites by sarcastically calling them to offer their sacrifices and bring their tithes and identifying their sin as pride—"Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD."

D. Enlist a member of the congregation or class with dramatic ability the week before to play the role of a modern-day Amos. At this point have him interrupt the sermon or Bible study and deliver the following modernization of Amos' sarcastic call to worship. "Go to church and sin; go to Sunday School and sin even more. Read your Bible every morning and bring your tithe every week. Thank the Lord for how wonderful you are and brag about your willingness to give to him—boast about it, you Christians, for this is what you love to do,' declares the Sovereign LORD."

E. You should prepare to meet God if you are proud of your piety because religious pride is sin.

II. Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting of their unresponsive to his discipline and returning to him because unresponsiveness is foolish.

A. Amos described the various and severe judgments that God had brought against the Israelites because of their sin.

B. Amos emphasized the severity of God's judgments in two ways. First, he compared God's judgments against some Israelites to his judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah—"I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." According to Genesis 19:24-26, God rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah and everyone on the entire plain was consumed along with the vegetation. Even Lot's wife became a pillar of salt when she looked back. Second, Amos compared the Israelites to a burning stick—"You were like
a burning stick snatched from the fire." They had come so close to being consumed by God's judgment that they had already begun to burn.

C. Amos rebuked the Israelites by repeatedly emphasizing their ironic failure to heed God's warning judgments despite their variety and severity—"Yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me . . . yet you have not returned to me,' declares the LORD." By repeatedly emphasizing their failure Amos underscored their extreme foolishness.

D. You should prepare to meet God by repenting of your unresponsive to his discipline and returning to him because unresponsiveness to his discipline is foolish.

III. **Christians should prepare to meet God by repenting and returning to him because they may meet God in judgment and meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment is a frightening prospect.**

A. Amos announced God's judgment against the Israelites because of their pride, complacency, and unresponsiveness to his discipline—"Therefore, this is what I will do to you, Israel." The meaning of Amos' warning is uncertain. Some think that a more specific announcement of judgment has been lost. Others think that Amos is referring back to the judgments already described that will be unleashed together without restraint. Another possibility is that Amos was pointing to some catastrophe as an illustration of God's judgment of Israel. Whatever the specific meaning of Amos' words, he was clearly warning the people of Israel of the reality of God's judgment of them for their religious pride and unresponsiveness to his discipline.

B. Amos warned the Israelites to prepare to meet their God—"and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." The desired result of worship is to meet God. However, the people of Israel had been going to Bethel and Gilgal because of their religious pride while being unresponsive to God's discipline. Amos warned them that they would still meet God, but for judgment rather than worship.

C. Amos described the frightening prospect of meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment—"He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God of Armies is his name." Prepare a brief slide presentation depicting the awesome majesty and power of God as revealed in the wonders of nature and show it as Amos 4:13 is read slowly, emphasizing the final line.

D. You should prepare to meet God by repenting and returning to him or you may meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment is a frightening prospect.

**Conclusion**

Why have you come to church today? A primary reason Christians should come to church is to encounter God and hear him speak. However, Christians today sometimes come to church because they are proud of their piety and they want to impress others with their devotion. They often do not really want to encounter God and hear him speak and in fact may be ignoring God's attempts to get their attention through discipline. The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were also proud, complacent, and unresponsive to God's discipline. As a result God warned them through the prophet Amos to prepare to meet their God. We also need to hear this warning that is recorded in Amos 4:4-13. You should prepare to meet God by repenting of your religious pride because religious pride is sin. You should prepare to meet God by repenting of your unresponsiveness to his discipline and returning to him because unresponsiveness is foolish.
You should repent and return to God because you may meet him in judgment and meeting the LORD God of Armies in judgment is a frightening prospect.
CHAPTER SIX

SEEK THE LORD AND LIVE
Amos 5:1-17

Though this passage as defined is long and contains many diverse elements, these elements are related by the structure of the passage. This passage follows a chiastic structural pattern with lamentation at both ends (See Strategy and Structure). Therefore, the beginning and ending of the passage can be clearly identified (See also Smith, 96 and Stuart, 344).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

5:1 Hear this word that I am taking up concerning you, a lament O house of Israel:
2 "She has fallen, no more will she rise, the virgin of Israel; she is deserted on her own land, with no one lifting her up."
3 Because thus says the Sovereign LORD: "The city that goes out a thousand strong you will leave a hundred; and that goes out a hundred strong you will leave ten."
4 Because thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live.
5 Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be nothing."
6 Seek the LORD and live, or he will advance through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel.
7 You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground,
8 He is the one who made Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into dawn and the day into night. He is the one who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land—the LORD is his name.
9 He flashes destruction on the stronghold and destruction comes on the fortress.
10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate and despise him who tells the truth.
11 Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take extractions of grain from him, though you have built stone houses, you will not live in them; though you have planted delightful vineyards, you will not drink their wine.
12 For I know your many offenses and your great sins, you who harass the righteous and take a bribe
and turn aside the poor in the gate.
13 Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in that time, for the time is evil.

14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live.
   Then the LORD God of Armies will be with you, just as you say he is.
15 Hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in the gate.
   Perhaps the LORD God of Armies will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

16 Therefore thus says the Lord, the LORD God of Armies:
   "There will be wailing in all the plazas
   and in all the streets they will say, 'Woe! Woe!'
They will call the farmers to weeping
   and those who know lamentation.
17 There will be wailing in all the vineyards,
   for I will pass through your midst" says the LORD.

**Situation and Purpose**

Amos 5:1-17 reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were oppressing the poor and denying them justice. Their oppression and injustice are reflected at many points within the passage. In verse 7 Amos addresses them as those "who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground." In verse 10 Amos alleges, "They hate the one who reproves in the gate and despise him who tells the truth." In verse 11 Amos explains the reason for God's judgment, "because you trample on the poor and take extractions of grain from him." In addition, the passage reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were proud and complacent. Verse 14 implies that they claimed that God was with them, "Seek good and not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God of Armies will be with you, just as you say he is." One basis of their pride and complacency was their unique relationship with God as implied in their claim that God is with them in verse 14 and God's warning that he will pass through their midst rather than pass over them as they celebrated in the Passover. Another basis for their pride and complacency was their religion as implied in Amos' exhortation in verses 5-6 to seek the LORD rather than their religious centers in Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba and his warning that these religious centers would be judged along with them and would not have anyone to put out the fire of judgment. Still another basis for their pride and complacency was their military might as implied in the warnings of the defeat of their army in verse 3 and the destruction of their strongholds in verse 9. The purpose of the passage was to discourage the elite of Israel from being proud and complacent because of their relationship with God, wealth, power, and especially their religion and encourage them to repent of their oppression and injustice and to seek God and good.

**Literary Context and Role**

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 5:1-17 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the elite of Israel of God's
impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 5:1-17 continues and reinforces the warning against oppression and injustice found in the 1:3-2:16, 3:1-15; and 4:1-3. This warning is reinforced further in 5:18-27; 6:8-14; and 8:1-14. Amos 5:1-17 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, and 4:4-13. This warning is reinforced further in 5:18-27; 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. Amos 5:1-17 plays a central role in this strategy by allowing for hope if the elite in Israel repent of their evil and seek God and good. This element of hope is reinforced and supplemented in chapter 9, especially verses 11-15.

Form and Function

Amos 5:1-17 can be classified generally as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. However, Amos 5:1-17 does employ specific commands and prohibitions and assurances as well as warnings. God commands and prohibits in verses 4-5, "Seek me . . . Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba." Amos follows up these commands with his own command in verse 6, "Seek the LORD." Amos also commands in verses 14-15, "Seek good and not evil . . . Hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in the gate." These commands and prohibitions define fairly comprehensively the appropriate response to this passage. However, the evil they are to avoid is ambiguous. Nonetheless, the specific nature of the evil is revealed in the accusations of verses 7 and 10-13—oppression and injustice. In addition, the warnings of the defeat of their army and the destruction of their strongholds implies the prohibition, "The elite should not complacently rely on their military might and defenses." Furthermore, the warning that God would pass through them rather than pass over them in verse 17 implies the prohibition, "The elite should not complacently rely on their unique relationship with God." These commands and prohibitions are reinforced with both assurances and warnings. Verses 4-5 assure life to those who seek the LORD and warn those who seek Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba of judgment. Verses 14-15 assure life, God's presence, and the possibility of God's grace to those who seek good and not evil, hate evil, love good, and maintain justice. In addition, the laments in verses 1-3 and 16-17 serve as warnings of God's judgment. Furthermore, the declaration of praise in verses 8-9 also serves as a warning of God's judgment.

Strategy and Structure

Amos 5:1-17 has a chiastic structure A1B1C1C2B2A2. The chiastic structure places emphasis on some elements of the passage by repetition. So the lament in verses 1-3 (A1) is reinforced by the lament in verses 16-17 (A2); the exhortation in verses 4-6 (B1) is reinforced by
the exhortation in verses 14-15 (B2); and the accusing address and hymn acclaiming God's authority and warning of his authority to judge in verses 7-9 (C1) is reinforced by the accusation and announcement of judgment in verses 10-13 (C2). A more common analysis of this passage as a chiasm follows the pattern A1B1C1DC2B2A2, with lamentation in verses 1-3, exhortation in verses 4-6, accusation in verse 7, hymn in verses 8-9, accusation in verses 10-13, exhortation in verses 14-15, and lamentation in verses 16-17 (See Smith 96 and Stuart 344). However, the divisions are not as clear-cut as this analysis suggests.

I. Lament for the Tragic Fall and Desertion of Israel (5:1-3)
   A. Command to Hear the Word of Lament (v. 1)
   B. Lament for the Tragic Fall and Helplessness of Israel (v. 2)
   C. Explanation that the LORD Has Ordered Israel's Defeat (v. 3)

II. Exhortation to Seek God rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba (5:4-6)
   A. God's Exhortation to Seek Him rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba (vs. 4-5)
      1. Introduced as the word of the LORD
      2. Command to seek him and assurance of life
      3. Prohibition of seeking Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba and warning that Gilgal will be exiled and Bethel will come to nothing
   B. Amos' Exhortation to Seek the LORD (v. 6)
      1. Command to seek the LORD
      2. Assurance of life
      3. Warning that he will advance through Joseph like a devouring fire and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel

III. Rebuking Address and Warning of the LORD's Authority to Destroy Strongholds (5:7-9)
   A. Rebuking Address of the Unjust and Unrighteous (v. 7)
   B. Acclamation of the LORD's Authority (v. 8)
      1. The one who made the constellations
      2. The one who turns night into day and day into night
      3. The one who pours rain out on the land
      4. Identification of his name as the LORD
   C. Warning of the LORD's Authority to Destroy Strongholds (v. 9)

IV. Accusation and Announcement of Judgment (5:10-13)
   A. Accusation of Hating Those Who Uphold Justice (v. 10)
   B. Announcement of Judgment for Injustice, Oppression, and Exploitation (v. 11)
      1. Explanation of the cause of their judgment
      2. Description of the judgment
   C. Warning that God Knows Their Many and Great Sins and the Evil that Results (vs. 12-13)
      1. Warning that God knows their many and great sins
      2. Rebuking address of those who harass the righteous, take a bribe, and turn aside the poor
      3. Explanation of the evil times that result from their sin

V. Exhortation to Seek Good rather than Evil, Hate Evil and Love Good, and Maintain Justice (5:14-15)
   A. Exhortation to Seek Good rather than Evil (v. 14)
1. Command to seek good and not evil  
2. Assurance of life  
3. Assurance of God's presence  

B. Exhortation to Hate Evil, Love Good, and Maintain Justice (v. 15)  
1. Command to hate evil, love good, and maintain justice  
2. The possibility that the LORD God of Armies will be gracious  

VI. God's Announcement of Widespread Lamentation (5:16-17)  
A. Introduced as the Word of the Lord, the LORD God of Armies (v. 16a)  
B. Warning of Widespread Lamentation (vs. 16b-17a)  
1. In all the plazas and streets  
2. Including farmers as well as professional mourners  
3. Even in all the vineyards  
C. Warning that God Will Pass Through Their Midst (v. 17b)  
D. Concluded as the Word of the LORD (v. 17c)  

Message or Messages  

The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their military might and alliances to protect them from disaster because the Sovereign LORD has ordered their devastating defeat and Amos is already mourning their tragic fall and helplessness. The elite in Israel should seek the LORD rather than complacently rely on their religion because he is the source of life and their religion will be judged along with them and will not be able to save them from his judgment. The elite in Israel should not be unjust and wicked and complacently rely on their military defenses to protect them from disaster because the LORD is the one who made the constellations, turns night to day and day to night, pours out the rain on the earth, and he has the authority to destroy their strongholds and fortresses. The elite in Israel should not be unjust or oppress and exploit others because God is aware of their many and great sins and will not allow them to enjoy the benefits of their wickedness. The elite in Israel should seek good rather than evil, hate evil and love good, and maintain justice rather than complacently think that God is with them because by so doing they will have life, really experience the presence of the LORD God of Armies, and have hope of receiving God's grace. The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their unique relationship with God to protect them from disaster because the Lord, the LORD God of Armies will pass through them in judgment rather than pass over them and everyone will mourn.  

Analysis of the Details  

Lament for the Tragic Fall and Desertion of Israel  

Amos begins with a lament for the fall and desertion of Israel in verses 1-3. Amos commands the elite to listen, delivers his lament, and explains the reason for the lament. This lament serves to warn them of impending judgment so that they will repent and seek God and good rather than Bethel and evil. A divine announcement of coming lamentation in verses 16-17 reinforces the warning of this lament.  

Command to hear the word of lament. Amos commands the elite in Israel to hear his word of lament in verse 1, "Hear this word that I am taking up concerning you, a lament O house of Israel." A lament is a cry of mourning over the dead. The elite in Israel were enjoying life and
complacently believed that the good times would continue because they had the military might to defend themselves from any threat. They were celebrating! By commanding them to listen to his words and identifying his words as a lament Amos was warning them that they had no reason to celebrate because they were as good as dead.

**Lament for the tragic fall and helplessness of Israel.** Amos delivers his lament for the tragic fall and helplessness of Israel in verse 2, "She has fallen, no more will she rise, the virgin of Israel; she is deserted on her own land, with no one lifting her up." Israel is portrayed as a virgin to stress the tragedy of her fate. The nation would never reach maturity and achieve her potential. The word "fallen" normally means "fallen in battle" (Stuart, 345) and warns of Israel's defeat. Amos speaks as if Israel has already fallen to emphasize its certainty. With the words, "no more will she rise," Amos warns that there is no hope for restoration in order to intensify the threat. Amos emphasizes the helplessness of Israel to defend herself. Probably another reason why he described her as a virgin was to portray her vulnerable condition. He further describes how she will be abandoned by her allies with, "deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up." Through the words of his lament, Amos warns that tragically Israel will be abandoned by her allies and fall in defeat to an invading army without hope of restoration or the ability to defend herself.

**Explanation that the LORD has ordered Israel's defeat.** Amos explains that the LORD has ordered her defeat in verse 3, "Because thus says the Sovereign LORD: 'The city that goes out a thousand strong you will leave a hundred; and that goes out a hundred strong you will leave ten for the house of Israel.'" The identification of the speaker as "the Sovereign LORD" stresses the authority of the one who is ordering their defeat and intensifies the warning. Most translations translate the word of the LORD in verse 3 something like the NIV, "The city that marches out a thousand strong for Israel will have only a hundred left; the town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left." However, the verb form is almost exclusively used in the sense of "you will leave" or "spare." Taken literally, God's words here should probably be understood as a command to those forces arrayed against Israel. God's command serves as a warning to the elite in Israel that God has already ordered their defeat. Amos was certainly not intending this word to be interpreted as an assurance of a remnant. What he portrays is devastating defeat in battle. As Mays observes, "The military forces of Israel were organized into units of 'thousands' and 'hundreds' (I Sam. 17.8; 18.13; 22.7; II Sam. 18.1). Translated into modern terms, Amos is saying that a battalion would be left a company, and a company reduced to a platoon" (Mays, 86). Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their military might and alliances to keep them safe from disaster because the Sovereign LORD has ordered their devastating defeat and Amos is already mourning their tragic fall and helplessness.

**Exhortation to Seek God rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba**

Next, Amos exhorts the elite in Israel to seek God rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba in verses 4-6. Amos relates God's exhortation to seek him rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba and then exhorts them himself to seek the LORD. Amos later reinforces and supplements this exhortation with another exhortation to seek good rather than evil in verses 14-15.
God's exhortation to seek him rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba. Amos relates God's exhortation to the elite in Israel to seek him rather than Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba in verses 4-5. First, he introduces the exhortation as the word of the LORD to them in the first part of verse 4, "Because thus says the LORD to the house of Israel." The identification of the speaker as the LORD reinforces the words of the exhortation that follows. Second, he relates God's command to seek him and assurance of life in the second part of verse 4, "Seek me and live." The elite in Israel probably thought that they were seeking God when they went to Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. They probably also believed that their religious piety guaranteed their material prosperity and safety. The words of the LORD serve to correct this mistaken understanding. Only by living authentically in covenant relationship with God could they save themselves from destruction and experience the fullness of life. The words "and live" are in the imperative mood, probably to strengthen the assurance. Third, Amos relates God's prohibition to the elite in Israel of seeking Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba and warning of his judgment on these centers of worship in verse 5, "Do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be nothing." Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were the principal religious centers of Israel's religion. The elite in Israel complacently relied on their religion for material prosperity and safety. These words of the LORD direct them away from their religious centers and undermine this misplaced trust by singling out Gilgal and Bethel as the specific foci of his judgment. However, Amos words probably have more to say about those who complacently rely on Gilgal and Bethel than the locations themselves. Gilgal is a place and cannot "be exiled." However, the elite in Israel who relied on Gilgal or religion would be exiled. Certainly Bethel could "come to nothing," but so would those who relied on Bethel or religion.

Amos' exhortation to seek the LORD. Amos reinforces God's exhortation with his own exhortation to seek the LORD in verse 6, "Seek the LORD and live, or he will advance through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel." To seek the LORD probably means to pursue an authentic covenant relationship with him. The words "and live" are again in the imperative mood, probably to strengthen the assurance. Amos describes the coming judgment as a fire devouring everything before it to stress the warning of devastation. Though he does not echo the LORD's prohibition of seeking Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, his warning that "there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel" attests to the futility of them relying on their religion or religious centers to protect them from God's wrath. Therefore, the elite in Israel should seek the LORD rather than complacently rely on their religion because he is the source of life and their religion will be judged along with them and will not be able to save them from God's judgment.

Rebuking Address and Warning of the LORD's Authority to Destroy Strongholds

Next, Amos addresses the elite in a rebuking manner and warns them of his power to judge in verses 7-9. Amos addresses the elite in a rebuking manner, acclaims the authority of the LORD, and specifically warns of his authority to destroy strongholds. In this way Amos identifies their sin and warns them of the danger of judgment. This rebuking address and warning of the LORD's authority to destroy strongholds is reinforced and supplemented in verses 10-13 with another rebuke and announcement of judgment.
Rebuking address of the unjust and unrighteous. Amos addresses the elite so as to rebuke them for their injustice and unrighteousness in verse 7, "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground." The first line of verse 7 rebukes the elite in Israel for the bitterness that results from their perversion of justice. "Justice" generally refers to the right treatment of others and more specifically to fairness in the legal system. "Bitterness" could be literally translated "wormwood," a bitter and sometimes harmful plant. The courts were designed to protect the rights and property of people. However, through their injustice the elite in Israel had corrupted the legal system and used it to advance their own ambitions. As a result, that which was intended to protect the rights and property of people ended up causing them harm and making them bitter. The second line of verse 7 rebukes the elite in Israel for their disregard for righteousness. "Righteousness" is doing right and in this context in parallelism with "justice" probably refers again to the right treatment of others. However, the elite "cast righteousness to the ground." They consider it to be worthless and throw it away with the garbage.

Acclamation of the LORD's authority. Amos acclaims the LORD's authority in verse 8, "He is the one who made Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into dawn and the day into night. He is the one who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land—the LORD is his name." Amos relates three actions of the LORD that illustrate his authority over his creation. First, he is the one who made the heavenly bodies such as the constellations of Pleiades and Orion. Second, he is the one who turns night into day and day into night. Third, he is the one who gives rain. This acclamation of the authority of the LORD serves to reinforce the warning of the authority of the LORD to destroy strongholds and fortresses that follows in verse 9.

Warning of the LORD's authority to destroy strongholds. Amos warns that the LORD also has authority to destroy strongholds in verse 9, "He flashes destruction on the stronghold and destruction comes on the fortress." The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their strong defenses to keep them safe. However, Amos warns that their strongholds and fortresses will not be able to protect them from God's wrath. Certainly the one who made the heavenly bodies, turns night to day and day to night, and gives rain can also destroy strongholds and fortresses. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not be unjust and wicked and complacently rely on their military defenses to protect them from disaster because God is the one who made the constellations, turns night to day and day to night, pours out the rain on the earth, and he has the authority to destroy strongholds.

Accusation and Announcement of Judgment

Next, Amos accuses the elite of hating those who support justice and warns them of God's judgment in verses 10-13. Amos accuses them of hating those who support justice, announces his judgment against them, and explains that God is aware of the extent of their sin and the evil that results. This accusation and announcement of judgment reinforces and supplements the rebuking address and warning of the LORD's authority to destroy strongholds in verses 7-9.

Accusation of hating those who uphold justice. Amos accuses the elite in Israel of hating those who support justice in verse 10, "They hate the one who reproves in the gate and despise him who tells the truth." The "gate" refers to the place where cases were heard in public. In fact, many translations render this word "court." The "one who reproves" is a person who challenges those who are trying to pervert the legal system. The one "who tells the truth" is a person who
upholds the legal system by testifying truthfully. The elite in Israel hated these people because the elite were perverting the legal system and bribing false witnesses.

**Announcement of judgment for injustice, oppression, and exploitation.** Amos announces God's judgment against them for their oppression and exploitation of the poor in verse 11, "Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take extractions of grain from him, though you have built stone houses, you will not live in them; though you have planted delightful vineyards, you will not drink their wine." Rather than helping the poor to rise from their downtrodden position, the elite in Israel were trampling them, preventing them from improving their lives. The poor had probably been reduced to tenant farmers. One of the ways that the elite prevented the poor from improving their lot was by collecting exorbitant payments for their crops. The description of the judgment is closely linked to the injustice of the elite by "Therefore," and the oppression and exploitation of the elite by "because." As a result of their injustice, oppression, and exploitation, God will not allow them to enjoy that which they have gained by their injustice, oppression, and exploitation.

**Warning that God knows their many and great sins and the evil that results.** Amos explains that God knows the extent of their sin and the evil that results in verse 12-13, "For I know your many offenses and your great sins, you who harass the righteous and take a bribe and turn aside the poor at the gate. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in that time, for the time is evil." Amos expands further the list of their sins by addressing them as "you who harass the righteous and take a bribe and turn aside the poor at the gate." They oppose those who uphold justice. They accept payment for false testimony. They deny justice to the poor. The words "many" and "great" emphasize the extent of their sin. They had sinned often and their sins were heinous. The extent of their sin is further emphasized by the response of the wise man to the unjust legal system that has resulted—they keep quiet for fear that the unjust legal system will be turned against them. Even though their sins were extensive, the elite complacently believed that they were safe from God's judgment. Nonetheless, this explanation warns that God is not blind to their sin. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not be unjust or oppress and exploit others because God is aware of their many and great sins and will not allow them to enjoy the benefits of their wickedness.

**Exhortation to Seek Good rather than Evil, Hate Evil and Love Good, and Maintain Justice**

Next, Amos exhorts the elite in Israel to seek good rather than evil, hate evil and love good, and maintain justice in verses 14-15. This exhortation reinforces and supplements the exhortation to seek God rather than Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba in verses 4-6. Whereas the emphasis of the previous exhortation was on seeking God, the emphasis of this exhortation is on seeking good.

**Exhortation to seek good rather than evil.** Amos exhorts the elite in Israel to seek good rather than evil in verse 14, "Seek good and not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God of Armies will be with you, just as you say he is." The evil that Amos commands them to avoid should be understood in relationship to the immediately preceding rebukes and accusations. They have been repeatedly admonished for their injustice, oppression, and exploitation (See vs. 7 and 10-13). The good that Amos commands them to seek should be understood as the counterpoints of these sins—promoting justice and helping those in need. In fact, the subsequent
exhortation commands them to "maintain justice." Amos seeks to motivate them to seek good rather than evil with two assurances. The first is that "you may live." Though the grammatical structure is different, this assurance is probably equivalent to the assurance to those who seek the LORD in verses 4 and 6. Those who seek good rather than evil will have hope of escaping destruction and experiencing the fullness of life in relationship with God. The second is that "the LORD God of Armies will be with you." The elite in Israel claimed that God was with them. Amos implies that they are mistaken and the only way that they can ensure God's presence, protection, and blessing is by seeking good rather than evil.

**Exhortation to hate evil, love good, and maintain justice.** Amos exhorts the elite in Israel to hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in verse 15, "Hate evil, love good, and maintain justice in the gate. Perhaps the LORD God of Armies will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." Through their actions the elite in Israel demonstrated that their values were perverted. They oppressed and exploited the poor and perverted the legal system so that the poor could not get justice. They loved evil and hated good and perverted justice. Amos appeals to them to reverse their values. He encourages them to reverse their values by offering them the limited possibility of God's grace if they reverse their values. The elite believed that God was under obligation to be gracious to them because they were his chosen people. However, Amos only allows for a limited possibility of God's grace to undercut their complacency. He limits the possibility of God's grace in three ways. First, he employs a Hebrew adverb that is used to convey a sense of doubt that I have translated "Perhaps." Second, he limits the possibility of God's grace by making it contingent upon the reversal of their values. Third, he limits the possibility of God's grace by restricting it to "the remnant of Joseph." Not all would receive God's grace, only those who reversed their values. Therefore, the elite in Israel should seek good rather than evil, hate evil and love good, and maintain justice rather than complacently think that God is with them because by so doing they will have life, really experience the presence of the LORD God of Armies, and have hope of receiving God's grace.

**God's Announcement of Widespread Lamentation**

Amos concludes with an announcement of widespread lamentation in verses 16-17. Amos assures them that this announcement comes from the LORD, announces the coming of widespread lamentation, and explains the reason for this lamentation. This announcement of lamentation serves to warn them of impending judgment so that they will repent and seek God and good rather than Bethel and evil. This warning of coming lamentation reinforces and supplements Amos' own lament in verses 1-3.

**Introduced and concluded as the word of the Lord, the LORD God of Armies.** Amos introduces this announcement of lamentation as the word of the LORD in the first part of verse 16, "Therefore, thus says the Lord, the LORD God of Armies." In fact, Amos concludes this announcement of lamentation in a similar way in the second part of verse 17, "says the LORD." The multiplication of divine names and titles in the introduction and repetition of the divine name in the conclusion serve to accentuate the authority of the LORD and the words of this announcement.

**Warning of widespread lamentation.** Amos warns of widespread lamentation in the second part of verse 16 and the first part of verse 17, "There will be wailing in all the plazas and in all the streets they will say, 'Woe! Woe!' They will call the farmers to weeping along with those who know lamentation. There will be wailing in all the vineyards." Amos emphasizes the extent
of the lamentation is three ways. First, the lamentation will overflow all the plazas and streets. The inclusive word "all" stresses that no plaza or street will be without lamentation. Second, farmers will join with the professional mourners in lamentation. Farmers were usually the least affected by the tragedy of warfare, but they would also be mourning. Third, the lamentation would even spread to the vineyards, places normally associated with joy because of their production of wine. Again the adjective "all" stresses that no vineyard would be exempt from mourning.

**Warning that God will pass through their midst.** Amos concludes by explaining the cause of their lamentation in the second part of verse 17, "for I will pass through your midst' says the LORD." The elite in Israel complacently believed that God would always be gracious to them. This belief was based on their experience of God's grace in the past. The preeminent experience of God's grace in the history of Israel was their deliverance from Egypt by ten great plagues culminating in the plague of the firstborn. At that time God passed through the houses of the Egyptians and killed their firstborn, but passed over the houses of the Israelites and spared their firstborn. The elite celebrated this experience of God's grace every year during the Passover. However, Amos warns that God will no longer graciously spare them as he has done in the past, but he will treat them just like the Egyptians because of their sin. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their unique relationship with God to protect them because the Lord, the LORD God of Armies will pass through them in judgment rather than pass over them and everyone will mourn.

**Application of the Message**

**Establishing the Correspondence**

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to a situation in the modern church. Christians sometimes presume that because of their special relationship with God in Christ and their faithfulness to the external standards of Christianity that God will always be gracious to them and never judge them. They may also presume that because they are prosperous and seemingly secure that they are safe from any calamity. As a result they become complacent and turn away from God and live wickedly. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 5:1-17 to the modern situation.

**Distinguishing the Contextualized**

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. The places and forms of Christian worship are different than those of Israel. Christians don't go to Bethel or Gilgal and don't offer the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament law. In addition, Christians don't usually rely on strongholds and fortresses either. Furthermore, the announcement of judgment and warning of lamentation is specifically addressed to Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

**Applying the Message**
Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their own strength like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD ordered the devastating defeat of Israel and Amos mourned their tragic fall and helplessness. Christians should seek the LORD rather than complacently rely on their religion like the elite in Israel because the LORD is the source of life and he warned them that their religion would be judged along with them and would not be able to save them from judgment. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their own strength like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that the LORD is the one who made the constellations, turns night to day and day to night, pours out the rain on the earth, and he also has the authority to destroy their strongholds. Christians should not sin and complacently think that God is unaware like the elite in Israel because the LORD warned them that he was aware of their many and great sins and would not allow them to enjoy the benefits of their wickedness. Christians should seek good rather than evil, hate evil and love good, and maintain justice rather than complacently think that God is with them like the elite in Israel because by so doing they would have life, experience God's presence, and have hope of receiving God's grace. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on a doctrine of security like the elite in Israel because the Lord, the LORD God of Armies told them that he would pass through them in judgment rather than pass over them and everyone would mourn.

**Proclamation of the Message**

**Title:** Seek the LORD and Live

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort Christians to avoid complacency and sin and seek and love God and good rather than evil.

**Proposition:** Christians should not become complacent and sin but seek and love God and good rather than evil because the elite in Israel complacently relied on their power and religion and presumed on their covenant relationship with God but these were unable to save them and their sin resulted in God's severe judgment and great mourning, but by seeking and loving God and good rather than evil they can experience God's presence, grace, and life.

**Introduction**

As Baptists we believe in the doctrine of the security of the believer. However, we don't believe in any doctrine of the complacency of the believer. We need to distinguish carefully between security and complacency. Security is based on a living relationship with God and results in righteousness. Complacency can be based on many things. You can become complacent because you have a secure job and income, you have a large bank account and your home is paid off, or you have good health. You can also become complacent because you have been baptized, attend church regularly, or you give faithfully. Complacency leads to sin. You become careless and drift away from God into a life of sin, presuming that you are safe. The elite in Israel had a similar problem with complacency, carelessness, and sin. Amos warned them of the disastrous consequences of their actions and reveals the way of life in Amos 5:1-17. Read Amos 5:1-17.

I. **Christians should not become complacent and sin because the elite of Israel complacently relied on their power and religion and presumed on their covenant relationship with God but these were unable to save them.**

   A. The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their military might to protect them from disaster. However, God has already ordered the devastating defeat of their armies, "Because
thus says the Sovereign LORD, 'The city that goes out a thousand strong you will leave a hundred; and that goes out a hundred strong you will leave ten for the house of Israel.'

They would suffer a 90% casualty rate! Their military might was certainly incapable of protecting them from God's wrath.

B. The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their strongholds and fortresses to protect them from disaster. Amos reminded them that the LORD has authority over his creation. He is the one who made the constellations of stars such as Pleiades and Orion. He is the one who turns the night into day and the day into night. He is the one who brings rain. Amos then warned them that if the LORD has this kind of authority over his creation he can certainly destroy their military defenses, "He flashes destruction on the stronghold and destruction comes on the fortress."

C. The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their religion to protect them from disaster. But God and Amos warned them of the disastrous consequences of complacently relying on their religion. God warned that "Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be nothing." Amos warned that the LORD "will advance through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel."

D. The elite in Israel presumed that because of their covenant relationship with God he would always be merciful to them. Every year the people of Israel celebrated God's mercy and grace to them as a nation during the Passover. During the Passover they celebrated God's deliverance of them from Egypt and specifically God's protection of them from the plague of the firstborn. On that night God passed through the Egyptians, killing their firstborn; but he passed over the Israelites and they were spared. The elite in Israel believed that God would always pass over them. However, God warns them that a time of widespread lamentation is coming and explains, "for I will pass through your midst,' says the LORD." God was no longer going to pass through them in judgment.

E. God was completely aware of the extent of their sin, "For I know your many offenses and your great sins."

F. Illustration of Complacency and Sin

G. You should not become complacent and sin because the elite in Israel complacently relied on their power and religion and presumed on their covenant relationship with God but these were unable to save them.

II. Christians should not become complacent and sin because the elite of Israel complacently sinned and the result was God's severe judgment and great mourning.

A. The elite in Israel were complacently sinning. They were unjust and oppressed and exploited the poor. They hated those who confronted injustice and testified truthfully because they were trying to pervert the legal system for their own selfish purposes. Furthermore, Amos charges them with harassing the righteous, taking bribes, and denying justice to the poor.

B. Amos dramatically warned them of the consequences of their sin by pronouncing a lament over them. A lament is a cry of mourning over the dead! They were as good as dead! In the lament, Amos describes the fall of Israel as if she were a young woman to stress the tragedy of her plight and helplessness of her condition, "She has fallen, no more will she rise, the virgin of Israel; she is deserted on her own land, with no one lifting her up."

Tragically, Israel would never realize the promise that she had as a young nation. Amos
explained that he lamented the tragic fall of Israel because God has already ordered their devastating defeat.
C. Amos warned them that God was going to advance through Israel like a fire, destroying everything because of their sin.
D. Amos warned them that God was going to flash destruction upon them because of their sin.
E. God warned them that they would not be able to enjoy the benefits of their wickedness, "though you have built stone houses, you will not live in them; though you have planted delightful vineyards, you will not drink their wine."
F. God warned them that a time of widespread lamentation was coming because of their sin, "Therefore, thus says the Lord, the LORD God of Armies, 'There will be wailing in all the plazas and in all the streets they will say, 'Woe! Woe!' They will call the farmers to weeping and those who know lamentation. There will be wailing in all the vineyards." Everyone in every plaza and street of the city would mourn. The lamentation would even spread to the farmlands and vineyards.
G. Illustration of Complacency and Sin
H. You should not become complacent and sin because the elite in Israel complacently sinned and the result was God's severe judgment and great mourning.

III. Christians should love and seek God and good rather than evil so that they can experience God's presence, grace, and life.
A. The elite in Israel weren't truly seeking God when they went to their worship centers at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. Instead, they had forsaken God and their worship was only superficial. Therefore, God exhorts them, "Seek me and live!" and Amos exhorts them, "Seek the LORD and live!"
B. The actions of the elite in Israel demonstrate that their values were perverted. They oppressed and exploited the poor and perverted the legal system so that the poor could not get justice. They loved evil, hated good, and perverted justice. Therefore, Amos commanded them to invert their values. Rather than loving evil and hating good they should, "Hate evil, love good." He commanded them to reverse their actions. Instead of seeking evil and not good and perverting justice they should, "Seek good and not evil" and "maintain justice."
C. Amos assured them that if they did seek God and good rather than evil they experience the presence of the LORD, "Then the lord will be with you just as you say he is."
D. Amos assured them that if they did seek God and good rather than evil that even at this late date they might experience the grace of the LORD, "Perhaps the LORD, God of Armies will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."
E. Illustration of Perverted Values
F. You should love and seek God and good rather than evil so that you can experience God's presence, grace, and life.

Conclusion

Christians sometimes become complacent because of the seeming security of their situation or their religion. As a result they sometimes become careless and drift away from God into a life of sin, presuming that they are safe. The elite in Israel had a similar problem with complacency, carelessness, and sin. Amos warns of the disastrous consequences of these actions and reveals the way of life in Amos 5:1-17. You should not become complacent and sin because the elite in
Israel complacently relied on their power and religion and presumed on their covenant relationship with God but these were unable to save them. You should not become complacent and sin like the elite in Israel because the result was God's severe judgment and great mourning. You should love and seek God and good rather than evil so that you can experience God's presence, grace, and life.
CHAPTER SEVEN

WOE TO YOU WHO LONG FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD
Amos 5:18-27

Though this passage contains some diverse elements, no announcement of judgment occurs until the end. In addition, the passage seems to have a progressive strategy that begins by undermining the complacency of the elite in Israel, then undermines one of the bases of that complacency, and concludes by identifying their sin and announcing God's judgment (See Strategy and Structure).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

5:18 Woe to you who long for the Day of the LORD! Why is this?
For you that Day of the LORD will be darkness, not light.
19 It will be like this: a man flees from before a lion and a bear meets him,
or he enters the house and rests his hand on the wall and a snake bites him.
20 Won't the Day of the LORD be darkness, not light,
and gloomy, without any brightness in it?
21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand the smell in your assemblies.
22 Even though you bring burnt offerings to me and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.
Also your fellowship offerings of fat animals, I will not regard.
23 Take away from me the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 But let justice roll along like a river,
righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!
25 Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert,
O house of Israel?
26 "You have lifted up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan,1 your idols,
the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves.
27 Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,"
says the LORD God of Armies his name.

1 Considerable confusion remains with regard to Sikkuth and Kaiwan. These are probably variant names of Assyrian deities that have been written with the vowels of the Hebrew word meaning "abomination" (See Mays, 112 and Smith, 114). However, the NIV follows the LXX and attempts translation rather than transliteration, "You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols." Nonetheless, a more likely translation of the LXX employs transliteration, "You took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Raephan."

Situation and Purpose

Amos 5:18-27 reflects a situation in which the elite of Israel were complacently presuming that they were acceptable to God; oppressing and treating the poor unjustly; and worshiping
other gods. Their complacent presumption that they were acceptable to God is reflected in the woe and explanation of verses 18-20 and especially verse 18, "Woe to you who long for the Day of the LORD! What will this Day of the LORD be for you? That day will be darkness, not light." Evidently some were yearning for the day of God's judgment, thinking that God would be condemning their enemies and vindicating them. Some of the bases for their complacent presumption that they were acceptable to God were their observance of religious festivals, sacrificial offerings, and worship. These bases for their complacent presumption are implied in God's rejection of these in verses 21-23, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand the smell in your assemblies. Even though you bring burnt offerings to me and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Also your fellowship offerings of fat animals, I will not regard. Take away from me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps." Their injustice is reflected in the command in verse 24, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" Their idolatrous worship of other gods is indicated directly by the accusation in verse 26, "You have lifted up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves." The purpose of the passage was to discourage the elite in Israel from complacently presuming that they were acceptable to God, exhort them to live righteously and justly, and warn them of God's judgment of them for their idolatry. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, the warning probably was intended to lead them to repent of their idolatry and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 5:1-17 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the elite of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 5:18-27 contributes to the warning against oppression and injustice found in 1:3-2:16, 3:1-15; 4:1-3, and 5:1-17. This warning is reinforced further in 5:18-27; 6:8-14; and 8:1-14. However, Amos 5:18-27 only contributes to this emphasis through the command in verse 24, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" Amos 5:18-27 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, and 5:1-17. This warning is reinforced further in 6:1-7, 8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. Amos 5:18-27 also has a concern for corrupt religion which is also a concern in 8:1-14 and 9:1-15. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, though the preceding passage (5:1-17) allowed some room for hope, this passage returns to severe warning of judgment that is unrelieved until the end of the book.

Form and Function

Amos 5:18-27 can be classified generally as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the
motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. However, Amos 5:18-27 does contain a specific command in verse 24, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" Nonetheless, this command does not define all that is implied about the appropriate response to this passage. In addition, the warning woe of verses 18-20 implies the prohibition, "Do not complacently presume that you will be accepted by God on the Day of the LORD." Furthermore, the denunciation of their worship in verses 21-23 and 25 implies the prohibition, "Do not complacently presume that your worship makes you acceptable to God." Moreover, the accusation and announcement of judgment in verses 26-27 implies the command, "Repent of your idolatry." These direct and implied commands and prohibitions are reinforced with warnings. Verses 18-20 warn of the darkness and unexpected danger of the Day of the LORD. Verses 21-23 warn of God's hatred for and rejection of their worship. Verse 27 warns that God is going to exile them because of their idolatry. In addition, a rhetorical question that makes allusion to the worship practices of the wilderness period is employed in verse 25 to establish that sacrifices and offerings were of secondary importance. Furthermore, the gods that they worshiped are described in verse 26 with the words, "which you made for yourselves," to establish the absurdity of worshiping them.

**Strategy and Structure**

Amos begins by pronouncing a warning woe on those who long for the Day of the LORD in verses 18-20. Through this woe Amos undermined the complacency of the elite in Israel. Next, Amos denounces the worship of the elite in Israel and exhorts them to justice in verses 21-25. Through the denunciation of their worship Amos undermined one of the bases of their complacency. Through the exhortation Amos identified the conduct that takes priority over outward forms of worship. Amos concludes by accusing the elite in Israel of idolatry and announcing God's judgment upon them in verses 26-27. Through this accusation and announcement of judgment Amos specifically identified their sin and warned of its disastrous consequences.

I. Warning Woe to Those Who Long for the Day of the LORD (5:18-20)
   A. Woe to Those Who Long for the Day of the LORD (18a)
   B. Warning Explanation Why It Is Foolish for Them to Long for the Day of the LORD (18b)
      1. Introductory rhetorical question
      2. Answer describing the darkness of that day
   C. Warning Illustrations of the Unexpected Danger of the Day of the LORD for Them (19)
      1. A man fleeing from a lion and meeting a bear
      2. A man entering the safety of a house and being bitten by a snake
   D. Rhetorical Question Forcing Them to Acknowledge the Darkness of that Day (20)

II. Rebutting Denunciation of Their Worship and Demand for Justice and Righteousness (5:21-25)
   A. Rebutting Denunciation of Their Worship (21-23)
      1. Religious feasts and assemblies
      2. Burnt offerings, grain offerings, and fellowship offerings
Message or Messages

The elite in Israel should not foolishly presume that they will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD because for them that day will be a time of lament, darkness not light, and unanticipated danger. The elite in Israel should not complacently presume that their worship makes them acceptable to God, but be perpetually just and righteous because the LORD God of Armies hates and has rejected their worship since it was not accompanied by justice and righteousness and sacrifices were secondary to justice and righteousness in the wilderness. The elite in Israel should repent of their idolatry because idolatry is abominable to the LORD God of Armies, they are foolishly worshiping what they have made with their own hands, and he is going to send them into exile far away.

Analysis of the Details

Warning Woe to Those Who Long for the Day of the LORD

Amos begins by pronouncing a warning woe on those who long for the Day of the LORD in verses 18-20. He pronounces the woe, explains why it is foolish for them to long for the Day of the LORD, illustrates the unexpected danger of that day, and asks a rhetorical question that forces them to acknowledge the darkness of that day.

Woe to those who long for the Day of the LORD. Amos pronounces his woe on those who long for the Day of the LORD in the first line of verse 18, "Woe to you who long for the Day of the LORD!" The Day of the LORD was a time when the wicked would be judged and the righteous would be vindicated. The elite in Israel evidently presumed that they were among the righteous and anticipated the Day of the LORD as a time when they would be vindicated and their enemies judged. However, Amos pronounced a woe on those who long for this day. A woe is the word used in laments and was originally a cry of mourning over the dead. As Mays explains, "The woe-cry pronounced over a living audience is found only in prophetic sayings; the prophet, knowing in advance the punishment decreed by Yahweh, would lament the death of his audience as a dramatic way of disclosing the dire consequences of their conduct" (Mays, 103). Through his woe Amos was warning the elite that on the Day of the LORD they would be grouped among the wicked and condemned.

Warning explanation of why it is foolish for them to long for the Day of the LORD. Amos explains why they should not long for the Day of the LORD in the remainder of verse 18. He begins with a rhetorical question, "Why is this?" This rhetorical question forced the elite to reevaluate their longing for the Day of the LORD. In fact, this rhetorical question probably conveys an element of ridicule. Amos was implying that it was foolish for them to long for the...
Day of the LORD. He explains, "For you that Day of the LORD will be darkness, not light." Amos employs the common contrasting metaphors of light and darkness to convey good and evil. The Israelites longed for the Day of the LORD, anticipating that it would be a time of light, when God would reveal himself in his glory and his people would be vindicated. However, Amos warns that the Day of the LORD would be a time of darkness, when God would reveal himself to them but in a troubling way—for judgment.

**Warning illustrations of the unexpected danger of the Day of the LORD for them.** Amos illustrates the unexpected danger of the Day of the LORD for the elite in verse 19, "It will be like this: a man flees from before a lion and a bear meets him, or he enters the house and rests his hand on the wall and a snake bites him." Their longing for the Day of the LORD is like a man who has just escaped a lion and feels safe when he is unexpectedly attacked by a bear. Their longing for the Day of the LORD is like a man who goes into the sanctuary of his own home and is unexpectedly bitten by a snake when he rests his hand on the wall. The elite in Israel believed that the Day of the LORD would be a time when they would be delivered from danger. However, Amos warned that the Day of the LORD would be a time of heightened danger.

**Rhetorical question forcing them to acknowledge the darkness of the Day of the LORD.** Amos asks another rhetorical question in verse 20 with which he hoped to force the elite in Israel to acknowledge the darkness of the Day of the LORD, "Won't the Day of the LORD be darkness, not light, and gloomy, without any brightness in it?" Amos expands on his earlier description of the darkness of the Day of the LORD by stressing that it will be "gloomy, without any brightness in it." As Stuart explains, "Darkness and gloom are both frequently used metaphors for trouble, distress, misery, and even death in the OT" (Stuart, 354). This rhetorical question is of the type that could be called a leading question. This question anticipates the acknowledgement, "Yes, the Day of the LORD will be darkness, not light, and gloomy, without any brightness in it." Though it is unlikely that the elite were ready to agree with Amos, he used the question to drive his point home. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not foolishly presume that they will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD because for them that day would be a time of lament, darkness not light, and unanticipated danger.

**Rebuking Denunciation of Their Worship and Demand for Justice and Righteousness**

Next, Amos delivers God's rebuking denunciating of the worship of the elite in Israel and commands them to act justly and righteously in verses 21-25. God denounces and rejects their worship, commands them to act justly and righteously, and asks a rhetorical question establishing the secondary importance of worship to justice and righteousness.

**Rebuking denunciation of their worship.** God's denounces the worship of the elite in Israel in verses 21-23. First, he denounces their feasts and assemblies in verse 21, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand the smell in your assemblies." Amos piles up words expressing God's abhorrence for their religious feasts and assemblies for emphasis. The final descriptive phrase depicts God's disgust graphically. Their religious feasts and assemblies stink! Second, he denounces their sacrificial offerings in verse 22, "Even though you bring burnt offerings to me and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. Also your fellowship offerings of fat animals, I will not regard." These are all legitimate offerings that normally would be pleasing to God. In fact, the description of their fellowship offerings as being "of fat animals"
suggests that they were bringing superlative animals to sacrifice. Indeed, the NIV translates "fellowship offerings of fat animals" with "choice fellowship offerings." Nonetheless, God will not accept or have regard for any of them. Third, he denounces their songs and music in verse 23, "Take away from me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps." Even their singing and instrumental music was unacceptable to God. What made their worship abhorrent and unacceptable to God? The context suggests that it was their failure to live justly and righteously as God demands in the next verse.

**Demand for perpetual justice and righteousness.** God demands perpetual justice and righteousness in verse 24, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." The placement of these commands in this context indicates that the reason why the worship of the elite in Israel was unacceptable to God was because justice and righteousness did not accompany it. Two similes are used to illustrate the continual justice and righteousness that God demands. Their justice should be constant like a river that rolls around obstacles on its unremitting march to the sea. Streams normally are seasonal, during the arid season they dry up. However, God demands that their righteousness be ceaseless like a stream that does not dry up during the arid season.

**Rhetorical question establishing the secondary importance of worship to justice and righteousness.** God concludes with a rhetorical question establishing the secondary importance of worship to justice and righteousness in verse 25, "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?" This question is another leading question, implying an emphatic "No!" in response. The sacrificial system was not fully in place during the wilderness period. However, the moral demands of the covenant were already in place. The implication of this question is that worship is of secondary importance to justice and righteousness. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not complacently presume that their worship makes them acceptable to God, but be perpetually just and righteous because God hates and has rejected their worship since it was not accompanied by justice and righteousness and sacrificial offerings were secondary to justice and righteousness in the wilderness.

**Rebuking Accusation of Idolatry and Announcement of Judgment**

Amos concludes by delivering God's rebuking accusation and announcement of judgment against the elite in Israel in verses 26-27. Amos delivers God's rebuking accusation in verse 26, "You have lifted up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves." Sikkuth and Kaiwan were Assyrian deities. The reference to "the star of your gods" is probably to Kaiwan since Kaiwan was a celestial deity. The vowels employed in these names do not correspond with those normally used. Amos probably has inserted the vowels for the Hebrew word meaning "abomination" to further condemn their idolatry (Mays, 112 and Smith, 115). The Northern Kingdom was heavily influenced by Assyria and some of the elite had begun worshiping the gods of the Assyrians (Smith, 116). Though Amos does not dwell extensively on the idolatry of the people of Israel, his contemporary, Hosea, devotes most of his prophetic ministry to condemning Israel for worshipping foreign gods. Amos asserts the foolishness of their worship of foreign gods with the relative clause, "which you made for yourselves." They are nothing more than idols that the craftsman has fashioned.
Amos delivers God's announcement of judgment in the first line of verse 27, "Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Damascus." The punishment for their injustice and idolatry would be military defeat and exile. As Stuart explains, "Damascus, north northeast of Israel, provided a kind of compass point for the direction the exile would actually take: north, then east, following the arc of the Fertile Crescent and its main roads into Assyrian territory" (Stuart, 356). They would be exiled far away. Finally, Amos identifies the accusation and announcement as the words of the LORD God Almighty, "says the LORD, God of Armies is his name." Through this identification Amos stresses the authority behind his prophetic message and implies the danger of failing to heed that message. Therefore, the elite in Israel should repent of their idolatry because idolatry is abominable to the LORD God of Armies, they are foolishly worshiping what they have made with their own hands, and he is going to send them into exile far away.

**Application of the Message**

**Establishing the Correspondence**

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds closely to a situation in the modern church. Christians often long with anticipation for Christ's return. Nothing is wrong with longing for the day of Christ. However, sometimes they have the wrong basis for this anticipation and may not be prepared for Christ's return. They may presume that they will be accepted by God on the day of Christ because of their participation in Christian worship. However, they may have a lifestyle that does not prepare them for Christ's return. They may be unjust and unrighteous and compromise their commitment to God through their devotion to other things like their career, money and possessions, or favorite pastimes. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 5:18-27 to the modern situation.

**Distinguishing the Contextualized**

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. The places and forms of Christian worship are different than those of Israel. Though Christians do feast and assemble, the nature of their meetings is much different. Christians do not offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, and fellowship offerings of fat animals. Though Christians do sing and make music, the nature of their songs and even their musical instruments are different. Christians do not normally worship other gods and certainly not Sikkuth and Kaiwan. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

**Applying the Message**

Christians should not foolishly presume that they will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that for them that day would be a time of lament, darkness not light, and unanticipated danger. Christians should not complacently presume that their worship makes them acceptable to God like the elite in Israel, but be perpetually just and righteous because God denounced their worship since it was not accompanied by justice and righteousness and reminded them that sacrifices were secondary to justice and righteousness in the wilderness. Christians should not compromise their commitment
to God with devotion to other things like the elite in Israel did because God warned them that idolatry was foolish since it was abominable to him, they were foolishly worshipping what they have made with their own hands, and he would send them into exile far away.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: Woe to You Who Long for the Day of the LORD!

Objective: The objective of this message is to discourage Christians from presuming that they are acceptable to God and encourage them to live justly and righteously and avoid any devotions that would compromise their commitment to God.

Proposition: Christians should not foolishly presume that they will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD, but be perpetually just and righteous and not compromise their commitment to God with devotion to other things.

Introduction

Christians often long with anticipation for Christ's return. Nothing is wrong with longing for the day of Christ. However, sometimes they have the wrong basis for this anticipation and may not be prepared for Christ's return. They may presume that God will accept them on the day of Christ because they worship him. However, they may have a lifestyle that does not prepare them for Christ's return. They may live unjustly and unrighteously and compromise their commitment to God through their devotion to other things like their career, money and possessions, or favorite pastimes. The elite in Israel were under similar delusions about the Day of the LORD and their worship. They were oppressing the poor and perverting the legal system to further their own ambitions. They were worshipping Assyrian gods while they continued to worship the LORD. Amos confronts them with the word of the LORD God of Armies in Amos 5:18-27. Read Amos 5:18-27.

I. Christians should not foolishly presume that they will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD because that day may be a time of lament, darkness, and unanticipated danger.

   A. The elite in Israel were longing for the Day of the LORD, presuming that God would accept and vindicate them and judge their enemies at that time.
   B. However, Amos pronounced a woe on those who longed for the Day of the LORD. "Woe" was the word used in laments as a cry of mourning over the dead." Amos was aware of the tragic consequences of their sin and pronounced this woe to shake them out of their complacency.
   C. In addition, Amos explained why it was foolish for them to long for the Day of the LORD. He implies that their longing for the Day of the LORD is foolish because for them that day would be darkness rather than light. The elite were anticipating that the Day of the LORD would be light, implying good, acceptance, and blessing. But Amos warned that the Day of the LORD would be darkness, implying evil, rejection, and judgment.
   D. Furthermore, Amos illustrated why it was foolish for them to long for the Day of the LORD. Their longing for the Day of the LORD was like a man who feels safe after he has escaped a lion and is attacked by a bear. Their longing for the Day of the LORD was like a man who feels safe after entering his house and is bitten by a snake when he leans his hand against the wall. The Day of the LORD would be a time of unexpected danger for them.
E. Moreover, Amos asked a rhetorical question that would force them to acknowledge the danger of that day for them, "Won't the Day of the LORD be darkness, not light, and gloomy, without any brightness in it?" I doubt that many of the hardhearted elite in Israel were ready to acknowledge Amos' point. What about you?

F. Christians often long for the day of Christ when he will return to establish his kingdom. They anticipate being accepted by him and reigning with him for eternity. There is nothing wrong with longing for the Day of the LORD. However, there is something wrong with presuming that you will be acceptable to God if your lives are filled with sin.

G. Illustration of Presumption

H. You should not foolishly presume that you will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD because that day may be a time of lament, darkness, and unanticipated danger.

II. Christians should not complacently presume that their worship makes them acceptable to God but be consistently just and righteous because God hates worship without justice and worship was secondary to righteousness in the wilderness.

A. The elite in Israel were complacently presuming that their worship made them acceptable to God. However, they were also perverting the judicial system and wickedly oppressing the poor. I guess they thought that the former made up for the latter.

B. However, God denounced their worship. He told them that he hated and despised their religious feasts and thought that their religious assemblies stank. He told them that he did not have any regard for or accept their sacrificial offerings. He refused to listen to their songs of praise and told them to go away.

C. Instead, God commanded them to constant justice and righteousness, "But let justice roll along like a river, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Their justice should be constant like a river that tenaciously flows around obstacles on its unremitting march to the sea. Streams normally are seasonal, drying up during the summer. However, God demands that righteousness be ceaseless like a stream that flows all year round.

D. God then asked them a rhetorical question establishing the secondary importance of worship to justice and righteousness, "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?" The question is a leading question, implying an emphatic "No!" in response. The sacrificial system was not fully in place during the wilderness period. However, the people of Israel were required to be just and righteous at that time.

E. Sometimes Christians presume that they are acceptable to God because they participate in Christian worship while they live unjustly and wickedly.

F. Illustration of Hypocritical Living

G. You should not complacently presume that your worship makes you acceptable to God, but be consistently just and righteous because God hates worship that is not accompanied by justice and worship was secondary to righteousness in the wilderness.

III. Christians should not compromise their commitment to God with devotion to other things because idolatry is foolish since it is abominable to God, they are worshiping what they have made with their own hands, and he could judge them.

A. The elite in Israel were influenced greatly by the most powerful nation at that time, Assyria. In fact, many of the elite apparently began to worship the gods of the Assyrians while they continued to worship the LORD.

B. God confronted them directly with their sin, "You have lifted up Sikkuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your idols, the star of your god." However, something is wrong with the names of these Assyrian gods. The vowels for the Hebrew word meaning "abomination" have been
substituted for the normal vowels of the names. In this way God warned them how abhorrent their idolatry was to him.

C. Next, God indicated how foolish their idolatry was since they were worshiping that which they have made for themselves. Worshiping God, the creator of the world would make sense, but worshiping that which they have made is ridiculous.

D. Finally, God testified to the foolishness of their idolatry by warning them that he was going to send them into exile, "Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Damascus." Damascus was the capital of Syria to the northeast of Israel. The elite in Israel did not heed God's warning and were defeated by the Assyrians and exiled even farther to the northeast. What about you?

E. Few Christians would ever even consider worshiping other gods. However, many do compromise their commitment to God through their devotion to other things like their career, money and possessions, and favorite pursuits.

F. Illustration of Contemporary Idolatry

G. You should not compromise your commitment to God with devotion to other things because idolatry is foolish since it is abominable to God, you are worshiping what you have made with your own hands, and he could judge you.

**Conclusion**

Christians often long with anticipation for Christ's return. Nothing is wrong with longing for the day of Christ. However, sometimes they have the wrong basis for this anticipation and may not be prepared for Christ's return. Sometimes they have a lifestyle that does not prepare them for Christ's return. The elite in Israel certainly had the wrong basis for anticipating the Day of the LORD and had a lifestyle that did not prepare them for the Day of the LORD. Amos confronted them with the word of the LORD God of Armies in Amos 5:18-27. Tragically, they failed to respond. What about you? You should not foolishly presume that you will be acceptable to God on the Day of the LORD because that day may be a time of lament, darkness, and unanticipated danger. You should not complacently presume that your worship makes you acceptable to God, but be continually just and righteous because God hates worship without justice and worship was secondary to righteousness in the wilderness. You should not compromise your commitment to God with devotion to other things because idolatry is foolish since it is abominable to him, you are foolishly worshiping what you have made with your own hands, and he could judge you.
CHAPTER EIGHT

WOE TO YOU WHO ARE COMPLACENT IN ZION
Amos 6:1-7

Though this passage as defined is closely related to its context, it is a relatively self-contained unit with an indication of the nature of the sin and a warning of judgment (See Form and Function and Strategy and Structure).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

6:1 Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel.
2 Cross over to Calneh and look; go from there to the great Hamath, and then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these or is their territory larger than yours?
3 You thrust away the evil day and pull near the residence of violence.
4 They lie on beds of ivory and lounge on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from a stall.
5 They strum on their harps like David and improvise on musical instruments.
6 They drink wine by the bowl and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not sickened over the shattering of Joseph.
7 Therefore they will depart immediately with the first of those going and the gaiety of the extravagant will depart.

Situation and Purpose

Although the oppressiveness of the elite in Israel probably underlies Amos 6:1-7, this passage primarily responds to their complacency. In fact, the warning against complacency in this passage includes the inhabitants of Jerusalem as well as those who lived in Samaria. Their complacency is reflected throughout the passage. The warning woe in the first half of verse 1 is directed "to you who are complacent in Zion and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria." The warning examples of Calneh, Hamath, and Gath are clearly intended to undermine the belief that Jerusalem and Samaria were unique. Amos' accusation in verse 3, "You thrust away the evil day," reflects their failure to take seriously the consequences of their irresponsibility. Their self-indulgent lifestyle is clearly described in verses 4-6, "They lie on beds of ivory and lounge on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from a stall. They strum on their harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. They drink wine by the bowl and anoint..."
themselves with the finest oils." Their indifference to the disintegration of the nation is clearly indicated in the second half of verse 6, "but are not sickened over the shattering of Joseph." Therefore, the purpose of the passage was to undermine the complacency of the elite in Israel and announce God's judgment against them. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, the warning probably was intended to lead them to repent of their complacency and worldly lifestyle, deal responsibly with the social evils of their day, and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 6:1-7 is in the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6) rather than the second half of the book that is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and visions address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the people of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 6:1-7 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, and 5:18-27. This warning is reinforced further in 6:8-14; 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. From another perspective, the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. No further hope is given until 9:1-15.

Form and Function

Amos 6:1-7 can be classified generally as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. Though no direct indication of the appropriate response is provided, the warning implies that the readers should heed the warning of God's judgment and repent. Amos 6:1-7 follows this form of prophetic exhortation. No specific commands and prohibitions are supplied. Nonetheless, the appropriate response is implied in the reasoned arguments. The warning woe to those who are complacent and feel secure and the warning examples in verses 1-2 imply the prohibition, "Don't be complacent and feel secure based on your prosperity and might." The rebuke and announcement of judgment in verses 3-7 imply the prohibition, "Don't be irresponsible, self-indulgent, and indifferent."

Strategy and Structure

Amos begins by pronouncing a woe on the complacent elite in verse 1, thereby warning them of their doom and discouraging their complacency. Next, he undermines their pride, the basis of their complacency, by ridiculing their boastful claims and inviting them to compare themselves
with other cities in verses 1-2. Next, Amos rebukes them for their irresponsibility and warns them of the disastrous consequences in verse 3. Finally, Amos gets at the root causes of their irresponsibility by rebuking them for their self-indulgence and indifference and announcing God's judgment against them in verses 4-7.

I. Warning Woe to the Complacent (6:1a)

II. Ridiculing Address to the Proud and Examples of Comparable Cities (6:1b-2)
   A. Ridiculing Address to the Noted Men of the Foremost Nation (v. 1b)
   B. Examples of Comparable Cities (v. 2)
      1. Invitation to visit Calneh, Hamath, and Gath
      2. Rhetorical question challenging complacency

III. Rebuke for Irresponsibility and Warning of the Disastrous Consequences (6:3)

IV. Denunciation for Self-indulgence and Indifference and Announcement of Judgment (6:4-7)
   A. Denunciation for Self-indulgence and Indifference (vs. 4-6)
   B. Announcement of Judgment (v. 7)

Message or Messages
The elite in Israel should not be complacent and feel secure because they are doomed. The elite in Israel should not be proud because their boastful claims about themselves and Israel are ridiculous and they are no better and Samaria is no larger than Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. The elite in Israel should not irresponsibly refuse to acknowledge their sin and the sin of the nation because by so doing they are responsible for the coming of a time of perpetual violence. The elite in Israel should not be self-indulgent and indifferent to the welfare of Israel because they will be among the first to be exiled and their jubilant and extravagant lifestyle will end.

Analysis of the Details

Warning Woe to the Complacent
Amos begins by pronouncing a woe on the complacent in the first half of verse 1, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria!" "Zion" is the hill upon which Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, stood. "Mount Samaria" is the large hill on which Samaria, the capital of Israel, stood. Both cities were walled cities built on high ground, making them easy to defend. In addition, many believed that Jerusalem was inviolable because of the promises of God to his people. Evidently the elite in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had similar beliefs with regard to Samaria. As a result they had become complacent and were neglecting their responsibility to safeguard the nation from harm. They were too busy indulging themselves to be concerned about the welfare of the nation. In fact, they were causing harm through their oppression of the poor. Therefore, Amos pronounces his warning woe. "Woe" was a word used in laments to mourn the dead. Amos laments because he was able to see the disastrous results of their complacency and irresponsibility. They were doomed! Therefore, the elite in Israel should not be complacent and feel secure because they are doomed.

Ridiculing Address to the Proud and Examples of Comparable Cities
Next, Amos addresses the elite in a ridiculing manner and uses examples of comparable cities to undermine their pride in the second half of verse 1 and in verse 2.

Ridiculing address to the noted men of the foremost nation. In the second half of verse 1 Amos addresses the elite in a sarcastic manner, "you noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel." Amos' subsequent rebukes for irresponsibility, self-indulgence, and indifference indicate that Amos did not have such a high estimation of the elite. Instead, Amos' address is probably a parody of their own boastful claims about themselves and Israel. They were claiming, "We are the noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel." Amos addresses them in this way in order to ridicule their boastful claims.

Examples of comparable cities. In verse 2 Amos uses examples of comparable cities to force the elite to acknowledge that they are no better. First, he invites the elite to visit these cities in the first half of the verse, "cross over to Calneh and look; go from there to the great Hamath, and then go down to Gath of the Philistines." Amos was not literally demanding that the elite visit these cities, but was simply introducing them as a basis for consideration. Calneh and Hamath were major cities of eastern Syria, while Gath was one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. The element of warning in these examples would be greater if it could be established that the Assyrians had already defeated these cities. However, the conquest of these cities did not occur until after Amos' prophetic ministry. Second, Amos asks two rhetorical questions that force the elite to acknowledge that Samaria is no better than these cities in the second half of the verse, "Are they better than these or is their territory larger than yours?" Though these questions are obscured by the uncertainty about who is referred to by the pronouns "they," "these," "their," and "yours," the implication of these questions is relatively certain. The elite were no better than the elite of these cities and the territory of these cities is larger than theirs. Therefore, the elite should not be proud because their boastful claims are ridiculous and they are no better and Samaria is no larger than Calneh, Hamath, and Gath.

Rebuke for Irresponsibility and Warning of the Disastrous Consequences

Next, Amos rebukes the elite in Israel for irresponsibility and warns them of the disastrous results in verse 3. Amos rebukes them for their irresponsibility in the first half of the verse, "You thrust away the evil day." The Hebrew verb translated "thrust away" is in the emphatic stem and means "to push away forcefully." Amos is probably referring to their refusal to acknowledge their own sin and the sin of the nation or consider its disastrous consequences. They were in denial! They complacently believed they were secure, proudly inflating themselves and their nation, enjoying life to the fullest, and refusing to consider anything that contradicted their sense of security and inflated conception of themselves or threatened their extravagant lifestyle. Amos warns the elite of the disastrous consequences of their irresponsibility in the second half of the verse, "and pull near the residence of violence." This warning stands in ironic contrast to the refusal of the elite to acknowledge their sin and its disastrous consequences. The Hebrew verbs translated "thrust away" and "pull near" are near antonyms. By refusing to acknowledge their sin and its disastrous consequences they were actually bringing about the disaster they hoped to avoid. The phrase "residence of violence" could be more literally translated "seat of violence." Many understand the "seat" to be a throne from which violence rules. However, the word is more commonly used as a place of residence.
The implication is that violence will be a permanent resident. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not irresponsibly refuse to acknowledge their sin and the sin of the nation because by so doing they are responsible for the coming of a time of perpetual violence.

**Denunciation for Self-indulgence and Indifference and Announcement of Judgment**

Finally, Amos denounces the elite in Israel for self-indulgence and indifference and announces God's judgment against them in verses 4-7.

**Denunciation for self-indulgence and indifference.** Amos denounces the elite for self-indulgence and indifference in verses 4-6. Amos denounces five aspects of the self-indulgent lifestyle of the elite in Israel. First, he denounces them for indulging themselves with leisurely extravagance in the first half of verse 4, "They lie on beds of ivory and lounge on their couches." Lying and lounging on beds and couches implies a leisurely lifestyle, while ivory was a lavish decoration that implies their extravagance. Second, he denounces them for indulging themselves with sumptuous dining in the second half of verse 4, "and eat lambs from the flock and calves from a stall." Meat was a luxury that most seldom enjoyed and veal was an extravagance even among the rich. Third, he denounces them for indulging themselves with leisurely pursuits in verse 5, "They strum on their harps like David and improvise on musical instruments." Few had the leisure for music. Smith suggests that the reference to David may imply that they may have regarded themselves as "little Davids" (Smith, 119). Fourth, he denounces them for indulging themselves with wine in the first part of verse 6, "They drink wine by the bowl." Rather than using cups, they drank from bowls because they could hold more wine. Fifth, he denounces them for indulging themselves with oils in the second part of verse 6, "and anoint themselves with the finest oils." Most people rarely had opportunity to anoint themselves with oil, but the elite anointed themselves and used only the best grades of oil. As villainous as the self-indulgence of the elite may have been, the magnitude of its sinfulness is intensified by what it led them to neglect. Amos denounces the elite for their indifference at the end of verse 6, "but are not sickened over the shattering of Joseph." They were so preoccupied with their self-indulgent lifestyle that they did not even consider the evils in the nation that were breaking it apart and would eventually lead to its disintegration.

**Announcement of judgment.** Amos announces God's judgment against the elite in Israel for their self-indulgence and indifference in verse 7, Therefore they will depart immediately with the first of those going and the gaiety of the extravagant will depart." The elite had been placing themselves first. They were claiming to be the "noted men of the foremost nation." They were putting their self-indulgent lifestyles ahead of the threat to Israel. Amos' announcement of judgment is ironically appropriate or may be termed poetic justice. Since they placed themselves first, they would be first in going into exile as well. Indeed, the elite were the first to go to Assyria. In addition, their joyous cries and extravagant lifestyle would depart as well. As Mays summarizes, "The announcement of judgment simply predicts a tomorrow in which the pride and mirth of the present are swallowed up and disappear" (Mays, 117). Therefore, the elite in Israel should not be self-indulgent and indifferent to the welfare of Israel because they will be among the first to be exiled and their jubilant and extravagant lifestyle will end.

**Application of the Message**
Establishing Correspondence

This passage is more specifically addressed than previous passages. Amos addressed the elite in relationship to their responsibility as leaders of the nation. Since Israel was a theistic nation those addressed corresponds both to Christians who serve in leadership positions in the nation and those who serve as leaders in the church. I have chosen to focus this application on church leaders. The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Church leaders sometimes become proud and complacent like the elite in Israel, believing that they are capable of dealing with any contingency and unrealistically optimistic about the condition of the church. In addition, church leaders sometimes become preoccupied with worldly pleasures, indifferent to the struggles of church members, and irresponsibly neglect the needs of the congregation. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 6:1-7 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Church leaders do not complacently rely on Zion or Mount Samaria for their security. Church leaders are not the noted men of a nation. Church leaders would find little benefit in comparing their church to Calneh, Hamath, and Gath or the kingdoms where they were located. Church leaders probably don't lie in beds of ivory, strum harps, drink wine by the bowl, or anoint themselves with oil. In addition, the word of woe and announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to the elite in Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statements of the applied message that follow I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing the elite in Israel as a warning example.

Adjusting the Message

Church leaders should not be complacent and feel secure like the elite in Israel because Amos pronounced a woe on them, indicating that they were doomed. Church leaders should not be proud like the elite in Israel because Amos ridiculed their boastful claims about themselves and Israel and forced them to acknowledge that they were no better and Samaria was no larger than other cities. Church leaders should not refuse to acknowledge their sin and the evil in the church like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for irresponsibility and warned them that they were responsible for the coming of a time of perpetual violence. Church leaders should not be self-indulgent and indifferent to the welfare of the church like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for their irresponsibility and warned that they would be among the first to be exiled and that their jubilant and extravagant lifestyle would end.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: Woe to You Who Are Complacent in Zion

Objective: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Church leaders to avoid complacency, pride, self-indulgence, and irresponsibility.

Proposition: Church leaders should not be complacent, proud, self-indulgent, and irresponsible like the elite in Israel because Amos pronounced a woe on them, ridiculed their pride and forced them to see they were no better than others; rebuked them for irresponsibility and warned them
of its consequences; and warned that they would be judged and their extravagant lifestyle would end.

**Introduction**

As church leaders you have an awesome responsibility to God's people. However, as leaders you are prone to many dangers. Church leaders sometimes become proud, believing that they are capable of dealing with any contingency. Church leaders may also become irresponsible, ignoring sin and other problems in the church because they are too troublesome. In addition, church leaders sometimes become preoccupied with worldly pleasures. As a result they may become indifferent to the struggles of church members. The elite in Israel had similar struggles. Amos confronted the elite in Israel for their pride, irresponsibility, preoccupation with worldly pleasures, and indifference to the needs of the nation in Amos 6:1-7. As painful as it may be, as church leaders you need to hear Amos' words so that you can be responsible leaders of God's people. **Read Amos 6:1-7.**

I. **Church leaders should not be complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos pronounced a woe on them.**

A. The elite in Israel were complacent and felt secure because they resided in Samaria. Samaria was a walled city built on a large hill called Mount Samaria and therefore easily defended. The elite in Israel complacently believed that Samaria was safe from attack because of its strong defensive position and felt secure as a result.

B. Amos pronounced a woe on the elite, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria." "Woe" was a word used in laments to mourn the dead. Amos mourned for them because he was able to see the disastrous consequences of their complacency.

C. Church leaders sometimes become complacent and feel secure because their situation seems stable.

D. Illustration of a Complacent Church Leader

E. As church leaders you should not be complacent and feel secure like the elite in Israel because Amos pronounced a woe on them.

II. **Church leaders should not be proud like the elite in Israel because Amos ridiculed them and forced them to see that they were no better than others.**

A. The elite in Israel made boastful claims about themselves and their city and nation. They were boasting, "We are the noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel."

B. Amos addressed them in the second half of verse 1 in a way that seems at first to acknowledge their boastful claims, "You noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel" (Read with a neutral or even complimentary tone). However, Amos' subsequent rebukes and denunciations of the elite make it clear that he did not have a very high estimation of them. Instead, Amos is sarcastically ridiculing their pride, "You noted men of the foremost nation, the ones to whom come those from the house of Israel" (Read with a sarcastic tone).

C. Amos then asked them to consider some other cities and forced them to acknowledge that they were no better and Samaria no larger, "cross over to Calneh and look; go from there to the great Hamath, and then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms or is their territory larger than yours? The implication of these rhetorical
questions is that the elite are no better than these cities and the territory of these cities is larger than that of Samaria.

D. Church leaders sometimes become proud and make boastful claims about themselves and their church. Church leaders often become proud because they are like a big fish in a small pond. However, if they are released into the ocean they may find out that they are just fish food.

E.Illustration of a Proud Church Leader

F. As church leaders you should not be proud because your pride is ridiculous since you are no better than others.

III. Church leaders should not ignore sin like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for irresponsibility and warned them of its disastrous consequences.

A. The boasting of the elite in Israel indicates that they had an unrealistic image of themselves and the nation. As a result they refused to acknowledge their sin and the evil that existed in the nation or consider the disastrous consequences. A common psychological term for their condition is "denial."

B. Amos rebuked them for their irresponsibility, "They thrust away the evil day." They put off doing anything about their sin and the evil in the nation because they did not want to acknowledge that they were sinners and the nation was evil.

C. Amos then warned that their refusal to do anything about their sin and the evil in the nation had disastrous consequences. The words "thrust away" and "pull near" are near opposites. By refusing to acknowledge their sin and its consequences they were actually bringing about the disaster they refused to acknowledge. The phrase "the residence of violence" describes a time when violence will dwell as a permanent resident.

D. Church leaders sometimes have may have difficulty acknowledging their sin and the evil in the church. They can be in denial like the elite in Israel.

E. Illustration of a Church Leader in Denial

F. As church leaders you should not ignore sin like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for irresponsibility and warned them of its disastrous consequences.

IV. Church leaders should not be self-indulgent and apathetic like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked and warned them that they would be judged and their extravagant lifestyle would end.

A. The elite in Israel were so preoccupied with enjoying worldly pleasures that they became apathetic to the condition of the nation.

B. Amos denounced five aspects of the extravagant and self-indulgent lifestyle. He denounced their leisurely extravagance. He denounced their sumptuous dining. He denounced their leisurely pursuits. He denounced their excessive drinking. He denounced their use of the finest of oils.

C. As villainous as the extravagance and self-indulgence of the elite in Israel may have been, the magnitude their sin was intensified by what it led them to neglect. Amos denounces them for their indifference at the end of verse 6, "but are not sickened over the shattering of Joseph." They were so preoccupied with their extravagant and self-indulgent lifestyle that they did not even consider the evils in the nation that were breaking it apart and would eventually lead to its disintegration.

D. Amos announces God's judgment on the elite in Israel for their extravagance and indifference in verse 7, "Therefore they will depart immediately with the first of those going and the gaiety of the extravagant will depart." The elite were always putting themselves first
so it is appropriate that they would also be the first to be judged. They were so preoccupied with the enjoyment of their extravagant and self-indulgent lifestyle that they could not be bothered with the needs of the nation. Therefore, it was also an appropriate punishment that which preoccupied their lives would also be taken away from them.

E. Church leaders are sometimes preoccupied with worldly pleasures and become apathetic to the condition of the church.

F. Illustration of a Self-Indulgent and Apathetic Church Leader

G. As church leaders you should not be self-indulgent and apathetic like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for their irresponsibility and warned that they would be judged and their extravagant lifestyle would end.

Conclusion

As church leaders you have an awesome responsibility to God's people. However, as leaders you are prone to many dangers much like the elite in Israel. Church leaders sometimes become complacent and proud like the elite in Israel, believing that they are capable of dealing with any contingency. In addition, church leaders sometimes become irresponsible like the elite in Israel, ignoring sin because it is too troublesome to deal with. What is more, Church leaders sometimes become preoccupied with worldly pleasures like the elite in Israel. As a result they may become apathetic to the struggles of church members and neglect the needs of the congregation. As church leaders you should not be complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos pronounced a woe on them. As church leaders you should not be proud like the elite in Israel because Amos ridiculed their boastful claims and forced them to acknowledge that they were no better than others. As church leaders you should not ignore sin like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked them for irresponsibility and its disastrous consequences. As church leaders you should not be self-indulgent and apathetic like the elite in Israel because Amos rebuked and warned them that they would be judged and their extravagant lifestyle would end.
CHAPTER NINE

I ABHOR THE PRIDE OF JACOB
Amos 6:8-14

Though this passage as defined is closely related to its context, it is a relatively self-contained unit with an indication of the nature of the sin and a warning of judgment (See Form and Function and Strategy and Structure).

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

6:8 The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his own life—
a declaration of the LORD God of Armies:
"I* abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses;
I will deliver up the city and its fullness."

9 And it shall be that even if ten men remain in one house, they will die. 10 Indeed if someone's relative and the one who is to burn him comes to carry the bones from the house and asks one in the remote parts of the house, "Is anyone still with you?" and he says, "No," then he will say, "Silence!" For we must not mention the name of the LORD."

11 For indeed the LORD commands,
and smashes the great houses into pieces
and the small house into bits.

12 Do horses run on the precipice?
Does one plow there with oxen?1
But you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness.

13 You who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar
and say, "Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?"

14 Indeed, the LORD God of Armies declares,
"I am raising up a nation against you, O house of Israel,
and they will oppress you all the way from the entrance
to Hamath to the valley of the Arabah."

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English.

1 The Hebrew text is literally, "Does one plow with oxen?" However, this question makes little sense in the context. The context requires a question with an implied negative response that identifies a behavior as foolish. One possible approach is to imply the locale from the preceding verse, "Does one plow there (the precipice) with oxen?" Another possibility is that the Hebrew word for "sea," has been mistaken for a plural suffix. In that case the line would be best translated, "Does one plow the sea with oxen?"

Situation and Purpose
Amos 6:8-14 reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were proud of their military might, complacently presuming that they were safe from God's judgment. As a result they were oppressing the poor and treating them unjustly. Their proud reliance on their military might and complacency are reflected repeatedly in the passage. In the second half of verse 8 God swears, "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses." The close association of pride and fortresses in the parallel structure indicates that their pride was in their fortresses. In verse 13 they are described as, "The ones who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, 'Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?'" Lo Debar means "nothing" and Karnaim means "horns," a symbol of power. This description reveals that they arrogantly boasted in their military might. Since the entire passage is directed at undermining this proud reliance on their military might by warning of God's judgment, the implication is that they have become complacent and presume that they are safe from God's judgment. Oppression and injustice also accompanied their pride and complacency. Their oppression and injustice are clearly reflected in the rebuking accusation in the second half of verse 12, "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness." Therefore, the purpose of this passage was to undermine their proud reliance on their military might and complacency and warn them of God's judgment for their oppression and injustice. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, the warning probably was intended to lead them to repent of their oppression and injustice and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 6:8-14 concludes the first half of the book that is dominated by prophetic exhortations (chs. 1-6). From another perspective these prophetic exhortations and even the prophetic visions in chapters 7-9 address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the elite of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 6:8-14 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, and 6:1-7. This warning is reinforced further in 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14. Amos 5:1-17 continues and reinforces the warning against oppression and injustice found in the 1:3-2:16, 3:1-15; 4:1-3, and 5:18-27. This warning is reinforced further in 8:1-14. From another perspective, the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. After that passage the prophetic words return to severe warning of judgment. No further hope is given until 9:1-15.

Form and Function

Amos 6:8-14 can be classified generally as prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby
encourage faithfulness. The Book of Amos is dominated by prophetic exhortations that have warnings of judgment, but few direct commands and prohibitions. Though no direct indication of the appropriate response is provided, the warning implies that the readers should heed and repent. Amos 6:8-14 follows this characteristic form of prophetic exhortation. The denunciation of pride and fortresses and announcement and descriptions of judgment in verses 8-11 imply the prohibition, "The elite should not be proud and complacently rely on their military might." The rhetorical questions and rebuking accusation in verse 12 imply the prohibition, "The elite should not be unjust and unrighteous." The rebuking accusation of pride in military conquest in verse 13 and the announcement of judgment in verse 14 imply the prohibition, "The elite should not be proud and complacently rely on their military might."

**Strategy and Structure**

Amos begins by delivering God's rebuking denunciation and announcement of judgment of the elite in Israel for their pride and complacency in verse 8. Next, he reinforces the warning of the announcement of judgment by further describing its thoroughness and horror in verse 9-10. Next, Amos further emphasizes the warning of the announcement of judgment by declaring God's authority to command their destruction in verse 11. Amos then detours from his warning against pride and complacency to deal with what has resulted from it. He warns them of the precarious position they have placed themselves in through injustice and unrighteousness in verse 12. Amos concludes by returning to his primary emphasis on confronting the pride and complacency of the elite. He ridicules their proud boasting in their military might and announces God's judgment upon them in verses 13-14.

I. Rebutting Denunciation and Announcement of Judgment (6:8)
   A. An Oath and Declaration of the Sovereign LORD God of Armies
   B. Rebutting Denunciation and Announcement of Judgment

II. Warning Description of the Thoroughness and Horror of the Judgment (6:9-10)
   A. The Thoroughness of the Judgment (v. 9)
   B. The Horror of the Judgment (v. 10)

III. Warning Declaration of the Authority of God's Command to Judge (6:11)

IV. Ridiculing Rebuke of Their Foolish Injustice and Unrighteousness (6:12)
   A. Rhetorical Questions Identifying Foolish Behavior
      1. Running horses on the precipice
      2. Plowing the precipice with oxen
   B. Rebutting Accusation of Equally Foolish Behavior
      1. Turning justice to poison
      2. Turning the fruit of righteousness into bitterness

V. Ridiculing Address and Announcement of Judgment (6:13-14)
   A. Ridiculing Address of Those Who Are Proud of Military Might (v. 13)
   B. Announcement of Judgment (v. 14)
      1. Introduced as a declaration of the LORD God Almighty
      2. Announcement of thorough judgment

**Message or Messages**
The elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might and Samaria and its wealth because the Sovereign LORD God of Armies has sworn and declares that he abhors their pride, hates their fortresses, and will deliver up the city and its fullness. The elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might and Samaria and its wealth because God's judgment will be so thorough and horrifying that they will be terrified of mentioning the name of the LORD. The elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might and Samaria and its wealth because the LORD has the authority to command and smash every house into bits. The elite in Israel should not pervert the courts because doing so is as foolish as horses running on a precipice or farmers plowing there with oxen and embitters and poisons the lives of the poor. The elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on Samaria's military might and wealth because their boastful claims are ridiculous and the LORD God of Armies has declared that he is raising up a nation against them that will oppress them from their northern to their southern border.

Analysis of the Details

Rebuking Denunciation and Announcement of Judgment

Amos delivers God's rebuking denunciation and announcement of judgment in verse 8. These serve as warnings to the elite in Israel not to proudly and complacently rely on their military might or Samaria and its wealth.

An oath and declaration of the Sovereign LORD God of Armies. Amos introduces the denunciation and announcement of judgment as an oath and declaration of the Sovereign LORD God of Armies in the first half of the verse, "The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his own self—a declaration of the LORD God of Armies." Oaths were given to assure that a commitment would be fulfilled. The greater the person or thing sworn by, the more certainty that the commitment would be fulfilled. No greater assurance could be given that an oath would be fulfilled than to swear that oath on the name of the LORD. In this case, God swears by himself to stress the certainty of the denunciation and announcement of judgment that follows. Amos further stresses the certainty of God's denunciation and announcement of judgment by identifying them as a declaration of "the LORD God of Armies." In fact, Amos multiplies divine names that convey the authority of God. The denunciation and announcement of judgment are not only an oath of "The Sovereign LORD" but a declaration of "the LORD God of Armies." The word translated "Sovereign" is normally translated "Lord." Here I have translated it "Sovereign" to avoid confusion with the divine name. This word stresses God's control over his creation. The word translated "of Armies" is often translated "Almighty" and stresses God's great might. However, I have translated it "of Armies" here because the elite in Israel were proud and complacently relying on their own armies. They needed to realize that God is the Commander in Chief of all armies.

Rebuking denunciation and announcement of judgment. Amos then states God's denunciation and announcement of judgment on the proud elite in Israel in the second half of the verse, "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and its fullness." The elite in Israel were extremely proud. The reasons for their pride are implied within this denunciation and announcement of judgment—they were proud of their "fortresses" and "the city and its fullness." The city referred to here is almost certainly Samaria. The already
strong verbs employed in the denunciation of their pride, "abhor" and "detest," are further strengthened by an intensive use of the personal pronoun "I" (Indicated in translation with bold print). The verb "deliver up" indicates God's direct involvement in their defeat. They are in his control and he will hand them over to their enemies. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might and Samaria and its wealth because the Sovereign LORD God of Armies has sworn and declares that he abhors their pride, hates their fortresses, and will deliver up the city and its fullness.

Warning Description of the Thoroughness and Horror of the Judgment

Amos describes more fully the thoroughness and horror of the judgment in verse 9-10. This description intensifies the warning of the announcement of judgment so that the elite in Israel will not proudly and complacently rely on their military might or Samaria and its wealth.

The thoroughness of the judgment. Amos describes the thoroughness of the judgment in verse 9, "And it shall be that even if ten men remain in one house, they will die." This description presupposes that some disaster has already occurred, probably defeat in battle. This disaster has already decimated the population and buildings so that only ten men are left and only one house remains standing. However, as thorough as the judgment already seems, it is not yet complete. Even the ten men who remain will die (See Stuart, 364).

The horror of the judgment. Amos describes the horror of the judgment in verse 10, "And if someone's relative and the one who is to burn him comes to carry the bones from the house and asks one in the remote parts of the house, 'Is anyone still with you?' and he says 'No,' then he will say, 'Silence! For we must not mention the name of the LORD.'" The Hebrew text of verse 9 is difficult to translate. Nonetheless, this illustrative account describes the collection of bodies for burning. The survivors will be so horrified by the judgment and its aftermath that they won't dare even mention the name of the LORD for fear that he might renew his assault against them. Perhaps also, considering Amos' predilection for irony, he may be warning the proud and complacent elite in Israel that they would eventually learn to humbly fear God, but only after it was too late. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might or Samaria and its wealth because God's judgment will be so thorough and terrifying that they will be terrified of mentioning the name of the LORD.

Warning Declaration of the Authority of God's Command to Judge

Amos declares that God has authority to command judgment in verse 11, "For indeed the LORD commands, and smashes the great houses into pieces and the small houses to bits." This declaration intensifies the warning of the announcement of judgment so that the elite in Israel would not proudly and complacently rely on their military might or Samaria and its wealth. The elite in Israel were proud and complacent because of their city and its wealth. However, their city and its wealth were not an appropriate basis for pride and complacency because they were under the authority of God. The authority of God's command is stressed in this verse. As he ordered the world into being, he can also order the destruction of their city. The description of the houses that are destroyed as both "great" and "small" probably was intended to stress the thoroughness of the destruction. The thoroughness of the destruction is further emphasized by
the description of the remains, "pieces" and "bits." Therefore, the elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might or Samaria and its wealth because the LORD has the authority to command and smash all their houses into bits.

**Ridiculing Rebut of Their Foolish Injustice and Unrighteousness**

Amos ridicules and rebukes the elite in Israel for their foolish injustice and unrighteousness in verse 12. In this way, Amos discouraged them from being unjust and unrighteous by warning them of the precarious situation in which they have foolishly placed themselves. He begins with two rhetorical questions in the first half of the verse that identify behavior that even the elite would have had to agree was foolish, "Do horses run on the precipice? Does one plow there with oxen?" These rhetorical questions presume the emphatic reply, "No, of course not!" Horses have enough sense to realize that running on the edge of a cliff would be dangerous and they walk carefully. Similarly, farmers are smart enough to realize that plowing on the edge of a cliff would be dangerous and plant their crops on safer ground. He then rebukes them for ridiculous behavior that is as foolish as running or plowing on the precipice in the second half of the verse, "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness." The elite had perverted the legal system to advance their own selfish ends. As a result the poor suffered. The elite turned the legal system that should have cured the injustices in the nation into a toxin that was poisoning the poor. The elite turned the legal system that should have satisfied the poor like sweet water into a bitter and insipid concoction. Underlying the correlation of the injustice and unrighteousness of the elite with foolishly running and plowing on the precipice is a warning of the disastrous consequences of their actions. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not pervert the courts because doing so is as foolish as horses running and farmers plowing with oxen on a precipice and poisons and embitters the lives of the poor.

**Ridiculing Address and Announcement of Judgment**

Amos ridicules the elite in Israel and announces God's judgment on them for their pride in their military might in verses 13-14. This ridiculing address and announcement of judgment served to warn them not to proudly and complacently rely on their own strength.

**Ridiculing address of those who are proud of military might.** Amos sarcastically addresses the elite in Israel, ridiculing their pride in their military might in verse 13, "You who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, 'Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?'" The sarcasm of Amos' address is seen most clearly in the names of the places that the elite were boasting about having conquered. "Lo Debar" literally means "not a thing." "Karnaim" literally means "horns," a common symbol of strength. They were proudly boasting that they had taken a place of strength by their own strength when in reality they had done nothing worth bragging about.

**Announcement of judgment.** Amos delivers God's announcement of judgment on the elite in verse 14, "For indeed the LORD God of Armies declares, 'I am raising up a nation against you, O house of Israel, and they will oppress you all the way from the entrance of Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.'" Again, Amos refers to God as the LORD God of Armies to emphasize his authority to judge and heighten the warning of the announcement of judgment. As the
Commander in Chief of all armies he will raise up the army of a nation against them. Amos stresses that the judgment will be thorough, encompassing the whole nation from north to south. The "entrance of Hamath" was the northern boundary of Israel and the "valley of the Arabah" was its southernmost boundary. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not proudly and complacently rely on their military might because their boastful claims are ridiculous and the LORD God of Armies has declared that he is raising up a nation against them that will oppress them from their northern to their southern border.

**Application of the Message**

**Establishing Correspondence**

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent like the elite in Israel. The bases for their pride and complacency may be similar as well—their secure and prosperous position. As a result they may even become unjust and unrighteous like the elite in Israel. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 6:8-14 to the modern situation.

**Distinguishing the Contextualized**

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Christians do not normally rely on their fortresses or military might and few have ever been to Samaria. In addition, Christians are not usually involved in the perversion of the legal system. Furthermore, the denunciations and announcements and descriptions of judgment are specifically addressed to the elite in Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

**Adjusting the Message**

Christians should not proudly and complacently rely on their strength and prosperity like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD God of Armies swore and declared that he abhorred their pride, hated their fortresses, and would deliver up their city and its fullness. Christians should not proudly and complacently rely on their strength and prosperity like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that God's judgment would be so thorough and horrifying that they would be terrified of mentioning the name of the LORD. Christians should not proudly and complacently rely on their strength and prosperity like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that the LORD has the authority to command and smash all of their houses into bits. Christians should not treat others unjustly like the elite in Israel because doing so is as foolish as horses running or farmers plowing with oxen on a precipice and embitters and poisons the lives of others. Christians should not proudly and complacently rely on their strength and prosperity like the elite in Israel because Amos ridiculed their boasting and the LORD God of Armies declared that he was raising up a nation against them that would oppress them from their northern to their southern border.

**Proclamation of the Message**

**Title:** I Abhor the Pride of Jacob
**Objective**: The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to avoid pride, complacency, and injustice.

**Proposition**: Christians should not be proud, complacent, and unjust like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore that he hated their pride and it would lead to disaster; Amos warned that God's judgment would be thorough and horrifying; the LORD has authority to destroy all they had; being unjust is foolish and embitters and poisons the lives of others; and their boasting was ridiculous and the LORD would thoroughly judge them.

**Introduction**

Self-sufficiency is a prized goal in modern culture. People strive to make money and secure their position so that they will be able to deal with any contingency. Doesn't self-sufficiency sound logical and desirable to you? Though self-sufficiency sounds good, it has some inherent dangers for Christians. As the word suggests, self-sufficiency is focused on self. As a result self-sufficiency leads to pride. In addition, since self-sufficiency is focused on self, it leads to a disregard for God. Self-sufficiency leads people to turn from God and depend on themselves. Furthermore, since self-sufficiency is focused on self, it leads to the mistreatment of others. Self-sufficiency becomes a compulsion that drives people to achieve their goal no matter who they hurt. The elite in Israel were self-sufficient. They had great wealth and secure defenses. However, they had paid a great price for their self-sufficiency. They had turned away from God and treated the poor unjustly. As a result judgment was imminent. We need to learn from their example and heed God's word in Amos 6:8-14. Read Amos 6:8-14.

I. **Christians should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore that he hated their pride and their complacency would lead to disaster.**

   A. The elite in Israel were proud of Samaria and its wealth and defenses and they were complacently relying on these to keep them safe.
   B. In response, Amos delivered the word of God. In fact, Amos stresses that this word is an oath and declaration of the Sovereign LORD God of Armies to emphasize the reliability of this word. Oaths were made to assure that a commitment would be fulfilled. The greater the person or thing sworn by, the more assurance that the commitment would be fulfilled. In this case, God swears by "his own life." No greater guarantee could be given for an oath! The names that Amos uses for God further stress that what God says is true and will certainty come about. He is the Sovereign LORD God of Armies, the exalted and omnipotent Lord!
   C. The word of God that Amos delivered was a denunciation of the pride of the elite and announcement that he was going to deliver them to their enemies, "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and its fullness." Their pride and complacent reliance on Samaria, its wealth, and its fortresses was a mistake. Through their pride and complacent reliance on their own strength and prosperity the elite offended God and he took away everything that they were proud and complacently relied upon.
   D. Christians sometimes be proud and complacent because of their seemingly secure position and prosperity like the elite in Israel proudly and complacently relied on Samaria's wealth and fortresses.
   E. Illustration of a Christian Who Is Proud and Complacent due to Power
   F. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore he hated their pride and their complacency would lead to disaster.
II. Christians should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that God's judgment would be thorough and horrifying.

A. The elite in Israel were proud of Samaria's wealth and defenses and were complacently relying on these to keep them safe.
B. In response, God denounced their pride and announced that he was going to deliver them to their enemies.
C. In addition, Amos warned them that God's judgment would go beyond defeat in battle. Amos describes the aftermath of the battle in verse 9, "And it shall be that even if ten men remain in one house, they will die." Even those who survive the defeat of Israel's army will die. Furthermore, Amos describes a horrible time when they would be afraid to even mention God's name for fear that it might lead to further judgment, "And if someone's relative and the one who is to burn him comes to carry the bones from the house and asks one in the remote parts of the house, 'Is anyone still with you?' and he says 'No!' then he will say, 'Silence! For we must not mention the name of the LORD.'"
D. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent because of their seeming security and prosperity like the elite in Israel proudly and complacently relied on Samaria's wealth and defenses.
E. Illustration of a Christian Who Is Proud and Complacent due to Success
F. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that God's judgment would be thorough and horrifying.

III. Christians should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that the LORD has the authority to destroy all that they had.

A. The elite in Israel were proud of Samaria's wealth and defenses and were complacently relying on these to keep them safe.
B. In response, God denounced their pride and announced that he was going to hand them over to their enemies.
C. In addition, Amos warned them that God's judgment would go beyond defeat in battle and would include the complete devastation of the nation.
D. In verse 11, Amos declares the authority of God's command to judge, "For indeed the LORD commands, and smashes the great houses into pieces and the small houses to bits." In their pride, the elite had exalted themselves above God. Amos reminded them that God is in control of their fate and they could do nothing to countermand his command for judgment. A word from the LORD and every one of their houses and all they possess would be smashed to pieces.
E. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent because of their seeming security and prosperity like the elite in Israel proudly and complacently relied on Samaria's wealth and defenses.
F. Illustration of a Christian Who Is Proud and Complacent due to Prosperity
G. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that the LORD has the authority to destroy all they had.

IV. Christians should not treat people unjustly like the elite in Israel because doing so is foolish and embitters and poisons the lives of others.

A. The elite in Israel had perverted the legal system to advance their own ambitious plans.
B. Amos warned them that they were endangering themselves by their injustice. He asks two rhetorical questions in the first part of verse 8 that identify behavior that the elite in Israel would have agreed were foolishly dangerous, "Do horses run on the precipice? Does
one plow there with oxen?" These rhetorical questions presume the emphatic reply, "No, of course not!" Horses have enough sense to realize that running on the edge of a cliff is dangerous so they walk carefully. Similarly, farmers are smart enough to realize that plowing on the edge of a cliff would be dangerous and they plant their crops on safer ground. He then equates their injustice with these foolishly dangerous behaviors.

C. In addition, Amos describes the suffering that resulted from the injustice of the elite in Israel in the second half of verse 8, "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness." The legal system was intended a cure for injustices to the poor, but the elite were using the court to poison the poor. The legal system was meant to refresh the poor like a sweet drink of water, but the elite had turned it into an insipid concoction that none could stand to drink.

D. Christians sometimes treat people unjustly because they are ambitious to advance their own selfish plans.

E. Illustration of a Proud and Unjust Christian

F. You should not treat others unjustly like the elite in Israel because doing is foolish and embitters and poisons the lives of others.

V. Christians should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that their boasting was ridiculous and the LORD God of Armies was going to thoroughly judge them.

A. The elite in Israel were proudly boasting about their conquests and complacently relying on their military might.

B. Amos ridicules their boasting in verse 13 by addressing them as "The ones who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, 'Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?" The biting sarcasm of this identification is seen most clearly in the names of the places that the elite were boasting about having conquered. Lo Debar literally means "not a thing." Karnaim literally means "horns," a symbol for strength. They were proudly boasting that they had taken a place of strength by their own strength when in reality they had conquered nothing worth bragging about.

C. Amos announces God's judgment against the elite in verse 14, "For indeed the LORD God of Armies declares, 'I am raising up a nation against you, O house of Israel, and they will oppress you all the way from the entrance of Hamath to the valley of the Arabah.'" As the LORD God of the Armies, God has all armies at his command and he had determined to raise up an army against Israel. Their proud boasting and complacency would prove to be unfounded as this army oppressed them from the entrance of Hamath on Israel's northern border to the valley of the Arabah on Israel's southern border.

D. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent and make boastful claims because of their strength and wealth.

E. Illustration of a Christian who Is Proud due to Power and Success

F. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that their boasting was ridiculous and the LORD God of Armies was going to thoroughly judge them.

Conclusion

Though self-sufficiency sounds good, it has some inherent dangers. As the word suggests, self-sufficiency is focused on self. As a result its leads to pride, disregard for God, and the mistreatment of others. The elite in Israel were self-sufficient. They had great wealth and had
secure defenses. However, they had paid a great price for their self-sufficiency. They had turned away from God and treated the poor unjustly. As a result God judged them. We need to learn from their example and heed God's word in Amos 6:8-14. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because the LORD said that he abhorred their pride and it would lead to disaster. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that God's judgment would be thorough and horrifying. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that the LORD has the authority to take away all they had. You should not treat people unjustly like the elite in Israel because doing is foolish and embitters and poisons the lives of others. You should not be proud and complacent like the elite in Israel because Amos warned them that their boasting was ridiculous and the LORD was going to thoroughly judge them.
CHAPTER TEN

I WILL NOT SPARE THEM AGAIN, PART I

Amos 7:1-9

The passage as defined has a recognizable beginning and ending and a cohesive purpose (See Situation and Purpose), form (See Form and Function) and strategy (See Strategy and Structure). In addition, the passage as defined is a manageable unit for interpretation.

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

7:1 Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me: Behold he was forming swarms of locusts in the beginning of the latter growth and indeed the latter growth after the king's share. 2So it was that when they had completely finished eating the vegetation of the land, I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!" 3So the LORD relented concerning this. "This will not happen," the LORD said.

4Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me: Behold the Sovereign LORD was calling for a trial by fire; it consumed the great deep and devoured the land. 5Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, please stop! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!" 6So the LORD relented concerning this. "This will not happen either," the Sovereign LORD said.

7Thus he showed me: Behold the Lord was standing by a plumb lined wall, and in his hand was a plumb line. 8Then the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" Then I replied, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will not spare them again.

9"The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

1The Hebrew word translated "plumb line" only occurs here and its meaning is dubious. Stuart argues that it should be translated "tin" (Stuart, 372-373). However, this translation becomes absurd in the context. The context favors the traditional translation of "plumb line" (See the discussion under Analysis of the Details).

Situation and Purpose

Amos 7:1-9 reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were complacently presuming that God would always be merciful and they were safe from his judgment. Though the passage does not contain any direct indication of their complacent presumption on God's mercy, their complacent presumption is reflected indirectly in the strategy of the passage (See Strategy and Structure). The passage contains three visions of judgment. God relents and withdraws the judgments envisioned in the first two visions, but God does not relent and withdraw the third judgment envisioned. This strategy presupposes and plays upon the complacent presumption of the elite that God would always be merciful and never judge. Though the reasons for their complacency are not specifically identified, their worship centers and the house of Jeroboam are specifically singled out for judgment in verse 9. Therefore, their religion and the dynasty of...
Jeroboam with all its political and military power were probably the bases of their pride and complacency. The purpose of this passage was to undermine their complacent presumption and warn them of God's judgment. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, the warning probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sins and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 7:1-9 introduces the second half of the book, which is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic visions and even the prophetic exhortations in chapters 1-6 address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 7:1-9 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-7, and 6:8-14. This warning is reinforced further in 7:10-17 and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. After that passage the prophetic words return to severe warning of judgment. No further hope is given until 9:1-15. Furthermore, the passages in 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14 seem to have an especially close relationship. Amos 7:1-9 and 8:1-14 are linked by identical declarations of the LORD, "I will not spare them again." Amos 7:10-17 is closely linked to 7:1-9 by a Hebrew conjunction (translated "Then"). The announcement of God's destruction of the centers of Israel's religion and attack on the house of Jeroboam in 7:1-9 and especially 7-9 provides the background for Amaziah's negative reaction in 7:10-17. The prophetic word in 8:1-14 reinforces and supplements 7:1-9, specifying the sins of Israel and elaborating on the description of judgment.

Form and Function

Amos 7:1-9 can be classified generally as prophetic vision/dialogue. Prophetic visions are a pictorial form of prophetic exhortation. In fact, prophetic visions are often accompanied by prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. Prophetic visions normally employ a picture or story from the world of dreams to illustrate what would normally be stated more directly in prophetic exhortation, usually the warning or assurance. Amos 7:1-9 contains three prophetic visions. Each vision is accompanied by a dialogue between Amos and God. All three visions portray judgment and serve as warnings to discourage complacency. The first two dialogues acknowledge God's mercy while implicitly warning of the precarious position of Israel apart from God's mercy. The final dialogue interprets the vision and reinforces the warning with an announcement of judgment. These visions imply the prohibition/command,
"The elite in Israel should not complacently presume that God will always be merciful, but repent of their sins."

**Strategy and Structure**

The passage contains a series of three visions of judgment. The first two visions reveal judgments—locusts and drought—that God relents from sending (vs. 1-3 and 4-6). These two visions of relented judgments play upon the complacency of the elite in Israel and their presumption that God will always be merciful and never judge them. However, at the same time they implicitly warn the elite of their precarious position. The third vision report reveals a judgment that God does not relent from sending and is reinforced by an announcement of judgment (v. 7-9). This vision and announcement of judgment dramatically undermine the complacency of the elite by revealing that God's mercy has limits and he does hold his people accountable for their sins.

I. A Vision of Judgment by Locusts that God Mercifully Relents and Revokes (7:1-3)
   A. Introduced as a Vision of the Sovereign LORD (v. 1a)
   B. A Vision of Devastating Judgment by Locusts (v. 1b)
   C. Amos' Appeal for God to Forgive Based on Israel's Feebleness (v. 2)
   D. God Mercifully Relents and Revokes the Judgment (v. 3)

II. A Vision of Judgment by Drought that God Mercifully Relents and Revokes (7:4-6)
   A. Introduced as a Vision of the Sovereign LORD (v. 4a)
   B. A Vision of Devastating Judgment by Drought (v. 4b)
   C. Amos' Appeal for God to Stop Based on Israel's Feebleness (v. 5)
   D. God Mercifully Relents and Revokes the Judgment (v. 6)

III. A Vision of Accountability that God Does Not Relent or Revoke (7:7-9)
   A. Introduced as a Vision of the Sovereign LORD (v. 7a)
   B. A Vision of God Standing by a Plumb Wall with a Plumb Line in His Hand (v. 7b)
   C. An Interrogation Focusing Attention on the Plumb Line (v. 8a)
   D. God Interprets the Significance of the Plumb Line (vs. 8b-9)
      1. He will hold them accountable
      2. He will not pass over them again
      3. He will destroy their centers of religion and political power

**Message or Messages**

The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because they are feeble and would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the plague. The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because they are feeble and would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the drought. The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because God will hold them accountable for their sin, stop being merciful to them even though they are his people, and destroy that which they relied upon.

**Analysis of the Details**

**A Vision of Judgment by Locusts that God**
Mercifully Relents and Revokes

Amos begins by reporting a vision of judgment by locusts that God mercifully relents from sending and revokes in verses 1-3. He introduces the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD, describes the vision of devastating judgment by locusts, relates his cry for God to forgive based on God's sovereignty and Israel's feebleness, and reports that God relented and revoked the plague. The elite in Israel complacently believed that they were secure. This vision and the dialogue that accompanies it undermine their complacency by revealing that their survival to this point in time has been because of the intercession of Amos and the mercy of God.

Introduced as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD. Amos identifies the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD in the first part of verse 1, "Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me." The word translated "Sovereign" is frequently translated "Lord." I have chosen to translate with "Sovereign" to avoid confusion with the divine name. Both "Sovereign" and "Lord" convey the absolute authority of God. By identifying this vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD, Amos was indicating God's authority to judge and stressing the need to heed the warning revealed in the vision.

A vision of devastating judgment by locusts. Amos describes the vision of judgment by locusts in the remainder of verse 1, "Behold he was forming swarms of locusts in the beginning of the latter growth and indeed the latter growth after the king's share." Locusts were a terrible disaster. Mays describes the situation well,

The recurrent appearance of locust swarms was one of the most dreadful plagues that afflicted the population of the ancient East. When the swarm made their ravenous way across the land, the face of the earth was stripped of every green plant. Nothing was left but the suffering and death of famine and the despair of men in the face of menace against which they were helpless (Mays, 128).

The tragedy of the plague of locusts was intensified by the time of their arrival. Though this is the only mention of the practice, evidently King Jeroboam took the initial harvest to support his government and military. King Jeroboam had already taken his share and the locusts were taking the share that would normally feed the people.

Amos' appeal for God to forgive based on Israel's feebleness. Amos relates that when he saw the devastation of the plague of locusts he cried out for God to forgive and revoke the plague in verse 2, "So it was that when they had completely finished eating the vegetation of the land, I cried out, 'Sovereign LORD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!'" Though no sin is specifically identified in this passage, Amos' appeal for God to forgive indicates that they have sinned and implies that these sins were the reason for God's judgment. Though Amos does not specifically appeal to God to revoke the plague, this appeal is implicit in his prayer for forgiveness. Amos' appeal is based on the authority of God and the feebleness of Israel rather than any merit they may have. As the "Sovereign LORD" God could judge them or forgive them. The rhetorical question, "How can Jacob stand?" implies the response, "He cannot stand!" The explanation that follows, "He is so small!" further emphasizes the inability of Israel to stand apart from God's intervention. Ironically, Israel's weakness rather than its strength was the basis of their survival.

God mercifully relents and revokes the judgment. God responds to Amos' plea by mercifully relenting and revoking the judgment in verse 3, "So the LORD relented concerning
this. 'This will not happen,' the LORD said." God exercises his sovereignty and demonstrates his mercy by changing his mind. As Stuart explains, "The scriptures consistently witness to the possibility that God may choose to do something he had not planned, or not do something he had planned, in response to human appeal (Gen 18:22-32; Num 14:11-20; Josh 7:6-13; 2 Kgs 22:19-20; Jer 18:1-10; Jonah 3:10; Joel 2:13, 14)" (Stuart, 371-372). God mercifully spared Israel. Nonetheless, Israel narrowly escaped devastation by the plague of locusts. If not for Amos' appeal and God's mercy they would have suffered grievously. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because they are feeble and would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the plague.

A Vision of Judgment by Drought that God Mercifully Relents and Revokes

Next, Amos reports the vision of the judgment by drought that God mercifully relents from sending and revokes in verses 4-6. The similarity of the vision report to the preceding report is obvious. He introduces the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD, describes the vision of judgment by drought, relates his cry for God to stop based on his authority and Israel's feebleness, and reports that God relented and revoked the judgment. The elite in Israel complacently believed that they were secure. This vision and the dialogue that accompanies it undermine their complacency by revealing that their survival to this point in time has been because of the intercession of Amos and the mercy of God.

**Introduced as a vision of the Sovereign LORD.** Amos again identifies the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD in the first part of verse 4, "Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me." By identifying this vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD, Amos was indicating God's authority to judge and stressing the need to heed the warning revealed in the vision.

**A vision of devastating judgment by drought.** Amos describes the vision of judgment by drought in the remainder of verse 4, "Behold the Sovereign LORD was calling for a trial by fire; it consumed the great deep and devoured the land." Though the trial "by fire" the description indicates that this judgment would be a drought. This fire is described as a ravenous beast that consumes all the water and devours all the land. "The great deep" probably refers to the subterranean waters that the Hebrews believed fed all the streams. The drought would dry up all the water in the streams and the land would be parched and unable to support life.

**Amos' appeal for God to stop based on Israel's feebleness.** Amos relates his cry for God to stop the plague based on Israel's feebleness in verse 5, "Then I cried out, 'Sovereign LORD, please stop! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!'" Though he does not specifically appeal to God to forgive their sin, this appeal is implicit in his prayer for God to stop the drought. As in verse 2, Amos again appeals to God based on his authority as the "Sovereign LORD" and the feebleness of Israel (See above).

**God mercifully relents and revokes the judgment.** God again responds to Amos' plea by mercifully relenting and revoking the judgment in verse 6, "So the LORD relented concerning this. 'This will not happen either,' the Sovereign LORD said." God again demonstrates his sovereignty and mercy by changing his mind. Nonetheless, Israel narrowly escaped devastation by the severe drought. If not for Amos' appeal and God's mercy they would have suffered
grievously. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because they are feeble and would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the drought.

A Vision of Accountability that God Does Not Relent or Revoke

Amos concludes by reporting a vision of accountability in verses 7-9 that God does not relent from or revoke. This vision report is similar to the preceding vision reports, but with some notable exceptions. He again introduces the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD, though he does not specifically use the title. He reports the vision of God standing by a wall with a plumb line in his hand. However, in this case Amos does not have opportunity to intercede on behalf of Israel because God focuses his attention on the plumb line and then explains its significance. Through this vision report Amos advances the indirect warning of the previous visions by revealing that God's mercy has limits and that he ultimately holds his people accountable for their actions.

Introduced as a vision of the Sovereign LORD. Amos again identifies the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD in first part of 7, though he does not specifically use the title, "Thus he showed me." However, even without the title this identification of the source of the vision underscores the need to heed the warning it conveys.

A vision of God standing by a plumb wall with a plumb line in his hand. Amos describes the vision in the remainder of verse 7, "Behold the Lord was standing by a plumb lined wall, and in his hand was a plumb line." Stuart contends that the translation "plumb line" was "never more than a guess." He proposes the translation "tin" and translates the description of the vision, "He was standing on a tin wall and he had some tin in his hand." He acknowledges that the translation "is in one sense ridiculous." However, he maintains, "the play on words is the real issue." The Hebrew word translated "tin" is very similar in sound to two other Hebrew words that are associated with the moaning and groaning that result from distress. Therefore, he asserts that this play on words "implies the agony of defeat and destruction" (Stuart, 372-373). As compelling as Stuart's argument is, I have chosen to retain the traditional translation because most visionary images make sense even when a play on words is employed (For example, Amos' subsequent vision of a basket of summer fruit in 8:1-2). A plumb line consists of a cord with a lead weight attached. By holding the cord up to a wall it is possible to build a wall straight up and down and determine if a wall is upright or is leaning and in danger of falling. In this case Amos sees a wall that had originally been built true to plumb, suggesting that Israel had been made upright. He then sees the Lord with a plumb line in his hand, implying that he was going to examine Israel against that standard of uprightness to see if they have remained so or have begun to lean and are in danger of falling.

An interrogation focusing attention on the plumb line. Amos recounts an interrogation in the first part of verse 8, "Then the LORD asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' Then I replied, 'A plumb line.'" Though Amos also saw the wall and the Lord, he answers "A plumb line." He has rightly perceived that the plumb line is the key element of the vision and his response serves to focus attention on the plumb line in God's hand.

God interprets the significance of the plumb line. Amos records God's interpretation of the significance of the plumb line in the rest of verse 8 and verse 9. First, God explains that the
plumb line signifies accountability in the rest of verse 8, "Then the Lord said, 'Behold, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel.' He will judge them against his standard of uprightness. The elite believed they were exempt from God's judgment because they were his people. However, God specifies that he does hold them accountable even though they are his people. Second, God explains that the plumb line signifies that he will no longer treat them mercifully in the first part of verse 9, "I will not spare them again." God had previously passed over them in Egypt when he killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. They celebrated God's mercy every year during the Passover. Nonetheless, he would no longer treat them mercifully. Third, God explains that the plumb line signifies that he will judge the elite in Israel and those things they were complacently relying upon in the remainder of verse 9, "The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their outward observance of religion and the prosperity and security provided by Jeroboam's government. However, these would prove to be unworthy bases for complacency since they would be the specific foci of God's judgment. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently think they are secure because God will hold them accountable for their sin, stop being merciful to them even though they are his people, and destroy that which they relied upon.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent like the elite in Israel. The bases for their pride and complacency may be similar as well—their experience of God's mercy in the past, their observance of the outward forms of religion, and their secure and prosperous position. As a result of their complacency they may drift away from God and allow sin to control them like the elite in Israel. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 7:1-9 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Christians do not complacently rely on God's mercy as revealed at the time of the exodus and celebrated during the Passover. However, they may complacently rely on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They don't complacently rely on their attendance at "The high places of Isaac" and "the sanctuaries of Israel." However, they may complacently rely on their attendance at church. They don't complacently rely on "the house of Jeroboam." However, they may rely on the prosperity and security of their situation. In addition, the announcement of judgment is specifically addressed to Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents as I have done above. In the statements of the applied message that follow I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should not sin and complacently think they are secure like the elite in Israel because God warned them that they were feeble and would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the plague. Christians should
not sin and complacently think they are secure like the elite in Israel because God warned them that they were feeble and would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from the LORD mercifully relenting and revoking the drought. Christians should not sin and complacently think they are secure like the elite in Israel because God warned them that he would hold them accountable for their sin, stop being merciful to them even though they were his people, and destroy that which they relied upon.

**Proclamation of the Message**

**Title:** I Will Not Spare Them Again, Part I

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to encourage and exhort Christians to fear and obey God rather than become complacent and sin.

**Proposition:** Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from God's mercy; they would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from God's mercy; and God held them accountable for their sin, stopped being merciful to them, and destroyed that which they relied upon.

**Introduction**

One of the greatest threats to the life of Christians is complacency. Synonyms of complacency include satisfaction and contentment. There is nothing wrong with being satisfied and content with life. The problem arises when we lose our hunger for God and our desire to please him. The result is a life that is focused on the pleasures of life rather than on God and his will. The reasons for complacency are many. Christians may become complacent because they are prosperous and secure. Christians may become complacent because they come to church faithfully and participate in the ministry of the church. Christians may become complacent because they have experienced God's mercy and grace. All those who are saved have been forgiven by God's grace and mercy through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. We celebrate God's mercy and grace every time we take the Lord's Supper. Christians may complacently presume that because they have experienced God's mercy and grace God will never discipline them no matter what they do. The elite in Israel also seemed prosperous and secure, went to their places of worship, and celebrated God's mercy and grace at the Passover. They complacently believed they were safe. But they had become complacent and gravitated away from God to sin. God revealed through Amos that he certainly is gracious and merciful. However, he also revealed that his mercy has limits when his people persist in sin and he will hold them accountable. *Read Amos 7:1-9.*

**I. Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from God's mercy.**

A. God revealed to Amos a devastating vision of judgment, "Behold he was forming swarms of locusts in the beginning of the latter growth and indeed the latter growth after the king's share." He then witnessed as these swarms of locusts swept through the land and "completely finished eating the vegetation of the land." Swarms of locust were one of the most devastating plagues known in the ancient East. The locusts filled the sky like a great cloud and when they settled on the land they left nothing green. The coming of locust meant certain famine. The tragedy of the plague of locusts was intensified by the timing of their arrival. King Jeroboam had already taken his share and now the locusts were taking the share that would normally feed the people.
B. Amos was appalled by the devastation of the land and appealed to God to forgive, "Sovereign LORD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!" The elite in Israel had sinned. They deserved to be judged. But Amos appealed to God based on his sovereignty as the LORD. The elite in Israel complacently believed Israel was strong and secure. But Amos appealed to God based on Israel's weakness. Ironically, their only hope was in the Sovereign LORD and their weakness rather than their own righteousness and strength.

C. God relented and revoked the plague, "So the LORD relented concerning this. 'This will not happen,' the LORD said." The elite in Israel deserved to be judged because of their sin. Israel certainly would have been devastated by the plague of locusts. But God mercifully changed his mind and did not send the plague. Nonetheless, they narrowly escaped total devastation by the plague of locusts. If it were not for God's mercy they would have suffered grievously.

D. Illustration of Human Frailty and God's Mercy

E. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from God's mercy.

II. **Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from God's mercy.**

A. God revealed to Amos another devastating vision of judgment, "Behold the Sovereign LORD was calling for trial by fire; it consumed the great deep and devoured the land." Though the trial is "by fire," the description indicates that this judgment would be a severe drought. This fire is described as a ravenous beast that drinks all the water and devours all the land. The "great deep" probably refers to the subterranean waters that the Hebrews believed fed all the rivers and streams. The drought would dry up all the water at its source and the land would be parched and unable to support life. Drought was another great catastrophe in the ancient East. Without water many would die of thirst and many of those who survived would then die of the resulting famine.

B. Amos was again appalled by this disaster and appealed to God to stop, "Sovereign LORD, please stop! How can Jacob stand? For he is so small!" The elite in Israel had sinned. They deserved to be punished. But Amos appealed to God based on his sovereignty as the LORD. The elite in Israel believed that Israel was strong and secure. But Amos appealed to God based on Israel's weakness. Ironically, their only hope was in the Sovereign LORD and their weakness rather than their own righteousness and strength.

C. God again relented and revoked the drought, "So the LORD relented concerning this. 'This will not happen either,' the Sovereign LORD said." The elite in Israel deserved to be judged because of their sin. Israel certainly would have been devastated by the drought. However, God changed his mind and did not send the drought. Nonetheless, they narrowly escaped total devastation by the drought. If it were not for Amos' appeal and God's mercy they would have suffered grievously.

D. Illustration of Human Frailty and God's Mercy

E. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from God's mercy.

III. **Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because God held them accountable for their sin, stopped being merciful to them, and destroyed that which they relied upon.**
A. God revealed to Amos one last vision of judgment, "Behold the Lord was standing by a plumb lined wall, and in his hand was a plumb line." A plumb line consists of a line to which a lead weight is attached. A plumb line is used when building a wall to ensure that the wall is built perpendicular to the floor. A plumb line is also used to examine a wall to check whether it has begun to lean.

B. God did not give Amos another opportunity to appeal for mercy after this vision. Instead, he questioned him, "Then the LORD asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' Then I replied, 'A plumb line.'" Though Amos also saw a wall and the Lord, he rightly perceived that the plumb line was the key element in the vision.

C. God then interpreted the significance of the plumb line. First, the plumb line signifies accountability, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel." Though they are his people, God is going to hold them accountable for their actions. They were the wall that had been built true to plumb. Now he is going to set that plumb line against them once again to determine if they are leaning and about to fall. Second, the plumb line signifies the withdrawal of God's preferential treatment, "I will not spare them again." God had previously passed over them in Egypt when he killed the firstborn of the Egyptians and enabled them to escape slavery. However, he would no longer treat them graciously. Third, the plumb line signifies judgment, "The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword." The elite in Israel were complacently relying on their religion and the seeming security of Jeroboam's reign. However, God was going to judge them and these things that they complacently relied upon would be the specific foci of his judgment.

D. Illustration of God's Discipline of Sinful Christians

E. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because God held them accountable for their sin, stopped being merciful to them, and destroyed that which they relied upon.

Conclusion

One of the greatest threats to the life of Christians is complacency. When we lose our hunger for God and our desire to please him the result is a life that is focused on the pleasures of life rather than on God and his will. The elite in Israel were also prosperous and secure, went to the their places of worship, and celebrated God's mercy and grace at the Passover. God revealed through Amos that he certainly is gracious and merciful. However, he also revealed that his mercy has limits when his people persist in sin and he will hold them accountable. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a plague of locusts apart from God's mercy. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because they would have been devastated by a severe drought apart from God's mercy. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because God held them accountable for their sin, stopped being merciful to them, and destroyed that which they relied upon. Instead, you should fear God and seek to please him.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

GO, YOU SEER
Amos 7:10-17

The passage as defined has a recognizable beginning and ending and a cohesive purpose (See Situation and Purpose), form (See Form and Function) and strategy (See Strategy and Structure). In addition, the passage as defined is a manageable unit for interpretation.

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

10Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all his words. 11For thus has Amos said:

'Jeroboam will die by the sword,
and Israel will certainly go into exile,
away from his land.'"

12Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Go, you seer! Flee to your own, to the land of Judah. Eat bread and prophesy there. 13But you are not to prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and this is the house of the kingdom."

14Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and a tender of sycamore fig trees. 15But the LORD took me from behind the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

16Now then, hear the word of the LORD.

You* say: "Do not prophesy against Israel,
and stop preaching against the house of Isaac."

17Therefore thus says the LORD:

"Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword.
Your land will be divided in parcels,
and you* will die in a pagan country.
And Israel will certainly go into exile,
away from their native land."

*The bold print indicates an emphasis in the Hebrew text that is otherwise difficult to convey in English.

Situation and Purpose

The passage describes a setting in which Amaziah responds negatively to the prophesying of Amos by reporting the contents of his preaching to king Jeroboam and warning him of the danger and ordering Amos to leave and no longer prophesy. The passage implies two reasons for Amaziah's negative response. First, his report to the king in verses 10-11 implies that he was afraid that Amos' negative message would undermine the stability of the nation. Second, he was skeptical about Amos' motivation and rejected his authority. This episode from Amos' ministry
is obviously not told for the sake of Amaziah, but for others who might respond negatively to Amos' prophetic message because they did not like what he says or rejected his authority. The passage is a prophetic narrative in which Amaziah illustrates the inappropriate response to God's prophetic word (See Form and Function). Therefore, this passage indirectly reflects a situation in which later readers might stubbornly reject and oppose Amos' prophetic message like Amaziah. Consequently, the purpose of the passage was to encourage people to heed God's prophetic warning rather than rejecting and opposing it like Amaziah.

Literary Context and Role

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 7:10-17 introduces the second half of the book, which is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). However, this passage interrupts the flow of prophetic visions with a prophetic narrative (See below for an explanation). From another perspective these prophetic visions and even the prophetic exhortations in chapters 1-6 address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 7:10-17 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-7, 6:8-14, and 7:1-9. This warning is reinforced further in 8:1-14. From another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. After that passage the prophetic words return to severe warning of judgment. No further hope is given until 9:1-15. In addition, the passages in 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14 seem to have an especially close relationship. Amos 7:1-9 and 8:1-14 are linked by identical declarations of the LORD, "I will not spare them again." Amos 7:10-17 is closely linked to 7:1-9 by a Hebrew conjunction (translated "Then"). The announcement of God's destruction of the centers of Israel's religion and attack on the house of Jeroboam in 7:1-9 and especially 7-9 provides the background for Amaziah's negative reaction in 7:10-17. The prophetic word in 8:1-14 reinforces and supplements 7:1-9, specifying the sins of Israel and elaborating on the description of judgment.

Form and Function

Amos 7:10-17 can be classified generally as prophetic narrative/exhortation. Prophetic narratives are diverse, but they normally function like most other narratives. The key elements of narrative are setting, characters, and plot. Through the identification of the characters in their setting the readers are enabled to enter into the experience of God's people in history and learn from their experience as the plot develops. However, prophetic narratives often contain prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. Amos 7:10-17 contains a prophetic narrative that is combined with a prophetic exhortation to Amaziah. As the
readers enter into the narrative and observe Amaziah's negative reaction to Amos' announcement of judgment against Israel they are confronted by Amos' defense of his prophetic ministry and announcement of judgment against Amaziah. Underlying this defense and the warning inherent in this announcement of judgment is the command/prohibition, "Heed rather than reject and oppose Amos' prophetic message."

**Strategy and Structure**

The passage begins with a description of Amaziah's negative reaction to the prophecy of Amos in verses 10-13. Next, Amos' defense of his prophetic ministry is described in verses 14-15. This account provides the rationale for heeding Amos' prophetic message. Finally, Amos' announcement of God's judgment of Amaziah is related in verses 16-17. This announcement provides the rationale against rejecting Amos' prophetic message.

I. The Reaction of Amaziah to the Prophesying of Amos (7:10-13)
   A. Amaziah's Negative Report to King Jeroboam (vs. 10-11)
      1. Warning of the consequences of Amos' prophecy
      2. Report of the content of Amos' prophesying
   B. Amaziah's Expulsion of Amos and Ban on His Prophesying (vs. 12-13)
      1. Order of expulsion
      2. Ban on his prophesying

II. Amos' Defense of His Prophesying (7:14-15)
   A. Amos' Prophesying Unaffiliated with the Prophetic Establishment (v. 14)
   B. Amos' Prophesying a Result of the Selection and Command of the LORD (v. 15)

III. Amos' Announcement of God's Judgment on Amaziah and Affirmation that Israel Will Be Exiled (7:16-17)
   A. Command for Amaziah to Hear the Word of the LORD (v. 16a)
   B. A Quotation of Amaziah's Ban on Amos' Prophesying (v. 16b)
   C. Announcement of God's Judgment on Amaziah and Affirmation that Israel Will Be Exiled (v. 17)
      1. Introduced as the word of the LORD
      2. Announcement of God's judgment on Amaziah
      3. Affirmation that Israel will be exiled

**Message or Messages**

God's people should heed Amos' prophetic warning rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because Amos was not part of the prophetic establishment, but was selected and commanded by God to prophecy; his words had divine rather than merely human authority; they might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah, and their rejection and opposition won't avert God's judgment.

**Analysis of the Details**

The Reaction of Amaziah to the Prophesying of Amos
The passage begins with an account of Amaziah's negative reaction to Amos' prophesying in verses 10-13. This account includes Amaziah's negative report to King Jeroboam and his expulsion of Amos and ban on his prophesying. Amaziah serves as a negative example, illustrating what God's people should not do—reject and oppose God's prophetic word.

**Amaziah's negative report to King Jeroboam.** Amaziah's negative report to King Jeroboam is described in verses 10-11. Amaziah warns Jeroboam of the threat and negative consequences of Amos' prophesying in verse 10, "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all his words.'" Amaziah depicts Amos' prophesying to Jeroboam as if it were part of a political conspiracy rather than the revelation of God. He did regard Amos' prophesying as a real threat to the security of the nation. However, he did not fear that Jeroboam would die and Israel would be exiled as Amos predicted. His evaluation that "The land is not able to endure all his words" probably implies that he believed Amos might instigate an armed revolt against the government.

Amaziah reports the content of Amos' prophesying in verse 11, "For thus has Amos said: 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile, away from his land.'" Actually, no recorded prophecy of Amos specifically states that Jeroboam would die by the sword. However, Amos did prophesy that the house or dynasty of Jeroboam would fall by the sword. In fact verse 9 probably provides the immediate context for Amaziah's report, "I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." Indeed, Jeroboam's dynasty did fall by the sword, but Jeroboam's fate is unknown. Amos did prophesy repeatedly that Israel would be exiled (5:5, 27; 6:7; 7:17; 9:4) and these precise words are used by Amos to affirm that Israel would be exiled in verse 17. Indeed, Israel was conquered by Assyria and exiled. Therefore, Amaziah opposed and rejected Amos' prophetic message because he disliked its content and perceived it as a threat.

**Amaziah's expulsion of Amos and ban on his prophesying.** Amaziah's expulsion of Amos from Israel and ban on his prophesying are described in verses 12-13. Amaziah orders Amos to leave in verse 12, "Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Go, you seer! Flee to your own, to the land of Judah. Eat bread and prophesy there.'" Amaziah's expulsion of Amos clearly indicates that he rejected and opposed Amos' prophetic message. Within his order of expulsion several reasons for his rejection and opposition may be implied. First, the ridiculing command, "Go, you seer!" suggests that Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos' message because he has little regard for prophets. Indeed, priests often instigated the mistreatment of the prophets. Second, the command, "Flee to your own, to the land of Judah!" suggests that Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos' message because he has little regard for prophets. Indeed, priests often instigated the mistreatment of the prophets. Second, the command, "Flee to your own, to the land of Judah!" suggests that Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos' message because he has little regard for prophets. Indeed, priests often instigated the mistreatment of the prophets. Second, the command, "Eat bread and prophesy there!" suggests that Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos' message because he believed that Amos was motivated by the desire to make a living.

Amaziah bans Amos from prophesying in verse 13, "But you are not to prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and this is the house of the kingdom." Amaziah based his ban on the authority of the king and kingdom over Bethel. Implied within this assertion of the king's authority was the rejection of Amos' authority to prophesy at Bethel. Therefore, Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos' prophetic message because he disputed his authority to prophesy.

**Amos' Defense of His Prophesying**
Next, the passage contains an account of Amos' defense of his prophetic ministry in verses 14-15. Amos defends his prophetic ministry against the charges of Amaziah based on his independence from the prophetic establishment and God's selection of him and command for him to prophesy. This defense provides the rationale for heeding Amos' prophetic message, he was not affiliated with the prophetic establishment and he was selected and commanded by the LORD to prophesy.

Amos' prophesying unaffiliated with the prophetic establishment. Amos defends his prophetic ministry based on his independence from the prophetic establishment in verse 14, "Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, 'I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and a tender of sycamore-fig trees.'" One of the reasons that Amaziah rejected Amos' prophetic message was that he had contempt for Amos as a prophet. He seems to have regarded prophets to be like those in other professions. Here Amos disclaims any affiliation with the prophetic establishment. Some go so far as to suggest that Amos' disavowal should be in the present tense, "I am neither a prophet nor a prophet's son" (Smith, 139). Certainly Amos was now a prophet, but his prophetic ministry was not based on affiliation with the prophetic establishment.

Amos' prophesying a result of the selection and command of the LORD. Amos defends his prophetic ministry based on the selection and command of the LORD in verse 15, "But the LORD took me from behind the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" Instead of basing his authority to prophesy on affiliation with the prophetic establishment, Amos based the authority for his prophetic ministry on the selection and command of the LORD. Amos could have no greater credentials than the selection and command of the LORD. Therefore, God's people should heed Amos' prophetic warning rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because Amos was not part of the prophetic establishment, but he was selected and commanded by God to prophesy.

Amos' Announcement of Judgment on Amaziah and Affirmation that Israel Will Be Exiled

The passage concludes with Amos' announcement of God's judgment on Amaziah and affirmation that Israel will be exiled in verses 16-17. Amos commands Amaziah to hear the word of the LORD, quotes Amaziah's ban on prophesying, and announces God's judgment on Amaziah and affirms that Israel will be exiled. This announcement and affirmation provide the rationale against rejecting Amos' prophetic message, rejection is presumptuous, futile, and results in judgment.

Command for Amaziah to hear the word of the LORD. Amos commands Amaziah to hear the word of the LORD in the first part of verse 16, "Now then, hear the word of the LORD." Amos has just established that his prophetic message is based on the authority of the LORD's selection and command. Now Amos commands Amaziah to hear the LORD's word for him.

A quotation of Amaziah's ban on Amos' prophesying. However, before delivering the word of the LORD to Amaziah, Amos first quotes Amaziah's ban on prophesying in the remainder of verse 16, "You say: 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.'" Amos draws attention to Amaziah's ban to establish the authority of the word of the LORD over the words of Amaziah. The pronoun "You" is emphatic. I have translated it with bold print to convey this emphasis. Amos contrasts the ban of Amaziah with the word of
the LORD that he has already commanded Amaziah to hear and will subsequently speak. The implication of this contrast is that Amaziah's ban is presumptuous since his words have far less authority than the word of the LORD. Therefore, God's people should heed Amos' prophetic message of warning rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because it has divine rather than merely human authority.

**Announcement of God's judgment on Amaziah and affirmation that Israel will be exiled.** Finally, Amos does deliver the word of the LORD to Amaziah in verse 17. He introduces the announcement as the word of the LORD, "Therefore thus says the LORD." This identification again emphasizes the authority upon which Amos' prophetic message is based. He then announces God's judgment on Amaziah, "Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be divided into parcels, and you will die in a pagan country." Amaziah was a proud man. He proudly opposed God's prophet and rejected his message. However, Amaziah would be humiliated. He would lose everything—wife, children, land and even his life. His humiliation would be compounded by the shame of his wife turning to prostitution and spending the rest of his life in a pagan country. The pronoun "you" is again emphasized in the Hebrew text and I have translated it with bold print. Through this emphatic pronoun Amos stresses the tragic and humiliating end of Amaziah. Therefore, God's people should heed Amos' prophetic warning rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because otherwise they might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah.

Amos concludes by affirming that Israel will be exiled, "And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land." These words are identical to Amaziah's quotation of Amos in verse 11 and reemphasize the warning of exile. The Hebrew text could be more literally translated, "Israel going will go into exile." This construction is used to emphasize the certainty of exile and I have translated accordingly. Amaziah opposed Amos and his prophetic message. However, Amaziah's opposition did not change a thing. Israel would still be exiled. Indeed, Israel was defeated by Assyria and exiled. Therefore, God's people should heed Amos' prophetic warning rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because their rejection and opposition of God's warning won't avert God's judgment.

**Application of the Message**

**Establishing Correspondence**

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Christians sometimes become proud and complacent like Amaziah. Then when they are confronted with God's word in the Bible, especially his warnings, they reject and oppose what God has said because the message is unpleasant and it threatens their comfortable circumstances. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 7:10-17 to the modern situation.

**Distinguishing the Contextualized**

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Some of Amaziah's reasons for rejecting and opposing Amos' prophetic ministry were specifically related to that historical context. In addition, the announcement and affirmation of judgment are specifically directed against Amaziah and Israel. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In fact, the word of judgment against Amaziah was not recorded for his
benefit. Instead, Amaziah is used as a warning example in the narrative for later readers like us. Therefore, the message of this passage can be applied fairly directly with only minor adjustments. However, I have chosen to broaden the application to apply to all of God's revelation in the Bible rather than just Amos' prophecies. I believe that this broadened application is justified by the close correspondence described above.

Adjusting the Message

People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible is from God not men, the Bible has divine rather than merely human authority, they might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah, and their rejection and opposition will not change the truth of God's word.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: Go, You Seer

Objective: The objective of this message is to encourage and exhort people to heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it.

Proposition: People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible is from God not men, the Bible has divine rather than merely human authority; they might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah, and their rejection and opposition will not change the truth of God's word.

An Introductory Enactment

Narrator: Amos was a bold prophet! He went to Bethel, the primary sanctuary of Israel, and proclaimed the word of the LORD.

Amos (standing center stage with Amaziah standing off to the side): Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will not spare them again. The high places of Isaac will be desolated and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword."

Narrator: Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, rejected and opposed the word of the LORD. He sent a report to the king condemning Amos and his preaching and ordered Amos to leave and prohibited him from preaching.

Amaziah (sits at desk and pretends to write): To Jeroboam the Great, King of Israel. Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to endure all his words. For thus has Amos said: "Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will certainly go into exile, away from his land."

Amaziah (stands, approaches, and addresses Amos) Go, you seer! Flee to your own, to the land of Judah. Eat bread and prophesy there. But you are not to prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and this is the house of the kingdom.

Narrator: Bold Amos refused to be intimidated and stood up to Amaziah, speaking the word of the LORD to him for his rejection and opposition to God's word.

Amos: Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say: "Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife will
become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be divided in parcels, and you will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land."

Narrator: Amaziah's rejection of the word of the LORD was disastrous. As Amos prophesied, Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and the citizens were carried off as captives, including Amaziah (2 soldiers come and take Amaziah away).

Obviously Amaziah did not respond to God's word appropriately. However, you need to be careful about being too critical of Amaziah. People often respond to God's revelation in the Bible much like Amaziah. They enjoy listening to pleasant words of encouragement from the Bible, but when God confronts them with their sin and warns them of his judgment they often feel threatened, get defensive, and have difficulty accepting God's word.

I. **People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible is from God not men.**
   A. Amaziah rejected and opposed the word of God delivered by Amos. On of the reasons that he rejected and opposed the word of God was that he didn't have much respect for prophecy or Amos as a prophet. He ridiculed Amos, "Go, you seer!" He interpreted the threat of Amos' preaching as armed revolt rather than divine judgment. He regarded prophecy as a job whereby men earned their livelihood. He considered Amos to be an outsider and ordered him to go back home and prophesy in Judah. From Amaziah's perspective, the message of the prophets was their own.
   B. Amos responded by denying any affiliation with those professional prophets, "Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, 'I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and a tender of sycamore fig trees.'" The authority of his message was not based on his identity as a prophet.
   C. Instead, Amos asserted that his message was based on a much higher authority, "But the LORD took me from behind the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" His message was based on the selection and command of God to speak his word.
   D. People sometimes do not heed the word of God revealed in the Bible because they lack respect for those who preach God's word. They are really not that different from Amaziah.
   E. Illustration of Someone Who Does Not Heed the Message of the Bible because They Lack Respect for Those Who Preach God's Word
   F. You should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible is from God not men.

II. **People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible has divine rather than merely human authority.**
   A. Amaziah rejected and opposed the word of God delivered by Amos. One of the reasons he rejected and opposed the word of God was that he felt that his authority as the priest of Bethel was threatened by Amos' prophetic ministry, and understandably so. He was the priest of Bethel and Amos was preaching, "Go to Bethel and sin!" "Seek the LORD and live!" "Do not seek Bethel!" and "he (the LORD) will advance against the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and there is no one to extinguish it at Bethel." Amos had even come to the sanctuary at Bethel and announced God's judgment against it, "the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste." Amos was undermining his authority as the priest of Bethel. Therefore, he ordered Amos out and prohibited him from preaching.
B. After asserting that his prophetic ministry was based on the selection and command of God to prophesy, Amos told Amaziah to listen to God's word, "Now then, hear the word of the LORD." However, before speaking the word of the LORD, Amos quotes Amaziah, "You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.'" Amos then speaks the word of God, announcing God's judgment on Amaziah and reaffirming his judgment of Israel. Amaziah had rejected and opposed Amos' message because he regarded Amos as a threat to his authority. Here Amos sets the words of Amaziah over against the word of God, implying that Amaziah had no authority to order Amos to depart and prohibit him from preaching because of the superior authority of the word of God.

C. People sometimes do not heed the word of God revealed in the Bible because they do not have respect for the authority of God's word. They are really not that different from Amaziah.

D. Illustration of Someone Who Does Not Heed the Message of the Bible because They Lack Respect for the Authority of God's Word

E. You should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible has divine rather than merely human authority.

III. People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because otherwise they might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah.

A. Amaziah rejected and opposed the word of God delivered by Amos. One of the reasons that Amaziah rejected and opposed Amos was that his message threatened what Amaziah was devoted to and depended upon for security. Amaziah had a secure and prestigious job. He was the priest of the chief religious sanctuary of Israel. He received this job by royal appointment. As Amaziah explained to Amos with regard to Bethel, "this is the king's sanctuary and this is the house of the kingdom." He was a devoted subject of the king and relied on the kingdom for his security and Amos was preaching, "I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with a sword."

B. Amos responded to Amaziah's rejection and opposition by announcing God's judgment against him, "Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be divided in parcels, and you will die in a pagan country." Ironically, by defending what he was devoted to and relied upon for security against the word of God Amaziah was sealing his own fate. The result was a humiliating disaster. He would lose everything—wife, children, land and even his own life.

C. People sometimes do not heed the message revealed in the Bible because they don't like what it says and perceive it as a threat. They are really not that different from Amaziah.

D. Illustration of Someone Who Does Not Heed the Message of the Bible because They Don't Like What It Says and Perceive It as a Threat

E. You should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because otherwise you might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah.

IV. People should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because their rejection and opposition will not change the truth of God's word.

A. Amaziah rejected and opposed the word of God delivered by Amos. One of the reasons that Amaziah rejected and opposed the word of God was that it undermined his pride and threatened his sense of identity. He was the priest of Bethel and was responsible for the spiritual welfare of the nation. He probably thought he was doing a good job. In fact, this
period in Israel's history was characterized by great religious fervor. However, Amos was preaching that the people were wicked, the religion was corrupt, and the nation was doomed. Amaziah found it much easier to reject and oppose Amos than admit to the wickedness and danger of Israel and acknowledge his irresponsibility.

B. Amos responded to Amaziah's rejection and opposition by affirming God's judgment of Israel, "And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land." Amaziah's expulsion of Amos from Israel and prohibition of his preaching accomplished nothing. The word of God would still be fulfilled. Ironically, the failure of Amaziah and the rest of Israel to heed God's word insured that his word of judgment would be fulfilled. If they had repented and turned to God, there was still hope that God might still be merciful. However, their refusal to heed God's word sealed their fate.

C. People sometimes do not heed the word of God revealed in the Bible because they do not want to acknowledge their sin and repent. They are really not that different from Amaziah.

D. Illustration of Someone Who Does Not Heed the Message of the Bible because They Do not Want to Acknowledge Their Sin and Repent

E. You should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because your rejection and opposition will not change the truth of God's word.

**Conclusion**

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, rejected and opposed Amos' prophetic word. Obviously he did not respond to God's word appropriately. However, you need to be careful about being too critical of Amaziah. People often respond to God's revelation in the Bible much like Amaziah. When God confronts them with their sin and warns them of his judgment they often feel threatened, get defensive, and reject God's word. You should heed the message of the Bible rather than reject and oppose it like Amaziah because the Bible is from God not men, the Bible has divine rather than merely human authority, you might be singled out for judgment like Amaziah, and your rejection and opposition will not change the truth of God's word.
Mays, Smith, and Stuart all distinguish 8:4-14 as a distinct passage and relate 8:1-3 closely to chapter 7 (Mays, 123; Smith, 127; and Stuart, 366). Certainly 8:1-3 is related to chapter 7 and especially to 7:9 by the repetition of "I will not spare them again" from 7:8 in 8:2 (See Literary Context and Role). Nonetheless, I regard 8:4-13 as an elaboration of the announcement of judgment in verse 3. This connection is justified by the repetition of "in that day" from verse 3 in verses 9 and 13 as well as the similar expression, "the days are coming," in verse 11.

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

8:1Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of summer fruit. 2Then he asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" Then I answered, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come for my people Israel; I will not spare them again."

3"They will wail the songs in the temple in that day," declares the Sovereign LORD. "Many corpses! Thrown everywhere! Silence!"

4Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land
5saying, "When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath that we may open wheat?"

making the ephah small, and making the shekel large and distorting with deceitful scales,

6buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the refuse wheat.

7The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will certainly never forget anything they have done.

8Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn and all of it rise like the Nile; and be driven and sink like the Nile of Egypt?"

9"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD: "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in the light of day.

10I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your songs into a dirge.

I will put sackcloth upon all loins and baldness upon every head.

I will make it like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day."

11"Indeed, the days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD,
"when I will send a famine into the land—
Not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.
12They will wander from sea to sea
and roam from north to east,
searching for the word of the LORD,
but they will not find it.
13In that day the lovely young women and strong young men
will faint because of thirst.
14Those who swear by the offense of Samaria,
or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,'
or, 'As surely as the way of Beersheba lives—
also will fall and not rise again."

1This translation is a literal rendering of the Hebrew text. Unfortunately this translation does not preserve the play on words between "summer fruit" and "end." In the Hebrew text the play on words is between two words that sound similar, "summer fruit" and "end". The NIV has made a play on words using two different uses of the same word, "ripe." Though the NIV translation of verses 1-2 is not literal, the translators have done an admirable job of maintaining the play on words and conveying the general sense of the Hebrew text, "This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. 'What do you see, Amos?' he asked. 'A basket of ripe fruit,' I answered. Then the LORD said to me, 'The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.'"

Situation and Purpose
Amos 8:1-14 reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were only superficially religious, preoccupied with business, and practiced business ruthlessly and unscrupulously. These sins are directly identified in the rebuking address in verses 4-6. In addition, verse 14 indicates that their worship is corrupt. Furthermore, they were proud and complacently presuming that God would always be merciful and they were safe from his judgment. Their pride and complacent presumption on God's mercy are reflected indirectly in the vision report in verses 1-3, especially as this report relates to 7:1-9 (See Literary Context and Role). The "Pride of Jacob" is sarcastically used as the basis for an oath in verse 7, implying that it was great and enduring and had taken the place of God in their lives. Their complacency is further reflected in the contrast between their present singing and future wailing in verses 3 and 10. The indirect and direct quotations swearing by "the offense of Samaria" and expressing confidence in the god of Dan and the way of Beersheba suggest that their religion was at least one of the reasons for their pride and complacency. As a result of their complacency they disregarded God's prophetic word of warning. This disregard is implied in the announced famine for the words of the LORD in verses 11-12. The purpose of this passage was to undermine their pride and complacent presumption and warn them of God's judgment because of their sin. Though the passage provides little hope of escaping God's judgment, the warning probably was intended to lead them to repent of their sins and turn to God for mercy.

Literary Context and Role
From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 8:1-14 is part of the second half of the book, which is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic visions and even the prophetic exhortations in chapters 1-6 address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 8:1-14 continues and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-7, 6:8-14, 7:1-9, and 7:10-17. Amos 8:1-14 continues and reinforces the warning against oppression and injustice found in the 1:3-2:16, 3:1-15; 4:1-3; 5:18-27; and 6:8-14. Amos 8:1-14 also has a concern for corrupt religion that is also a concern in 5:18-27 and 9:1-15. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. After that passage the prophetic words return to severe warning of judgment. No further hope is given until 9:1-15. Furthermore, the passages in 7:1-9, 10-17; and 8:1-14 seem to have an especially close relationship. Amos 7:1-9 and 8:1-14 are linked by identical declarations of the LORD, "I will not spare them again." Amos 7:10-17 is closely linked to 7:1-9 by a Hebrew conjunction (translated "Then"). The announcement of God's destruction of the centers of Israel's religion and attack on the house of Jeroboam in 7:1-9 and especially 7-9 provides the background for Amaziah's negative reaction in 7:10-17. The prophetic word in 8:1-14 reinforces and supplements 7:1-9, specifying the sins of Israel and elaborating on the description of judgment.

Form and Function

Amos 8:1-14 can be classified as prophetic vision/exhortation. Prophetic visions are a pictorial form of prophetic exhortation. In fact, prophetic visions are often accompanied by prophetic exhortation as in this vision. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. Prophetic visions normally employ a picture or story from the world of dreams to illustrate what would normally be stated more directly in prophetic exhortation, usually the warning or assurance. Amos 8:1-3 contains a vision of warning that is clarified by words of warning. This warning implies the prohibition, "The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure." Amos 8:4-13 contains a series of prophetic warnings specifying a variety of sins of the elite in Israel and announcing God's judgment. Verse 4 does contain a command, "Hear this," but it does not specify the response. Verses 4-8 imply the more specific command, "The elite in Israel should not oppress the poor and needy, be preoccupied with business and only superficially religious, and use dishonest business practices." Verses 11-12 imply the more specific command, "The elite in Israel should not sin and ignore God's prophetic word." Verses 13-14 imply the more specific command, "The elite in Israel should not depend on their corrupt religion to save them."

Strategy and Structure
Amos begins with a warning vision of a basket of ripe fruit in verses 1-3. This vision and its interpretation served to undermine the complacency of the elite in Israel based on their identity as God's people. Next, Amos warns the ambitious, ruthless, and unscrupulous of the disastrous consequences of their sin in verses 4-8. Amos concludes with two declarations of an imminent disaster. The first describes a day of darkness and mourning in verses 9-10. This declaration seems to specifically discourage the sins already described. The second describes coming days of famine for the words of the LORD in verses 11-14. This declaration seems to specifically discourage their disregard for God's prophetic word as well as complacent reliance on their corrupt religion.

I. Warning Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit (8:1-3)
   A. Introduced as a Vision from the Sovereign LORD (v. 1a)
   B. Vision of a Basket of Summer (v. 1b)
   C. Inquiry Focusing Attention on the Basket of Summer Fruit (v. 2a)
   D. The LORD's Interpretation of the Vision (vs. 2b-3)
      1. The end of mercy and Israel
      2. A day of wailing, death, and despair

II. Warning to the Ambitious, Ruthless, and Unscrupulous (8:4-8)
   A. Command to Hear and Rebuking Address (vs. 4-6)
      1. Command to hear
      2. Ruthlessness to the poor and needy
      3. Preoccupied with business and superficially religion
      4. Unscrupulous business practices
   B. Oath Affirming that the LORD Will Not Forget Their Sin (v. 7)
      1. Introduced as an oath of the LORD
      2. Affirmation that the LORD will not forget their sin
   C. Rhetorical Question Affirming the Disastrous Consequences of Their Sin (v. 8)

III. Warning Declaration of a Coming Day of Darkness and Mourning (8:9-10)
   A. Introduced as a Declaration of the Sovereign LORD (v. 9a)
   B. A Day of Unnatural Darkness (v. 9b)
   C. A Day of Severe and Unrelenting Mourning (v. 10)

IV. Warning Declaration of Coming Days of Famine for the Word of the LORD (8:11-14)
   A. Introduced as a Declaration of the Sovereign LORD (v. 11a)
   B. Famine for the Word of the LORD (v. 11b)
   C. Futile Search for the Word of the LORD (v. 12)
   D. The Fainting of the Lovely Young Women and Strong Young Men (v. 13)
   E. The Permanent Fall of Those Who Rely on Corrupt Religion (v. 14)

Message or Messages

The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure because the end has come for them even though they are God's people, he will no longer be merciful to them, and they will wail rather than sing and silently despair as they view the horror. The elite in Israel should not be preoccupied with business, practice it ruthlessly and unscrupulously, and complacently presume that they are secure because the LORD has sworn by their misplaced pride that he will not forget anything they have done and as a result they will tremble, mourn,
and be subjected to a great upheaval. The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure because the Sovereign LORD has declared that a day of darkness and severe and unrelenting mourning is coming. The elite in Israel should not rely on their religion and ignore the word of the LORD because the Sovereign LORD has declared that days of famine for the word of the LORD are coming when they will not be able to find the word of the LORD and they will perish because they do not have the word of the LORD.

**Analysis of the Details**

**Warning Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit**

Amos begins by reporting his vision of a basket of summer fruit in verses 1-3. He introduces it as a vision of the Sovereign LORD; describes the vision of a basket of summer fruit; relates an inquiry focusing attention on the basket of summer fruit; and relates the LORD's interpretation of the vision. Through this vision Amos warned the elite in Israel against complacently presuming that they were secure from God's judgment because they were his people.

**Introduced as a vision of the Sovereign LORD.** Amos introduces the vision as a revelation of the Sovereign LORD in the first half of verse 1, "Thus the Sovereign LORD showed me." The word translated "Sovereign" is normally translated "Lord." I have used the word "Sovereign" because I did not want to cause confusion with the divine name translated "LORD." Both the words "Sovereign" and "Lord" convey the absolute authority of a ruler. Amos employs these terms to emphasize the authoritative source of the vision and its warning of judgment.

**Vision of a basket of summer fruit.** Amos describes the vision in the second half of verse 1, "a basket of summer fruit." Mays suggests that this basket could have been offered at Bethel during the autumn festival and that it would have been offered with a sense of anticipation of divine blessing (Mays, 141).

**Inquiry focusing attention on the basket of summer fruit.** Amos relates an inquiry in the first half of verse 2, "Then he asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' Then I answered, 'A basket of summer fruit.'" This inquiry serves to focus attention on the basket of summer fruit.

**The LORD's interpretation of the vision.** Amos relates the LORD's interpretation of the vision in the second half of verse 2 and in verse 3. First, the LORD interprets the visionary image and its implications in the first half of verse 2, "Then the LORD said to me, 'The end has come for my people Israel; I will not spare them again.'" As God's people, the elite anticipated God's blessing and did not believe that God would ever judge them. Nonetheless, the LORD declares, "The end has come for my people Israel." The word translated "summer fruit" and the word translated "end" sound similar. However, they depicted opposites. The "summer fruit" depicted the expectation of the elite as they brought their offerings to the autumn festival, continued blessing and not judgment. The "end" warned about the reality of their situation, the end of mercy and beginning of judgment. Second, the LORD describes the horrible consequences in verse 3, "'They will wail the songs in the temple in that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD. 'Many corpses! Thrown everywhere! Silence!'" Like the vision in verses 1-2 Amos identifies this warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD to emphasize the authoritative source of the declaration and its warning of judgment. The worship of the elite in Israel was characterized by joyous celebration. However, their songs of joyous celebration will turn to songs of lamentation and mourning because of the disaster that God is going to bring against them. Though the translation and meaning of the second half of verse 3 is uncertain, the
general implication is probably that the horror of seeing corpses everywhere would move them beyond wailing to the silence of despair. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure because the end has come for them even though they are God's people, he will no longer be merciful to them, and they will wail rather than sing and silently despair as they view the horror.

**Warning to the Ambitious, Ruthless, and Unscrupulous**

Next, Amos warns the ambitious, ruthless, and unscrupulous of the disastrous consequences of their sin in verses 4-8. He commands them to listen and addresses them in a rebuking manner, cites the LORD's oath that he will not forget their sins, and asks a rhetorical question affirming the disastrous consequences of their sin. Through this word of warning Amos alerted the elite in Israel to the disastrous consequences of complacently continuing to ruthlessly and unscrupulously practice business.

**Command to hear and rebuking address.** Amos commands them to listen in the first part of verse 4, "Here this." Then Amos addresses them in a rebuking manner in the remainder of verse 4 through verse 6. First, he rebukes them for their ruthless treatment of the poor and needy in verse 4, "you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land." The expression "trample the needy" suggests a picture of the needy being down and the elite walking over them and implies total disregard for their welfare. The expression "do away with the poor" is even more malevolent, implying that the elite were trying to exterminate the poor altogether. Second, he rebukes them for their preoccupation with business and superficial religion in the first half of verse 5, "saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath that we may open wheat?'" The New Moon and Sabbath were religious observances that required the cessation of labor. However, the elite were only superficially religious and so preoccupied with business that they could hardly wait for these observances to end so they could get back to business. Third, he rebukes them for their unscrupulous business practices in the second half of verse 5 and in verse 6, "making the ephah small, and making the shekel large and distorting with deceitful scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the refuse wheat." The ephah was a standard measure for weighing grain. The shekel was a standard measure for weighing silver. By making the ephah small, the merchants cheated their customers by giving them less grain than they had actually purchased. By making the shekel great, the merchants cheated their customers by taking more silver for the purchase than was actually required. The poor were often forced to sell themselves into slavery to cover their debts. Especially the selling of "the needy for a pair of sandals" indicates the low value that was placed on human beings. The "refuse wheat" was probably grain that had been spilled in the transaction of business, trampled by the merchants and their customers, and mixed with the dirt of the floor. The elite dumped these sweepings back into the bags of wheat.

**Oath affirming that the LORD will not forget their sin.** Amos cites the LORD's oath that he will not forget their sin in verse 7, "The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: 'I will certainly never forget anything they have done.'" An oath was made to affirm the truth of a statement or certainty of a commitment. This oath serves to affirm that God will not forget their sins. The Hebrew text emphasizes the certitude and duration of the affirmation. The Hebrew particle is used in oaths to express the certitude of what is sworn and I have expressed this in translation with the word "certainly." The preposition and noun I have translated "never" literally mean "to everlasting" and express the duration of the affirmation. Oaths were sworn on
that which was great and enduring. In this case the LORD swears on "the Pride of Jacob." This expression probably has a double meaning. The LORD should have been "the Pride of Jacob." Instead, the elite were proud of themselves and their nation. In addition to affirming that God would never forget their sin, Amos was again ridiculing their misplaced pride.

**Rhetorical question affirming the disastrous consequences of their sin.** Amos cites the LORD's rhetorical question affirming the disastrous consequences of their sin in verse 8, "Won't the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn and all of it rise like the Nile; and be driven and sink like the Nile of Egypt." This rhetorical question presumes an emphatic affirmation, "Yes! The land will tremble for this, and all who live in it will mourn and all of it will rise like the Nile; and be driven and sink like the Nile of Egypt." The affirmation that the land will tremble could refer to an earthquake. However, another possibility is that the trembling of fear is referred to here. The first two affirmations probably describe the response of the people, fear and mourning, to the cataclysm described in the second half of the verse. This cataclysm is described using the analogy of the seasonal flooding of the Nile. These seasonal floods could be very destructive. Smith suggests that the analogy also implies an extended period of upheaval since the seasonal flooding of the Nile lasted for several months (Smith, 147). Therefore, the elite in Israel should not be preoccupied with business, practice it ruthlessly and unscrupulously, and complacently presume that they are secure because the LORD has sworn by their misplaced pride that he will not forget anything they have done and as a result they will tremble, mourn, and be subjected to a great upheaval.

**Warning Declaration of a Coming Day of Darkness and Mourning**

Next, Amos warns the elite of a coming day of darkness and mourning in verses 9-10. He introduces the warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD and recounts the LORD's declaration, describing that day as a day of unnatural darkness and severe and unrelenting mourning. Through this warning Amos alerted the elite in Israel to the disastrous consequences of complacently continuing to sin.

**Introduced as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD.** Amos introduces the warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD in the first part of verse 9, "In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD." Like the vision in verses 1-2 and declaration in verse 3, Amos introduces this warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD to emphasize the authoritative source of the declaration and its warning of judgment.

**A day of unnatural darkness.** The LORD declares that day will be a day of unnatural darkness in the remainder of verse 9, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in the light of day." This declaration makes it clear that this darkness is directly caused by the LORD and apart from the natural order. The sun does not normally go down at noon and the earth is not normally darkened in the light of day. Unnatural darkness is commonly used as a portent of judgment and doom.

**A day of severe and unrelenting mourning.** The LORD declares that day will be a day of severe and unrelenting mourning in verse 10, "I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your songs into a dirge. I will put sackcloth upon your loins and baldness upon every head. I will make it like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day." Israel's religious feasts were a time of national celebration, but the LORD declares that the feasts would turn into
funerals. The songs in the temple were normally expressions of praise to God for his blessing, but the LORD declares that their songs would turn into mournful chants bemoaning God's judgment. Wearing sackcloth and shaving the head were also expressions of mourning. The severity of the mourning is emphasized by likening it to the "mourning for an only son." As Smith explains, "One reason loss of an only son created such great sorrow was that all hope for the future was gone as well as provision for one's old age" (Smith, 149). The unabated duration of the mourning is emphasized by describing the end of the time of mourning as "a bitter day." Even after the prescribed period of mourning there would be no relief from the bitterness of the loss. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure because the Sovereign LORD has declared that a day of darkness and severe and unrelenting mourning is coming.

**Warning Declaration of Coming Days of Famine**

**for the Word of the LORD**

Next, Amos warns the elite of coming days of famine for the word of the LORD in verses 11-12. He introduces the warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD and recounts the LORD's declaration, describing that day as a day of famine for the word of the LORD, when they will search futilely for the word of the LORD, and perish because they do not have the word of the LORD. Through this warning Amos alerted the elite in Israel to the disastrous consequences of complacently relying on their religion and ignoring the word of the LORD.

**Introduced as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD.** Amos introduces the warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD in the first part of verse 11, "Indeed, the days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD." Like the vision in verses 1-2 and earlier declaration in verse 3 and verses 9-10 Amos introduces this warning as a declaration of the Sovereign LORD to emphasize the authoritative source of the declaration and its warning of judgment.

**Famine for the word of the LORD.** The LORD declares that he is going to send a famine for his word in the remainder of verse 11, "when I will send a famine into the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." The elite in Israel were not suffering from famine or thirst for the word of the LORD during Amos' ministry. As Amaziah writes to Jeroboam, "The land is not able to endure all his words." The problem is that the elite were ignoring the word of the LORD. These are words that could supply them with spiritual life like food and water sustain the human body. Nonetheless, they were ignoring God's word. As a result, God would no longer reveal himself to them and they would no longer have opportunity to take spiritual sustenance from him.

**Futile search for the word of the LORD.** The LORD describes the futile searching of the people of Israel for the word of the LORD in verse 12, "They will wander from sea to sea and roam from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it." The fact that they are searching suggests that they will one day recognize their need for the word of the LORD. Unfortunately, at that time it will be too late. Their wandering and roaming "from sea to sea" and "north to east" indicates the thoroughness of their search and the futility of the results. Stuart explains that "from sea to sea" means from the Dead Sea in the south and the Mediterranean Sea in the west and "north to east" completes the points of the compass (Stuart, 386).
The fainting of the lovely young women and strong young men. The LORD describes that day as a day when even the healthiest and most vital will faint in verse 13, "In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst." Scholars dispute whether or not the famine is to be understood literally here (Stuart, 386 asserts that it should be understood as a literal famine; whereas Smith, 151 maintains that it should still be understood as a metaphor of hunger for the word of the LORD). The context seems to favor a figurative meaning. However, the language suggests that the metaphor has gone beyond merely describing hunger for the word of God to the disastrous consequences of not being nourished by his word. As starvation can lead to fainting and death, being deprived of God's word leads to spiritual weakness and death. The reference to the "lovely young women and strong young men" probably serves to stress the extent of the famine for God's word and its disastrous consequences. If the young and strong are affected, everyone must be affected.

The permanent fall of those who rely on corrupt religion. The LORD describes that day as a day when those who rely on corrupt religion will fall and be unable to rise in verse 14, "Those who swear by the offense of Samaria, or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,' or, 'As surely as the way of Beersheba lives—also will fall and not rise again." Oaths were commonly sworn on the name of a god and indicated veneration for the greatness of that deity. In fact, the second and third oaths are expressed in such a way as to affirm that the god of Dan and the way of Beersheba live. Whereas the LORD swore by "the Pride of Jacob" (8:7), these swear by "the shame of Samaria," probably the idols that were worshiped there. The god of Dan and the way of Beersheba probably are the false deities worshiped at these locations. Smith suggests, "Reference to Dan and Beersheba, the northern and southern extremities of the whole land, may suggest the extent of the practice." The young and strong are described as only fainting, those who rely on their corrupt religion will fall and be unable to rise. They will die as a result of being deprived of God's word. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not complacently rely on their religion and ignore the word of the LORD because the Sovereign LORD has declared that days of famine for the word of the LORD are coming, when they will not be able to find the word of the LORD, and they will perish because they do not have the word of the LORD.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Some Christians are only superficially religious and are preoccupied instead with their business. These same Christians are often ruthless and unscrupulous in their business because their Christian commitment has not led to a transformed life. However, they also are unresponsive to warnings with regard to their conduct because they complacently presume that God will always be merciful to them. These correspondences between the original and modern situations provide a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 8:1-14 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Christians do not rely on the gods of Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba. In addition, Christians have little opportunity to buy the poor and needy. Unscrupulous methods of business are also more sophisticated now. Furthermore, mourning customs are much different in modern cultures. Moreover, the rebukes and announcements and descriptions of judgment are specifically addressed to the elite in Israel.
Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation by employing Israel as a warning example.

**Adjusting the Message**

Christians should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD warned them the end had come for them even though they were his people, he would no longer be merciful to them, and they would wail rather than sing and silently despair as they view the horror. Christians should not be preoccupied with business, practice it ruthlessly and unscrupulously, and complacently presume that they are secure like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore to them that he would not forget anything they had done and as a result they would tremble, mourn, and be subjected to a great upheaval. Christians should not sin and complacently presume that they are secure like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD declared to them that a day of darkness and severe and unrelenting mourning was coming. Christians should complacently rely on their religion and ignore God's word like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD declared to them that days of famine for his word were coming when they would search everywhere for the word of the LORD but will not be able to find it and they will perish because they do not have the word of the LORD.

**Proclamation of the Message**

**Title**: I Will Not Spare Them Again, Part II

**Objective**: The objective of this message is to exhort Christians not to complacently presume on God's mercy, ignore God's word, and become preoccupied with business and conduct it ruthlessly and unscrupulously.

**Proposition**: Christians should not complacently presume on God's mercy, ignore God's word, and be preoccupied with business and conduct it ruthlessly and unscrupulously like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD warned them that they would be judged even though they were his people; the LORD swore to them that he would not forget anything they had done; and the Sovereign LORD declared to them that a famine for his word was coming when they would starve to death.

**Introduction**

Business is a highly competitive environment that presents many challenges for Christian businessmen. Business demands that businessmen be dedicated and spend long hours in arduous toil. But God's word demands that Christians be devoted to the Lord and serve him. Business compels businessmen to be ruthless and unscrupulous if they are to compete. But God's word demands that Christians be considerate and fair. Sometimes Christian businessmen are influenced too much by the demands of business and not enough by the demands of God's word. The elite in Israel would have fit well into the competitive environment of modern business. They were only superficially religious and could hardly wait for their religious observances to be over so they could get back to business. They practiced their business in a ruthless and unscrupulous manner and complacently presumed that God would always bless and never judge them because they were his people. They ignored God's prophetic word of warning. Amos confronts them with the word of the LORD in Amos 8:1-14. Read Amos 8:1-14.
I. Christians should not complacently presume on God's mercy like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD warned them that they would be judged even though they were his people.

A. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently presuming that God would always bless them and never judge them because they were his chosen people. Nonetheless, the Sovereign LORD revealed otherwise to the prophet Amos in a vision. In the vision, God showed Amos a basket of summer fruit. This basket of summer fruit was probably similar to the offerings the elite made to God at the autumn festival in anticipation of God's blessing during the coming year. However, the LORD interpreted the significance of this basket of summer fruit differently, "The end has come for my people Israel." The words for "summer fruit" and "end" sound alike in Hebrew. The blessings the elite anticipated as God's chosen people were coming to an end. In fact, the nation of Israel was coming to an end.

B. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently presuming that God would always bless them and never judge them because they were his chosen people.

C. The LORD further explains, "I will not spare them again." In chapter 7, God revealed three visions of judgment to Amos. In the first two God relented and revoked the judgments. However, after the third vision of judgment he said as here, "I will not spare them again." God had mercifully revoked his judgments in the past, but their sin had exceeded his mercy.

D. The Sovereign LORD declares the consequences of their sin and complacency in verse 3, "They will wail the songs in the temple in that day . . . Many corpses! Thrown everywhere! Silence!" Their joyous songs of worship in the temple would turn into the wailing of funeral. They would be so overwhelmed by the horror that their wailing would change to the silence of despair.

E. Christians sometimes sin and complacently presume that God will never judge them because they are Christians.

F. Illustration of a Christian Complacently Sinning

G. You should not complacently presume on God's mercy like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD warned them that they would be judged even though they were his people.

II. Christians should not be preoccupied with business and conduct it ruthlessly and unscrupulously like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore to them that he would not forget anything they had done.

A. The elite in Israel were only superficially religious and ambitiously practiced business and could hardly wait for worship to end so they could get back to work.

B. The elite in Israel conducted business in a ruthless and unscrupulous manner.

C. Amos rebuked them and commands them to listen to the word of the LORD.

D. The LORD emphatically affirmed that he would not forget their sin, "The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob; 'I will certainly never forget anything they have done.'" Oaths were sworn to guarantee the truth of an affirmation or the certainty of a commitment. Oaths were sworn on that which was great and enduring. The LORD himself was "the Pride of Jacob." The affirmation itself is doubly emphatic with the words "certainly never."

E. The LORD also affirmed the disastrous consequences of their sin with a rhetorical question, "Won't the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn and all of it rise like the Nile; and be driven and sink like the Nile of Egypt." This question implies the emphatic reply, "Yes!" They will tremble with fear and mourn because of the great cataclysm that God was going to cause. He describes this cataclysm using the analogy of the seasonal flooding of the Nile. These seasonal floods could be very destructive.
F. Christians sometimes are preoccupied with business and conduct business in a ruthless and unscrupulous manner.
G. Illustration of a Ruthless and Unscrupulous Christian Businessman
H. You should not be preoccupied with business and conduct it ruthlessly and unscrupulously like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore to them that he would not forget anything they had done.

III. Christians should not ignore God's word like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD declared to them that a famine for his word was coming and they would starve to death.
   A. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently ignoring God's word because they presumed that God would always bless and never judge them since they were his people.
   B. The Sovereign LORD declared to them the disastrous consequences of their sin and complacent disregard for his word.
      1. First, he declares that he will send a famine for his word in verse 11, "Indeed, the days are coming when I will send a famine into the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD."
      2. Second, he describes their futile search for his word in verse 12, "They will wander from sea to sea and roam from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."
      3. Third, he describes the ultimate demise of those who rely on their religion but ignore the word of the LORD in verse 14, "Those who swear by the offense of Samaria, or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,' or, 'As surely as the way of Beersheba lives'—also will fall and not rise again."
C. Food is a basic necessity of life. No one would be so foolish as to deny themselves food. The result would ultimately be death by starvation. The word of the LORD is also food. Deuteronomy 8:3 says, "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." The elite in Israel had refused to eat the bread of life and the LORD took that bread away from them. The result was death.
D. Christians sometimes sin and ignore God's word like the elite in Israel.
E. Illustration of a Christian Who Ignores God's Word
F. You should not ignore God's word like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD declared to them that a famine for his word was coming and they would starve to death.

Conclusion
Business is a highly competitive environment that presents many challenges for Christian businessmen. Sometimes Christian businessmen are influenced too much by the demands of business and not enough by the demands of God's word. You should not complacently presume on God's mercy like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD warned them the end had come for them even though they were his people. You should not be preoccupied by business and conduct it ruthlessly and unscrupulously like the elite in Israel because the LORD swore to them that he would not forget anything they had done. You should not ignore God's word like the elite in Israel because the Sovereign LORD declared to them that a famine for his word was coming and they would starve to death.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I WILL SHAKE THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL
Amos 9:1-15

Chapter 9 is normally broken down into smaller units (Mays, vi; Smith, 34; and Stuart, ix). Indeed, a clear distinction can be discerned in the nature of the material beginning at verse 11. Verses 1-10 are dominated by words of warning and verses 11-15 are exclusively words of assurance. Nonetheless, I have chosen to interpret all of chapter 9 as a unified passage. I believe this decision is justified primarily because all of these words of the LORD are placed within the vision of the Lord standing by the altar. In addition, the words of hope in verses 11-15 are anticipated at the end of verse 8, "Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,' declares the LORD."

Study of the Passage

Text and Translation

9:1 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said:
    "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake.
Break them off on the heads of all of them;
The remainder I will kill with the sword.
One of them who flees will not get away,
    and one of them escaping will not slip away.
2Though they dig down into Sheol,
    from there my hand will take them.
Though they climb up to the heavens,
    from there I will bring them down.
3Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
    from there I will hunt them down and take them.
Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea,
    from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them.
4Though they go into captivity before their enemies,
    from there I will command the sword and it will slay them.
I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

5The Lord, the LORD of Armies,
    He who touches the earth and it dissolves and all who live in it mourn—
All of it rises like the Nile,
    then sinks like the Nile of Egypt;
6He who builds his upper chambers in the heavens
    and sets its foundation on the earth,
Who calls for the waters of the sea
    and pours them out over the face of the land;
The LORD is his name.
7"Are you not like the sons of the Cushites to me, O sons of Israel?"
declares the LORD
"Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,  
and the Philistines from Caphtor  
and the Arameans from Kir?"

8"Indeed, the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom  
and I will destroy it from the face of the earth.  
Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,"  
declares the LORD.

9"For I will give the command,  
and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations  
as if it was being shaken in a sieve,  
and not a pebble will fall to the ground.

10All the sinners of my people will die by the sword,  
those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'"

11"In that day I will reestablish David's hovel that has fallen  
and I will wall up the breaches,  
I will re-erect its ruins,  
and rebuild it as in the days of old,

12so that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations that are called by my name (upon them),"  
declares the LORD, who will do this.

13"Indeed, days are coming," declares the LORD,  
"when the one reaping will be overtaken by the one plowing  
and the one sowing seed by the one treading grapes.  
The mountains will drip grape juice  
and all the hills will dissolve.

14I will return my captive people Israel;  
They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them.  
They will plant vineyards and drink their wine;  
They will make gardens and eat their fruit.

15I will plant Israel in their own land,  
and they will never again to be uprooted from their land  
which I have given to them,"  
declares the LORD your God.

Situation and Purpose

Amos 9:1-15 reflects a situation in which the elite in Israel were sinning and complacently thinking that God would not judge them. Their sinfulness and complacency are most clearly revealed in verse 10, "All the sinners of my people will die by the sword, those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'" The specific nature of their sinfulness is not revealed in this passage, but elsewhere they are rebuked and condemned especially for their oppression and injustice as well as their religious corruption. In fact, since God's judgment in the vision is specifically directed against the worshipers at the temple, the presumption is that their worship was corrupt. The primary reason for their complacency seems to be their experience of God's grace in the past. Verse 7 alludes to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. However, God asserts through rhetorical questions that he also brought the Philistines out of Caphtor and the Arameans
out of Kir and that the Israelites are the same to him as the Cushites. In addition, their anticipation of God's blessing is probably implied in God's warning at the end of verse 4, "I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good." The purpose of this passage was to undermine their pride and complacent presumption and warn them of God's judgment because of their sin. In addition, the purpose of the passage was to assure them of God's continued faithfulness. Both the warnings and assurances were intended to encourage them to repent of their sin and seek God so that they could realize the promises of God rather than be condemned by him.

**Literary Context and Role**

From one perspective the Book of Amos can be divided into two halves based on the nature of the material. Amos 9:1-15 is part of the second half of the book, which is dominated by prophetic visions (chs. 7-9). From another perspective these prophetic visions and even the prophetic exhortations in chapters 1-6 address various aspects of the general situation and for the most part warn the elite of Israel of God's impending judgment. However, there is a considerable amount of overlapping in the problems addressed and the warnings of judgment. This strategy seems to reinforce the warning through repetition. Amos 9:1-15 concludes and reinforces the warning against pride and complacency that was anticipated in 1:3-2:16 and developed in 3:1-15, 4:1-3, 4:4-13, 5:1-17, 5:18-27, 6:1-7, 6:8-14, 7:1-9, 7:10-17, and 8: 1-14. Amos 9:1-15 also has a concern for corrupt religion that is also a concern in 5:18-27 and 8:1-14. From still another perspective the Book of Amos seems to be structured to allow for some hope without diminishing the warning of judgment. However, the only glimpse of hope in the book so far has been in 5:1-17. After that passage the prophetic words return to severe warning of judgment until this passage and specifically verses 11-15. In fact, the wording of these assurances seems to mirror the warnings previously given and specifically those in 8:1-14.

**Form and Function**

Amos 9:1-15 can be classified as prophetic vision/exhortation. Prophetic visions are a pictorial form of prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands or prohibitions reinforced with explanations and reasoned arguments. In prophetic exhortation, commands or prohibitions sometimes indicate the appropriate response. However, in most cases the appropriate response is expressed indirectly as an expectation or is only implied. In prophetic exhortation the reasoned arguments provide the motivation for obedience and are dominated by assurance and warning. The warnings alert sinners to the danger of God's displeasure and judgment that results from their sin and thereby encourage repentance. The assurances affirm the faithfulness of God to the faithful and thereby encourage faithfulness. Prophetic visions normally employ a picture or story from the world of dreams to illustrate what would normally be stated more directly in prophetic exhortation, usually the warning or assurance. The first line of verse 1 contains a vision of the Lord standing by the altar. However, the vision simply introduces God as the speaker of the warnings and assurances that follow. This exhortation does not contain any commands or prohibitions and the appropriate response needs to be implied from his warnings and assurances. The warnings in verses 1-4 and 7-10 imply the prohibition, "The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their religion or covenant relationship with God for security." In addition, verses 5-6 contains a hymn that warns of God's authority, especially to judge and implies the command, "The elite in Israel should fear
the LORD and repent of their sins." The assurance in verses 11-15 implies the command, "The elite in Israel should seek God and live righteously for him."

**Strategy and Structure**

Amos begins by relating a vision of the Lord standing by the altar and his warning of judgment directed against the worshipers in verses 1-4. Next, Amos includes a hymn that supplements the proceeding warning by describing God's authority, especially to judge, in verses 5-6. Next, Amos further supplements the preceding warnings with another warning of God's intention to judge Israel and especially complacent sinners in verses 7-10. However, this warning also includes an element of hope for those who repent and seek him. Finally, Amos includes assurances of the restoration of David's rule and authority as well as bounty, resettlement, and security in verses 11-15 to further encourage the people of Israel to seek God and live righteously for him.

I. A Vision of the Lord and His Warning of Inescapable Judgment (9:1-4)
   A. A Vision of the Lord by the Altar (v. 1a)
   B. Instructions for the Annihilation of the Worshipers (v. 1b)
   C. Declaration of the Lord's Intention of Killing the Survivors (v. 1c)
   D. Declaration that None Will Escape (v. 1d)
   E. Declaration that There Will Be No Place to Escape (vs. 2-4a)
      1. Neither Sheol nor the heavens
      2. Neither Carmel nor the bottom of the sea
      3. Not even in captivity
   F. Declaration that the Lord Has Change His Outlook (v. 4b)

II. Hymn of Praise, Warning of the LORD's Authority to Judge (9:5-6)
   A. The Subject of the Hymn—The Lord, the LORD of Armies (v. 5a)
   B. The LORD's Authority to Cause Upheaval and Mourning (v. 5b)
   C. The LORD's Authority over the Heavens and the Earth (v. 6a)
   D. The Subject of the Hymn—The LORD is his name (v. 6b)

III. Warning of Judgment with the Possibility of Hope (9:7-10)
   A. The LORD's Indiscriminate Treatment of Israel (v. 7)
      1. The LORD makes no distinction between the Israelites and the Cushites
      2. Identified as a declaration of the LORD
      3. The LORD's equal treatment of the Israelites, Philistines, and Arameans
   B. Declaration of the LORD's Intention to Destroy Israel but Spare Some (v. 8)
      1. His awareness of Israel's sin
      2. His intention to destroy Israel
      3. His intention to spare some
      4. Identified as a declaration of the LORD
   C. Explanation that the LORD Intends to Shake Israel as in a Sieve (vs. 9-10)
      1. His intention to shake Israel among the nations
      2. Analogy of a sieve
      3. The destruction of complacent sinners

IV. The Hope of the Righteous (9:11-15)
   A. Assurance of the Restoration of the Splendor and Authority of David's Rule (vs. 11-12)
1. A day when the LORD will restore David's hovel
2. A day when Judah will possess Edom and all the nations
3. Identified as a declaration of the LORD

B. Assurance of Bounty, Resettlement, and Security (vs. 13-15)
1. Identified as a declaration of the LORD
2. Coming days of bounty
   a. The one reaping overtaken by the one plowing
   b. The one sowing seed overtaken by the one treading grapes
   c. The mountains dripping grape juice and the hills being dissolved
3. Coming days of return, resettlement, and reaping
4. Coming days of security
5. Identified as a declaration of the LORD

Message or Messages
The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their religion for security because the Lord has condemned them to death, none will be able to escape no matter where they go, and he has fixed his eyes on them for evil rather than good. The elite in Israel should fear the Lord and repent of their sin because God is the Sovereign LORD of Armies, he has authority over the heavens and the earth, and he has the authority to cause great upheaval that will result in mourning. The elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God for security because the LORD makes no distinction between them and others, he is aware of their sin, he is going to destroy them from the face of the earth, there is still the possibility that some may be spared, but all the complacent sinners will die by the sword. The elite in Israel should repent of their sin and seek the LORD because days are coming when he will reestablish the splendor and authority of David's kingdom; the land will be incredibly bountiful; he will return the captives, they will resettle the land, and enjoy its bounty; and he will plant them securely in their own land and they won't be uprooted again.

Analysis of the Details
A Vision of the Lord and His Declaration of Inescapable Judgment

Amos begins by reporting his vision of the Lord standing by the altar in verses 1-4. However, the vision itself is not developed except in declaration of inescapable judgment that the Lord speaks. Through this declaration, Amos undermines the complacent reliance of the elite in Israel on their religion as a basis of security. Amos introduces the vision of the Lord standing by the altar, then relates the Lord giving instructions for the annihilation of the worshipers, declaring that he intends to kill the survivors, none will escape, there is no place to hide, and that he has changed his outlook on Israel.

A vision of the Lord by the altar. Amos introduces his vision of the Lord standing by the altar in the first line of verse 1, "I saw the Lord standing by the altar." Amos normally identifies his prophetic words as a declaration of the LORD in order to reinforce their veracity. However, in verses 1-4 he does not. Instead, he reports a vision of the LORD and God speaks for himself. By placing this declaration of judgment within a vision of the Lord Amos underscores the gravity of the warning.
Instructions for the annihilation of the worshipers. The Lord gives instructions for the annihilation of the worshipers in the second line of verse 1, "and he said, 'Strike the tops of the pillars so that the bases shake. Break them off on the heads of all of them.'" The elite in Israel were relying on their religion as one basis for their security. However, the Lord's command for their temple to be demolished so that it would collapse on the heads of the worshipers. This command graphically portrays his displeasure with their religion and that rather than providing refuge from his judgment, their religion was the cause of their destruction. Throughout this warning, the Lord emphasizes that his judgment is thorough. The first indication of the thoroughness of God's judgment is that the Lord commands for the pillars to be broken off on "all of them."

Declaration of the Lord's intention to kill all the survivors with the sword. The second indication of the thoroughness of God's judgment is the Lord's declaration of his intention to kill all the survivors in the third line of verse 1, "The remainder I will kill with the sword." Though some might conceivably escape the demolished temple, none could escape the Lord's sword.

Declaration that none will escape. The third indication of the thoroughness of God's judgment is the Lord's declaration that none will escape in the fourth line of verse 1, "One of them who flees will not get away, and one of them escaping will not slip away." Neither speed nor stealth will enable them to escape.

Declaration that there will be no place to escape. The fourth indication of the thoroughness of God's judgment is the Lord's declaration that there is no place to escape in verses 2-4. The Lord declares that neither Sheol nor the heavens would provide them with any refuge in verse 2, "Though they dig down into Sheol, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down." Sheol was the shadowy underworld where the dead dwelt whereas the heavens were the abode of God. Sheol stands in contrast to the heavens to emphasize that no matter where they went in the metaphysical realm, they would not be able to escape God's wrath. The Lord declares that neither Mount Carmel nor the bottom of the sea would provide them any refuge in verse 3, "Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will hunt them down and take them. Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them." Mount Carmel was the highest point in Israel and the bottom of the sea the lowest point. Mount Carmel stands in contrast to the bottom of the sea to emphasize that no matter where they went in the physical realm, they would not be able to escape God's wrath. Finally, the Lord declares that they will not even find refuge in exile in the first part of verse 4, "Though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword and it will slay them."

Declaration that the Lord has changed his outlook. The Lord declares that he is changing his outlook toward Israel in the second part of verse 4, "I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good." The elite in Israel believed that God was obligated to watch over and bless Israel because they were his people. However, the Lord warns that his outlook has changed. Instead of watching for opportunities to bless them he will be looking for opportunities to curse them. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their religion for security because the Lord has condemned them to death, none will be able to escape no matter where they go, and he has fixed his eyes on them for evil rather than good.

Hymn of Praise, Warning of the LORD's Authority to Judge
Next, Amos includes a hymn that supplements the preceding warning by describing God's authority, especially to judge, in verses 5-6. Amos names the LORD as the subject of the hymn; declares God's authority to cause upheaval, fear, and mourning; declares the Lord's authority over the heavens and the earth; declares the Lord's authority over the forces of nature; and renames the LORD as the subject of the hymn.

The subject of the hymn. The hymn begins and ends with an identification of the subject. The primary identification of the subject is in the first line of verse 5, "The Lord, the LORD of Armies." The concluding identification is in the second line of verse 6, "The LORD is his name." These two identifications of the subject frame the hymn and emphasize that the LORD is the Lord and commander of all the heavenly armies.

The LORD's authority to cause upheaval and mourning. The hymn declares the authority of the LORD to cause upheaval, fear, and mourning in the second line of verse 5, "He who touches the earth and it melts and all who live in it mourn—All of it rises like the Nile, then sinks like the Nile of Egypt." The LORD's touch expresses his involvement in the world and the dissolving of the earth at his touch indicates the catastrophic impact that his involvement can take. Amos illustrates the catastrophic impact of his involvement using the analogy of the annual flooding of the Nile. Amos has already used the annual flooding of the Nile as an image of judgment in 8:8. Just as the rising Nile picks up soil from one location and deposits it at another, so God causes great upheaval. The result is mourning for the death and devastation that results.

The LORD's authority over the heavens and the earth. The hymn declares the authority of the LORD over the heavens and the earth in the first line of verse 6, "He who builds his upper chambers and sets its foundation on the earth, who call for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land." Though the language employed is a bit obscure, Smith is probably right when he explains, "A palace in the heavens whose foundation is on the earth speaks of a transcendent sovereignty over both earth and heaven. Both heaven and earth are his domain where he has sovereign authority" (Smith, 158). The LORD's authority over both heaven and earth is illustrated by his authority to command the waters of the sea and pour out water from heaven onto the earth. Therefore, the elite in Israel should fear the Lord and repent of their sin because God is the Sovereign LORD of Armies, he has authority over the heavens and the earth, and he has the authority to cause great upheaval that will result in mourning.

Warning of Judgment with the Possibility of Hope

Next, Amos further supplements the preceding warnings with another warning of God's intention to judge Israel and especially complacent sinners in verses 7-10. However, this warning also includes an element of hope for those who repent and seek him. The LORD declares that he regards and treats them no differently than other nations; declares his intention to destroy Israel, but spare some; and explains his intentions using the analogy of a sieve.

The LORD's indiscriminate treatment of Israel. The LORD declares that he regards and treats Israel no differently than the Cushites using a rhetorical question, "Are you not like the sons of the Cushites to me, O sons of Israel?" The implied answer to this rhetorical question is, "Yes, we are like the sons of the Cushites to you." Stuart suggests that for the Israelites the Cushites were a distant and obscure people. Therefore, by equating the Israelites with Cushites the LORD was
indicating that the Israelites were just as obscure (Stuart, 393). Second, he establishes that he has treated them no differently than the Philistines and Arameans using another rhetorical question, "Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" The implied answer to this rhetorical question is, "Yes, you brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir." The Arameans and Philistines were not obscure peoples to the Israelites. They were their hated enemies whom Amos has already condemned along with Israel. The implication of this rhetorical question is not only that the LORD has treated the Israelites like their hated enemies, but that they would not be exempt from God's judgment any more than the Arameans and Philistines.

**Declaration of the LORD's intention to destroy Israel but spare some.** The LORD declares his intention to destroy Israel in verse 8. First, he declares that he is aware of their sin, "Indeed, the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom." Second, he declares his intention to destroy Israel, "and I will destroy it from the face of the earth." This declaration seems to indicate that Israel will be completely obliterated. However, he then declares his intention to spare some, "Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob." This element of hope is introduced here, implied though left undeveloped in the analogy of the sieve, and developed fully in verses 11-15. The grammatical construction is insistent and could be literally translated, "Destroying I will not destroy the house of Jacob." Amos identifies this declaration as a word of the LORD in verse 8c, "declares the LORD." This identification serves to reinforce the authority of this warning of judgment and assurance of hope.

**Explanation that the LORD intends to shake Israel as in a sieve.** The LORD explains his intentions using the analogy of a sieve in verses 9-10. First, he explains that he intends to shake Israel among the nations in the first part of verse 9, "For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations." As the analogy of the sieve clarifies, the defeat and exile of Israel will be a sifting process in which sinners are separated from the righteous. Second, he uses the analogy of shaking grain in a sieve to clarify his intentions in the second part of verse 9, "as if it was being shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will fall to the ground." Third, he explains the disastrous implications of this judgment for complacent sinners in verse 10, "All the sinners of my people will die by the sword, those who say 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'" The defeat and exile of the Israelites would be a sifting process in which sinners were separated from the righteous as the larger pebbles are caught in the sieve and the grain falls through. This imagery implies both warning of judgment and assurance of hope. However, the primary emphasis is on warning of judgment at this point. Nothing is said of the grain, but "not a pebble will fall to the ground." Nothing is said of the righteous, but "All the sinners of my people will die by the sword, those who say 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'" The assurance of hope is only developed in verses 11-15. Therefore, the elite in Israel should not sin and complacently rely on their covenant relationship with God for security because the LORD makes no distinction between them and others, he is aware of their sin, he is going to destroy them from the face of the earth, there is still the possibility that some may be spared, but all the complacent sinners will die by the sword.

The Hope of The Righteous
Finally, Amos relates the LORD's assurance of his intention to restore David's rule and authority as well as his assurances of bounty, resettlement, and security in verses 11-15 to further encourage his people to seek God and live righteously for him.

**Assurance of the restoration of the splendor and authority David's kingdom.** Amos relates the LORD's assurance of his intention to restore David's rule in verses 11-12. First, the LORD gives the assurance that a day is coming when the splendor of David's kingdom will be reestablished using the analogy of a restored hut or hovel in verse 11, "In that day I will reestablish David's hovel that has fallen and will wall up the breaches, I will re-erect its ruins, and rebuild it as it used to be in the days of old." Israel during the time of David and Solomon is often regarded as the high point of the nation's history. A king from David's line still ruled over the Southern Kingdom of Judah. However, David's kingdom had fallen on hard times. Compared to David's palace when he reigned as king, the current status of David's kingdom could be aptly described as a hovel. Nonetheless, the LORD repeatedly emphasizes that it will be restored to the splendor it had during the reign of David. Second, the LORD gives the assurance that a day is coming when David's authority over Edom and other nations will be restored in the first part of verse 12, "so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that are called by my name." For much of the period of the divided monarchy Judah was subject to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and other neighboring nations. Nonetheless, the LORD assures that the situation will be reversed and David's kingdom will once again rule the nations. Third, Amos identifies these assurances as a declaration of the LORD in the second part of verse 12, "declares the LORD, who will do this." This identification serves to reinforce the certainty of these assurances.

**Assurance of bounty, resettlement, and security.** Amos relates the LORD's assurance of his intention to bless the land with bounty, resettle the people of Israel in the land, and make them secure in verses 13-15. Amos introduces and concludes this assurance by identifying it as a declaration of the LORD to reinforce the veracity of the assurance. First, the LORD gives the assurance of coming days of bounty in verse 13, "Indeed, days are coming," declares the LORD, 'when the one reaping will be overtaken by the one plowing and the one sowing seed by the one treading grapes. The mountains will drip grape juice and all the hills will dissolve.'" The LORD emphasizes the bounty of the land with hyperbole. The harvest will be so bountiful that they will not have time to gather the crop before it is time to plant again. The grapes will grow so fast that the one who treads the grapes to make wine will follow right after the planter. There will be so much juice produced by the grape harvest that it will drip like runoff rainwater from the mountains and it will erode the hills. Second, the LORD gives the assurance of coming days when he will resettle the people of Israel in verse 14, "I will return my captive people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit." This assurance reverses the judgment announced in 5:11, "though you have built stone houses, you will not live in them; though you have planted delightful vineyards, you will not drink their wine." Third, the LORD gives the assurance of coming days when the people of Israel will be secure in the first part of verse 15, "I will plant Israel in their own land, and they will never again be uprooted from their land which I have given them." Israel is likened to a plant that has been uprooted, but will once again be planted in the land. This assurance stresses the security of the people of Israel in the land of promise. The LORD assures them repeatedly that the land is theirs and that he has given it to them. The absolute negative "never" further emphasizes their secure possession of the land. Finally, the assurance is again identified as a declaration of the LORD in the second part of verse 15,
"declares the LORD your God." This identification serves to reinforce the certainty of this
assurance. Therefore, the elite in Israel should repent of their sin and seek the LORD because
days are coming when he will reestablish the splendor and authority of David's kingdom; the
land will be incredibly bountiful; he will return the captives, they will resettle the land; and enjoy
its bounty; and he will plant them securely in their own land and they won't be uprooted again.

Application of the Message

Establishing Correspondence

The situation addressed by this passage corresponds with a situation in the modern church. Some Christians sin and complacently rely on being religious as their bases of security but live unrighteously with little indication that Christ is at work in their lives. This correspondence between the original and modern situations provides a strong basis for applying the message of Amos 9:1-15 to the modern situation.

Distinguishing the Contextualized

Some contextualized elements do occur in this passage. Christians were not delivered from Egypt but from Satan and sin. In addition, the warnings of judgment are specifically addressed to Israel and God's judgment of Christians in the modern era would certainly take a different form. Furthermore, the assurances are also expressed in terms of the restoration and blessing of Israel as a nation, whereas the hope of Christians is sharing in the blessings and security of Jesus' eternal kingdom. Nonetheless, these differences can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. In the statement of the applied message that follows I have tried to ease the tension between the original and modern situation in some cases by employing the elite in Israel as a warning example. I have also updated the assurances so that they reflect equivalent promises to Christians regarding Christ's eternal kingdom.

Adjusting the Message

Christians should not sin and complacently rely on their religion for security like the elite in Israel because the Lord ordered that the temple be brought down on their heads, none would be able to escape no matter where they went, and he had fixed his eyes on them for evil rather than good. Christians should fear the Lord and repent of their sin because he is the Sovereign LORD of Armies, he has authority over the heavens and the earth, and he has the authority to cause great upheaval and mourning. Christians should not sin and complacently rely on being God's people for security like the elite in Israel because the LORD warned them that he made no distinction between them and others, he was aware of their sin, he was going to destroy them from the face of the earth, there was still the possibility that some might be spared, but all the complacent sinners would die by the sword. Christians should repent of their sin and seek the LORD because days are coming when Jesus will return and establish his eternal kingdom and the faithful will be delivered from this world, enter his kingdom, enjoy its bountiful blessings, and be secure for eternity.

Proclamation of the Message

Title: I Will Shake the House of Israel
Objective: The objective of this message is to discourage Christians from sinning and complacently relying on their religion for security and encourage them instead to fear the LORD, repent of their sin, and seek to please him.

Proposition: Christians not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because the LORD ordered the temple to be brought down on their heads and warned that none would be able to escape his judgment; he is the Sovereign LORD who has authority over the heavens and earth to bring great upheaval and mourning; the LORD warned them that he was aware of their sin and they would be judged like everyone else; and Jesus will return and the faithful will enter his kingdom and enjoy its blessings and security for eternity.

Introduction

Karl Marx once said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." What he probably meant was that religion makes people feel good even though they are miserable so that they don't rebel against the government. I am not a communist and I am not going to comment on Marx's political philosophy. However, there is an element of truth to what Marx has said. Religion often makes people feel like they are acceptable to God even though they are living their lives in a way that displeases God. Jesus taught that there would be sinners in the church who complacently believed they were saved, likening them to weeds among the wheat. Amos uses similar language to refer to the unrighteous elite in Israel during the time of his ministry, likening them to gravel among the grain. Even today there are people in the church who believe that they are Christians, but whose lives do not reflect the transforming power of Christ. In the Asian context I guess we could refer to them as rocks among the rice. Jesus warned that these weeds would be gathered together and burned. Amos warned that God was going to sift the grain through a sieve and "not a pebble will fall to the ground." None will escape God's judgment. Therefore, it is essential that we be found among the wheat rather than the weeds, the grain rather than the gravel, and the rice rather than the rocks. Listen as I read the fuller version of Amos' warning. Read Amos 9:1-15.

I. Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because God ordered the temple to be brought down on their heads and warned that none would be able to escape his judgment.

A. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently relying on their religion for security.
B. Amos describes a vision in which the Lord gave orders for his heavenly armies to bring the temple down on their heads.
C. Amos describes a vision in which the Lord took personal responsibility for guaranteeing that none of the worshipers escaped.
D. Amos describes a vision in which the Lord warns them that none would escape no matter where they went. There was no place where they could find refuge whether they went up to heaven, down to Sheol, up to Mount Carmel, down to the depths of the sea, or even into exile.
E. Amos describes a vision in which the Lord warns them that he has fixed his eyes on them for evil rather than good. The Lord normally watched over his people, looking after their needs. However, he warned them that he had changed his outlook toward them and no longer regarded them with favor but malice.
F. Christians sometimes sin and complacently rely on their religion for security.
G. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because God ordered the temple to be brought down on their heads and warned that none would be able to escape his judgment.

II. Christians should not complacently sin because God is the Sovereign LORD who has authority over the heavens and the earth to cause great upheaval and mourning.
   A. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently relying on their religion for security.
   B. Amos includes a hymn of praise to God along with his warning of judgment. Through this hymn he warned them of God's authority, especially his authority to judge. Amos warned them that God was the Lord, the LORD of Armies. Amos warned them that the Lord had authority over the heavens and the earth. Amos describes how God has built his upper chambers in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, depicting his dominion over both heaven and earth. In addition, he describes how God calls for the waters of the sea and pours them over the face of the land. Amos warned them that the Lord had authority to cause a great upheaval and mourning. At his touch the earth dissolves like the soil along the Nile River that is picked up and moved by the frequently violent annual flooding.
   C. Christians sometimes sin and rely on their religion for security.
   D. You should not complacently sin because God is the Sovereign LORD who has authority over the heavens and the earth to cause great upheaval and mourning.

III. Christians should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because the LORD warned them that he was aware of their sin and they would be judged like everyone else.
   A. The elite in Israel were sinning and complacently relying on their covenant relationship with God for security.
   B. The LORD warned them that he made no distinction between them and others.
   C. The LORD warned them that he was aware of their sin, he was going to destroy them from the face of the earth, there was still a possibility that some might be spared, but all complacent sinners would die by the sword.
   D. The LORD likened this judgment to the use of a sieve to separate the gravel that had become mixed with the grain. The grain would fall through the holes in the sieve and be saved, but "not a pebble will fall to the ground." As the LORD explains, "All the sinners of my people will die by the sword, those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'"
   E. Christians sometimes sin and complacently presume that they are secure because they are God's people.
   F. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because the LORD warned them that he was aware of their sin and they would be judged like everyone else.

IV. Christians should not complacently sin because Jesus will return and the faithful will enter his kingdom and enjoy its blessings and security for eternity.
   A. The elite in Israel had turned away from God and were living in a way that displeased him.
   B. The LORD assured those that repented and sought him that he would restore the splendor and authority of David's kingdom. He likens David's kingdom to a hovel or hut. Certainly David's kingdom had fallen on hard times. The Southern Kingdom of Judah still had a descendant of David on the throne, but it was a poor and weak nation. Comparing Judah to Israel when David was king would be like comparing David's palace with a hovel. However, the LORD repeatedly emphasizes that he will reestablish, repair, re-erect, and rebuild it "as in the days of old." Judah was at the mercy of her neighbors and subject to
Israel. However, the LORD promised that David's kingdom would once again rule the nations.

C. The LORD assured those who repented and sought him that the land would once again be blessed by him with bounty. The harvest will be so bountiful that they will not have time to gather the crop before it is time to plant again. The grapes will grow so fast that the one who treads the grapes will follow right after the planter. There will be so much juice produced that it will drip like runoff rainwater from the mountains and it will erode the hills.

D. The LORD assured those who repented and sought him that he would return them, they would resettle the land, and they would reap the bountiful harvest.

E. The LORD assured those who repented and sought him that he would plant them in their land and they would never be uprooted.

F. Christians sometimes turn away from God and live in a way that displeases him. However, Christians have greater motivation for repenting of their sin and seeking the LORD.

G. You should not complacently sin because Jesus will return and the faithful will enter his kingdom and enjoy its blessings and security for eternity.

**Conclusion**

Some people in the church believe they are Christians, but their lives do not reflect the transforming power of Christ. Therefore, it is essential that you be found among the wheat rather than the weeds, the grain rather than the gravel, and the rice rather than the rocks. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because the LORD ordered the temple to be brought down on their heads and warned that none would escape his judgment. You should not complacently sin because God is the Sovereign LORD of Armies who has authority over the heavens and the earth to cause great upheaval and mourning. You should not complacently sin like the elite in Israel because the LORD warned them that he was aware of their sin and they would be punished like everyone else. You should not complacently sin because Jesus will return and the faithful will enter his kingdom and enjoy its blessings and security for eternity.
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William H. (Bill) Lawson is a proud graduate of California Baptist University (BA), Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv), and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (PhD). He taught briefly at SBTS and then served with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and taught the Bible in Baptist seminaries throughout Asia for over 30 years. He has written other books including *Ears to Hear: A Guide for the Interpretation of the Bible* and *Obedient unto Death: A Guide for the Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. He is now retired and living at *The End of the Lane* where he is writing books and painting/drawing pictures.