

At Ease in Zion Amos 6:1

From time to time, we draw lessons from the Old Testament. This is a useful exercise, as there is so much to learn from all of God's word. That is what Romans 15:4 and other NT texts remind us of. In the Old Testament there are prophetic lessons, practical life lessons, examples of praise as well as character and events lessons. Tonight, I want to share another lesson from one of the Old Testament prophets – Amos. It is a familiar text that we have examined before, but not with the approach I would like to use in this study. We want to notice Amos 6:1, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion" and its context. We want to see what we can learn from this text.

I. Background of the text

- a. The book of Amos was written by Amos, a prophet whom we know little about his life. We know that he was a sheep breeder from Tekoa (a town in Judah south of Jerusalem - Amos 1:1) and a fruit farmer (Amos 7:14). Be we know him as a common man who also prophesied to both Israel and Judah. This indicates that he was a faithful servant of the LORD who was likely genuinely concerned about the corruption in both Israel and Judah. He is one of the earliest of the written prophets. While from Judah, the majority of his prophecy was directed against Northern Israel. Like so many of the prophets, his was a message of coming judgment if they did not repent.
- b. We are told in 1:1 that he prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam (II) in Israel and Uzziah in Judah. Jeroboam was an evil king and Uzziah was a somewhat good king, though he would become prideful. Both kings reigned around the same time for about 40 years (ca 780-740 BC) and during their reigns they saw material prosperity and relative peace.
So, we have a 40 year window for Amos to prophesy. Likely, he prophesied later in their reigns, with some placing Amos around 750 BC. To put it in perspective, this would be about 25-30 years before Samaria (the capital of Northern Israel) would fall to Assyria, and much of Judah would be devastated thereafter until God intervened because of the prayers of righteous Hezekiah (around 701 BC).
- c. The book of Amos, as already noted, is a message of coming judgment, to both Israel and Judah as well as surrounding nations. In this time of peace and prosperity, there was political, moral, social and religious corruption. The wealthy exploited the poor and helpless, there was an arrogance about them and worldly political alignments with nations putting their trust in them to the neglect of God. Religiously, Israel continued their false idolatrous worship of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (northern and southern borders of the land), as well as adopting the idolatry of nations around them. Their worship to YHWH was a sham and despised by God because of its corruption and THEIR corruption. It is in this climate that we are introduced to our text, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion."

II. At ease in Zion – complacency

- a. At ease in Zion and Mount Samaria (these were the capitals of Judah and Israel, Zion being a reference to Jerusalem – the place where God met with His people) was a reference to their arrogant complacency. They were relying on themselves and their neighbors, thinking they were secure. In essence, they were doing ok and didn't really need God to protect them or so they thought. HOW WRONG THEY WERE!
- b. **Complacency.** The main thought of this phrase is complacency. Complacency means that you are satisfied where you are at and see no need to move forward because you think everything is great. The problem with complacency is that it lulls one into a false sense of security where they let down their guard. This is the "Parable of the rich fool" (Luke 12:16-20), the Lukewarm church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-20), or Peter arguing with Jesus about denying Him (Matthew 26:33ff).

A complacent army will quit training as thoroughly and be more vulnerable; a complacent company, though strong, will quit moving forward, lessen its quality and eventually be passed into non-existence; a complacent athlete will lose the race (like the hare racing the tortoise). Spiritually, complacency is very dangerous as it makes you vulnerable to the attacks of the devil.

c. **We cannot be complacent and please God.**

i. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”*

Hebrews 2:3 warns us, *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?”*

Hebrews 6:11-12, *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

ii. 1 Peter 5:8 warns us to *be sober and vigilant because the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.* Also consider 2 Corinthians 2:11, *“Lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”*

iii. Certainly we must remind ourselves that we CANNOT be complacent and be faithful to God. Yet, because of the times in which live, ARE WE becoming complacent? Are we satisfied where we are at? Consider this pandemic: We’re now meeting only once a week and that is outdoors. Everything else is done online – including this sermon. Are we satisfied with this? Do we REALLY miss assembling together? Are we anxiously anticipating being able to be together in person on Sunday and Wednesday nights?

Do we think that home worship is a good PERMANENT solution to worship God? Are we glad we didn’t have those week long gospel meetings this year? Are we glad we don’t have to get dressed up a little to come worship God (giving Him your best)? Are we happy that we can our Sunday worship “out of the way” as early as possible?

Friends, I just don’t want us to decide that this is better than before! It is NOT!

- A verse that I recently thought about is worthy of consideration! Romans 16:16 begins, **“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”** This phrase is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12. It is pretty important. And it stands for the physical greeting of a TOUCH! I miss the handshakes, smiles and even the hugs of my brethren. Friends this is something we are NOT doing right now. And we are letting our governing authorities tell us we don’t need this. I understand the reasons why. BUT, do we miss it?

Sure some good can come out of this for those who are committed, but there is a danger of complacency if we are not careful.

III. **Causes of their complacency**

a. 1-2 - **They trusted in themselves** – (Zion and Samaria).

i. Vs. 2 gives a challenge – go to Calneh, Hamath, Gath, etc.

ii. This is a difficult text because these cities were still standing and we do not know everything about their history. They had been overrun in time past, but they recovered. However, they would all fall to Assyria, some of them before Samaria, so it could be a warning - “Watch and see what happens to them.”

Other have observed Amos could be talking about their arrogance and idolatry. Warning Samaria (and Judah) that they are NOT any better than them. Thus they would face the same judgment as them.

iii. Are we guilty of putting our trust in ourselves and others over God? When it comes to serving Him? Again – 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Romans 12:3 warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

1 Peter 5:5-6 – Humble yourselves before God and cast your cares on Him.

Luke 12:21, *“So is he who lays up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

- iv. WHEN we are trusting in ourselves, it is a sure sign that **we are complacent**. Don't forget James 4:13-15 which warns us to not leave God out of our plans. Our life is a vapor.
- b. 3 – **They put far off the day of judgment**
 - i. A false sense of security. They thought they had plenty of time, and even if God chose to judge them – in short order, He would deliver them.
 - ii. How many of us live as if we have forever before we will be judged?
2 Peter 3:3-4 – scoffers will come asking, “Where is the promise of His coming.”
Matthew 24:37-39 – they lived life as if they had all the time in the world.
NOTE: 2 Peter 3:10 – the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night... (1 Thessalonians 5:2, etc.)
 - iii. **The complacent** don't think about what might happen in the future. They live only for right now. Again, James 4:14 – your life is a vapor.
- c. 3 – **They caused the seat of violence to come near** – could mean either.
 - i. Injustice – justifying wicked behaviors and those who practice them. Sometimes the powerful and influential get away with what the common person cannot. There are so many inequities in life, many of which are perpetrated, endorsed or fueled by the powerful.
 - ii. Judgment to come – meaning that their rejection of God would bring upon them the coming violence of Assyria. I am leaning toward this, as it fits the context.
 - iii. **The complacent** are often self-seeking and don't care about how others are affected by their actions and inactions. Philippians 2:3-4 – look out for interests of others.
- d. 4 – **Materialism** –
 - i. **They sat on beds of ivory** – lived in luxury and comfort. Satisfied with this world's goods.
 - ii. Things have a way of causing us to forget about God.
Remember Matthew 6:19-21 – where is your treasure.
 - iii. **The complacent** have been lulled into a stupor because they are so comfortable with what they have. Think again about the rich fool – Luke 12:16-21
- e. 5 – **The pursuit of pleasures** -
 - i. **Who sing idly to instruments, invent instruments like David** – This verse is often used in the discussion of instrumental music in worship. Some contend that David invented instruments to worship God and thus he added to God's command.
I am not convinced of that and believe a case could be made for God commanding and/or tolerating instrumental music in the temple.
We CANNOT use them in our worship today because there is zero authority for them in the New Testament. Every passage that addresses it mentions only singing – 1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, etc.
 - ii. What is more likely here, IN CONTEXT, is that they were inventing instruments like David did for their entertainment, much like music and dancing are often associated with partying today.
 - iii. 6 – **Who drink wine from bowls and anoint yourself with the best ointments**. This again describes excess – who drinks from a bowl (a larger container) rather than a glass? Someone who drinks out of the bottle has a bigger problem.
The ointments would be those that only the wealthiest could afford (think high-end perfumes, make-up, etc.).
 - iv. **But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph** – NOT concerned about the plight of the less fortunate and the afflicted, OR how their excesses had led to the neglect of proper reverence toward God (people often follow the lead of rulers and high-society) OR the coming judgment because of their complacent attitude.

- v. Amos is describing luxuries that one used to think only about themselves and to cause them to forget about God. (Note: Luxuries are not wrong within themselves when appreciated with proper attitudes. I have continually emphasized this – TT).
- vi. **The complacent** pursue entertainment and luxuries as their main goal in life. Heed 1 Timothy 6:17-18.

Amos concludes this section with vs. 7 – *Therefore they shall now go captive and be removed*. Friends, we must never be complacent and forget about coming judgment. There is coming a day when we WILL stand before God in judgment. Hebrews 9:27, Acts 17:20-21. Will that be a day of dread as it was for Israel and Judah (eventually)? Enjoy life, but do not forget about God as you do so. Think about it!