

Amos

Chapter 5:4 – 6:14

Introduction

God had sent famine, drought, pestilence, and plague upon the Northern kingdom of Israel. He had sent Amos among them to prophesy,

Amos 3:11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "An adversary *shall be* all around the land; he shall sap your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered."

Even after all this they were ignoring God's strong warnings of coming judgment. You should ask, *Why? Why?* were they ignoring the clear, unmistakable warnings.

The answers to that question are in chapters five and six:

1. In chapter five you learn that the Jews were ignoring the warnings because they were trusting in their religion to keep them safe.
2. In chapter six you learn that the Jews were ignoring the warnings because they were trusting in their relationship to keep them safe.

The Jews did enjoy a special relationship with God; and they were very religious. But neither their *relationship* nor their *religion* was producing **righteousness**. In fact, they were **unrighteous**: They were oppressing the poor and living large lives on the loot and land they extorted from the poor by bribing unjust judges.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Unrighteousness Calls Your Religion Into Question, and #2 Unrighteousness Calls Your Relationship Into Question.

- #1 Unrighteousness Calls Your Religion Into Question
(5:4-27)

“Religion” is a word that immediately has a bad meaning to Christians. Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Religion cannot save anyone.

Yet at the same time Christians *are* religious. “Religion” simply means the external things you do to worship God; things like praying, singing, studying the Bible, and serving in the Church. Right now we are engaging in religious activities. The concern is whether or not our religion is heartfelt or hypocritical.

The apostle James put it like this:

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Your relationship with God should produce a “pure and undefiled religion” in your everyday life and living. If you are religious at Church but unrighteous everywhere else, then your religion is useless. No amount of outward religious activity can save you. There must be an inward change of heart that results in righteousness.

The Jews were very religious, but very unrighteous. They were trusting in religious activities to keep them safe.

Amos 5:4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek Me and live;
Amos 5:5 But do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing.
Amos 5:6 Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire *in* the house of Joseph, and devour *it*, with no one to quench *it* in Bethel -

Bethel and Gilgal were centers for the worship of idols in the Northern kingdom of Israel. Beersheba was a place the Jews worshipped idols in the Southern kingdom of Judah. God was pleading with them to seek Him rather than go after idols.

Amos 5:7 You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!”

“Wormwood” is bitter and poisonous; their justice was really injustice. “Laying righteousness to rest” means they were abandoning righteousness; their righteousness was really unrighteousness. They were religious, but it had no effect on their everyday life and living. It was hypocrisy.

Instead of dead idols they should seek the living God:

Amos 5:8 He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the LORD *is* His name.

Amos 5:9 He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress.

God is an awesome God! His people worshipped Him, but they also worshipped idols, which cancelled out their worship of Him. You can't add anything to God.

God reveals their unrighteousness and clearly warns them of coming judgment:

Amos 5:10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

Amos 5:11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them.

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just *and* taking bribes; diverting the poor *from justice* at the gate.

Their religion was left at the altar in the royal chapel. In the city gates, the place of everyday life and business, they hated the righteous and acted unrighteously toward the poor.

Amos 5:13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it *is* an evil time.

Amos 5:14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken.

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

They said, "The Lord God of hosts is with us," but He wasn't. They were far from Him and needed to seek Him. He promised to be found by those who sought Him and to be gracious. God is so good!

If they failed to seek Him, He would come to them – but in judgment:

Amos 5:16 Therefore the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, says this: "*There shall be* wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing.

Amos 5:17 In all vineyards *there shall be* wailing, for I will pass through you," says the LORD.

The Jews had professional mourners. You hired them for funerals. The destruction God is warning about would be so terrible that there

would not be enough professional mourners available; you would have to employ farmers as mourners.

Amos 5:18 Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good *is* the day of the LORD to you? It *will be* darkness, and not light.

Amos 5:19 It *will be* as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or *as though* he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him!

Amos 5:20 *Is* not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? *Is it not* very dark, with no brightness in it?

Apparently they misunderstood the Day of the Lord. We saw in Joel, who first introduced the theme, that the Day of the Lord begins with the darkness of tribulation and judgment. Yet they were looking forward to it as if it began where it ends – with the glorious appearing of the Lord to rule and reign on the earth.

Amos drew from his down home wisdom and described the Day of the Lord as though a man was trying to get home safe only to be attacked by a lion, then a bear, then to be bitten at home by a serpent!

A proper understanding of prophecy will help keep your religion pure and undefiled because you are looking for the return of the Lord. In your case, He returns and you will stand before His reward seat to have your life examined.

Amos 5:21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

Amos 5:22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

Amos 5:23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

Amos 5:24 But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

These people spent a lot of time in religious activities. Their outward religious activities were *not* pleasing to God because there was no inward change of heart.

Amos 5:25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"

Amos 5:26 You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves.

Amos 5:27 Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name *is* the God of hosts.

God reminds them of the wilderness wanderings of their ancestors. He wouldn't tolerate idolatry then; He wouldn't tolerate it now. He would judge them for it.

Actually, God won't tolerate idolatry **for your own sake**. Idolatry will ruin your life and cut you off from the source of true spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

You and I **are** religious. That's OK as long as we are consistent both in and out of church. Your relationship with God should produce a "pure and undefiled religion" in your everyday life and living. It will express itself in righteousness – in doing what is right. Religion without righteousness is hypocrisy.

#2 Unrighteousness Calls Your Relationship Into Question (6:1-14)

The second reason the Jews felt they could ignore God's warnings was that they felt secure in their relationship as His specially chosen people and nation. In verse one of chapter six you read,

Amos 6:1 Woe to you *who are* at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes!

"Zion" refers to Jerusalem, capital of the Southern kingdom of Judah, while "Samaria" was the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Both kingdoms considered themselves "the chief nation" of the world because of their special relationship to God as His chosen people. The "notable persons" were the leaders to whom "the house of Israel" came for counsel and advice. They were "at ease" in spite of God's warnings. We'll see that "at ease" means they were living large with little, if any, regard for spiritual things.

Amos 6:2 Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. *Are you* better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?

These were Gentile cities God had judged for unrighteousness. God could not ignore His own people who were committing the same sins. If anything, He had a greater urgency to discipline His own children.

God said that they were “at ease.” In verses three through six you see them at ease:

Amos 6:3 *Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near;*

Amos 6:4 *Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall;*

Amos 6:5 *Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;*

Amos 6:6 *Who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

They are described as if life for them was one long party, called “banquets” in verse seven. Let me give you a summary: They indulged themselves in every pleasure and it dulled their spiritual sense of urgency.

God was warning them of coming judgment. They “put far off the day of doom” that God warned them about because their spiritual senses were dulled. Their spiritual senses were dulled by their indulgences.

Let’s take a closer look at their “banquets,” at what we would call parties:

1. They would “anoint themselves with the best ointments” in order to be as attractive as possible.
2. Arriving at the party, they feasted on the best foods, “lambs and calves,” as they sat “stretched out” on the most comfortable “couches.”
3. The mood was set by the playing of the most popular, edgy, secular music of the day. They were able to “sing along.” They knew the words!
4. They got drunk. They weren’t simply enjoying a glass of wine with dinner. *They were drinking it from bowls!*
5. Sometimes they would end up lying “on beds of ivory.” Many commentators see this as referring to immoral sexual encounters.

School just started. There have been a lot of disturbing stories in the news about the partying that takes place on college campuses. The *Princeton Review* named Florida State the number one party school. It began,

“Florida State University students can tap a keg in honor of their latest No.1 ranking - but maybe they wouldn’t need a reason to anyway.”

Just to fully inform you, the top ten party schools are:

1. Florida State University
2. University of Florida
3. Michigan State University
4. Seton Hall University (New Jersey)
5. University of Mississippi
6. University of Montana
7. University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa
8. Sonoma State University (California)
9. Washington State University
10. University of Georgia

The top ten “stone cold sober” schools are:

1. Brigham Young University (Utah)
2. Wheaton College (Illinois)
3. California Inst. of Technology
4. U.S. Coast Guard Academy (Connecticut)
5. U.S. Naval Academy (Maryland)
6. Bryn Mawr College (Pennsylvania)
7. Wellesley College (Massachusetts)
8. Mount Holyoke College (Massachusetts)
9. Calvin College (Michigan)
10. College of the Ozarks (Missouri)

What Amos described is a pretty good summary of those parties and the “at ease” attitude.

We need to look at ourselves as well. It’s worse when this “at ease” attitude is adopted by believers. We tend to sneak-up on these things rather than indulge ourselves full-blown; but they still work to dull your spiritual senses. I’m not here to tell you to not drink... Or to not listen to any secular music or entertainment... Or any of the other things we’ve discussed.

I will encourage you to consider that, when you get together with other believers, it is not a time to have an “at ease” attitude that

encourages indulgence. It stumbles others and it dulls your sensitivities little by little. It's like dimming the lights in a room: Your eyes adjust to the darkness. *Don't learn to adjust to spiritual darkness!*

Amos 6:7 Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.

Amos 6:8 The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts says: "I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore I will deliver up *the* city and all that is in it."

Amos 6:9 Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.

Amos 6:10 And when a relative *of the dead*, with one who will burn *the bodies*, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, "*Are there* any more with you?" Then someone will say, "None."

And he will say, "Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the LORD."

Amos 6:11 For behold, the LORD gives a command: He will break the great house into bits, and the little house into pieces.

The Jews were trusting in their relationship to God to keep them safe. God called it "the pride of Jacob." Their special relationship held them to a higher standard, it didn't excuse a lower standard.

Amos 6:12 Do horses run on rocks? Does *one* plow *there* with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,

Amos 6:13 You who rejoice over Lo Debar, who say, "Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves by our own strength?"

Amos 6:14 "But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," says the LORD God of hosts; "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah."

Amos again borrows from his homespun wisdom. Horses don't run on rocks, and oxen don't plow over rocks. How much more foolish to act unrighteously and think there would be no consequences.

Part of the pride of trusting in their relationship was thinking that their military strength could prevail against any enemy. After all, they had won victories over Lo Debar and Karnaim. These were God's victories – not theirs. He would send a nation – the Assyrians – against whom they would not be victorious.

The privileges of having a special relationship carry with them responsibilities. Rather than live to *indulge* ourselves, we ought to live to *invest* ourselves in the work of the Lord. He is coming quickly, and when He comes He comes with His reward in hand to review your life. Let Jesus indulge you in heaven!

Conclusion

Your relationship with God should produce a “pure and undefiled religion” in your everyday life and living. If you are religious at Church but unrighteous everywhere else, then your religion is useless. No amount of outward religious activity can save you. There must be an inward change of heart that results in righteousness.

Your life should be a spiritual feast, not a worldly banquet.