

Prayer

Lift our hearts in praise, Almighty God, our Lord and Saviour. Fill our hearts with a desire to praise You in the midst of everything that happens to us; may we sing Your praises, speak of Your greatness, and do all our work as if for You. May everything we do be a worthy sacrifice of praise, Lord God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Television

Pray for those who present news on television, and the journalists and other staff who work for news agencies. The things they say influence many people for good or for ill.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the rule of law and the security it gives people
- Pray for young people in prison and for those who seek to help them
- Pray about how children are taught about our world and God's creation

Meditation

I trust You, Lord Jesus Christ, to

Maintain and sustain my life, my health,
My mental capacity and family life.

Search my soul and root out sin
From every corner of my being.

Guide me through life's troubles and trials,
And all its arguments and division.

Judge the merits of what I do and say,
And tell me what is good or bad.

Challenge me to listen to Your Word
To the Spirit and the voice of prophets.

Give me work to do which is valuable
In the service of others and the Kingdom.

Comfort my soul when life is hard,
And lift my heart to praise Your name.

I trust You, Lord Jesus Christ; forever.

Bible Study - Amos 2:12-16

¹² 'Now it was you who made the Nazirites drink wine, and instructed the prophets not to prophesy!'

¹³ 'Look, I will crush you down to the ground, as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. ¹⁴ The swift will be unable to flee and the strong will not retain their strength; neither will the warrior save his life, ¹⁵ nor will the archer stand his ground. Those who are fleet of foot will not save themselves, nor will the horseman save his life; ¹⁶ even the bravest of the warriors will flee away naked in that day,' says the LORD.

Review

Amos concluded his first prophecy against the people of Israel (2:6) with this stinging prophecy. The words flow on from yesterday's passage which condemned both moral and religious wrongdoing on the part of the people of Israel, and begins with the extraordinary words; 'it was you who made the Nazirites drink wine, and instructed the prophets not to prophesy!' In this way, Amos exposed the truth about what was happening in Israel. The Nazirites, who dedicated themselves to the Lord with vows which included refraining from wine

(Numbers 6:2f. Judges 13:5f.) had been compromised, and the prophets, the very people who God used to speak His Word had been silenced in Israel, and no prophets had spoken there for eighty years since the days of Elisha and the reign of king Joash (2 Kings 13:15f.). Without the moral and spiritual compass provided by these people, Israel was lost; but Amos did more in this prophecy than merely identify what had gone wrong with Israel. Most of today's reading is a strange prophecy about what God would do as a consequence of Israel's moral and religious sin; 'I will crush you down to the ground ... the swift will flee ... the bravest warrior will flee ...' (2:13-16).

What do these words mean? The first picture Amos used was that of a cart used at harvest-time, loaded with sheaves of corn and ready to be taken to the threshing floor (2:13). It is hard to interpret the Hebrew words exactly and arrive at a translation which both makes sense and is accurate, but in general, what Amos said was this; the cart was weighed down so much that it was on the verge of breaking, and nothing could be done to prevent it! In other words, this was not simply a vision of a harvest, representing 'the end', but something more dramatic. The breakup of a cart at harvest would have been a catastrophe for all concerned, and a catastrophe is what Amos predicted.

Amos proceeded without delay to conclude his prophetic word. It would have been clear to his listeners that Amos was talking about a catastrophe, and what he said next revealed its nature. Amos held back no longer, and with chillingly descriptive words he prophesied the most extreme thing that could happen to any nation in those days, which was defeat in battle. His words describe the terrible panic of defeat which spreads amongst an army when staring defeat and death; strength sapped out of stout warriors, archers unable to steady themselves to shoot, the terror of pursuit in fear of death and the inability of even a cavalry to change the course of battle. Amos' words are one of only a few prophecies in the Old Testament which convey the sheer terror of such a calamity in circumstances almost beyond our comprehension.

Pause for a moment, however, and think about what was happening as Amos spoke these words, using the general picture which has developed with our study of Amos (see especially 2:6-11). The crowd Amos gathered and who so loudly applauded him for the first seven of his prophecies had been silenced as he rounded on the northern nation of Israel (2:6), the very people he was speaking to. Now, he had the temerity to look them in the eye and tell them that God would punish them for their sins by allowing them to be defeated in war! Such a catastrophe would have unknown and devastating consequences and those who heard Amos would have been astonished. From their point of view, there was indeed a little trouble with the neighbouring state of Assyria, but because the nation was rich through trade, it was doing fine. What on earth was this trouble maker saying? The mood of the crowd changed with this prophecy of doom, and you can imagine them scratching at the ground for stones. The penalty for someone who insulted their nation like this was death, with no questions asked ...

Amos however, had only just begun. The Lord had given him much more to say; and as we will find out in our next study, he had to find a way of staying alive in order to say it!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Amos was concerned about the way that God's servants were 'muzzled' (2:12). Does anything like this happen today? If so, how?
2. What are the consequences of war for a nation today? Has this changed since ancient times? Can we say today that God sometimes judges nations through war?
3. What does this passage say to God's people today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

When attempting to understand a passage such as this, I find I need to return to God's Word many times in order understand what is happening. In this case, 2 Kings 14 to 16 and 2 Chronicles 26 to 28 reveal the essential background to the text, giving us a better overall picture of what life was like in Amos' day. These Scriptures talk about the life of kings and rulers, but they contain revealing little snippets illustrating what was happening in Israel and Judah generally. Also, maps and Bible dictionaries can help us understand this period of time. Without such aids, it is almost impossible to do anything other than react to the text in well-meaning ignorance.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *If you have the opportunity, share this passage of scripture and its meaning with others, and discuss its meaning. Try to picture the scene described in the study and discuss the feelings aroused by what Amos said.*
- *Pray for the church today, both established churches and newly founded churches, both of which face many serious issues which determine the future of their witness. Pray that the Lord will guide His people to listen to His Word.*

Final Prayer

All praise and glory is Yours, Jesus Christ my Saviour. You lift my heart and soul, You give me visions of peace and security, You give my life its hope and joy, You are the guard around me which never fails. All praise and glory is Yours, Jesus Christ my Saviour: AMEN
