

Prayer

You are the source of all goodness in me, Lord Jesus Christ.
 You have confronted the evil deep within me, and commanded it to go.
 You are glorious in doing Your will, through me, Your least important servant.
 You bring triumph out of the most difficult things within of life.
 You do for me repeatedly what I cannot do for myself.
 I love You and I praise You, Jesus Christ my Lord.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Trees

Trees add to the beauty of the world in which we live. Thank God for the way in which He creates things that are both functional and beautiful, thus making our world a thing of pleasure.

On-going prayers

- Pray for young people who are tempted into taking drugs
- Give thanks to God for the support you receive from friends
- Pray for those caught up in the earthquake in Java

Meditation

Tell me, my friend. Do you love the things of God?
 Or are you happy to be influenced by worldly things?

Do you let the Lord God help you in everything you do?
 Or do you find it easier to handle life by yourself?

Is Christ the driving force behind your daily life?
 Or is it someone else, or others, or even you, yourself?

Does God's Word attract and inspire You every day?
 Or does the television occupy more of your precious time?

Do you long to be with others who share your Christian faith?
 Or would you rather be with others who are 'better company'?

Can you testify to the wondrous things that God has done?
 Or do you prefer to keep your counsel about your Christian faith?

In the end you will have made your choices, for good or ill;
 Be careful, lest by default, you have not chosen Christ's way at all.

Bible Study - Amos 6:9-14

⁹ It will be like this; if ten men remain in one house, they will die. ¹⁰ Then, if a relative responsible for removing the bodies out of the house says to someone further inside, 'is there anyone else still with you?' and he answers 'No-one.' Then he will say 'Be quiet, we must not mention the name of the LORD.'

¹¹ For look, the LORD has given the command: the Palace will be struck down to the ground, and the small dwelling reduced to rubble.

¹² Do horses run on rocks? Or oxen plough the sea? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness. ¹³ You who rejoice in Lo-debar, and who say, 'Have we not seized Karnaim for ourselves by our own strength?'

¹⁴ 'Look, I am raising up a nation against you, O house of Israel,' says the LORD, the God of hosts, 'and they will oppress you, all the way from Lebo-hamath to the valley of the Arabah.'

Review

This reading is a most depressing passage, it is all about death and destruction. We know from the rest of the book of Amos that the general theme of his prophecy against the house of Israel was that they would be destroyed by war because of the injustices of the nation and their abandonment of the Lord their God in favour of the Ba'als. However, it is still hard to read a prophecy such as this, today, spoken against God's own people of Israel. When Amos began to prophesy (chapters 1 and 2), he spoke daringly about the judgement of God and its dire consequences. In this passage, however, there is a desperate and tragic feeling about the horrors of war described by Amos because we realise that Amos is describing the punishment of God's own people.

Each sentence of this passage captures the tragedy of war and punishment. In numb horror, relatives return to retrieve bodies from homes devastated by war (6:9,10), and the symbols of state like the great Palace at Samaria are torn down and reduced to rubble (6:11). Then, in verses 12 and 13, Amos pictures the shambles of a nation that is used to living with lies and deceit, and consequently comes to believe that its own strength will save it. This is a plain untruth, because in reality, the nation faces overwhelming odds! Amos declares that no-one can escape the Lord's wrath, because of their sin (6:14).

Sometimes, when we read passages such as these within the Old Testament, we turn away and dismiss them. We tell ourselves that we can learn little from such events because they happened in the past and were a long time before the redeeming work of Christ. Unfortunately, it would be unwise for us to respond like this, because God's people, both Jews and Christians, still turn away from Him and reap the same rewards of destruction as did people of ancient times. If we ignore what God has revealed about how His world works, then we will reap the consequences.

For example, many nations including Great Britain, USA, and others, defeated the terrible menace of Nazism in the 2nd World War. After this, many countries were blessed, and great advances were made for the general good of all, but these same countries now exhibit increasing pressures. Social instability has increased with the breakdown of family structures for the raising of children, and they have radical enemies across the world intent upon their downfall (in the form of extreme Islamists). Their own greed has created everything from financial instabilities that widen the gap between rich and poor, to the deadly pollution of the whole planet, now is in danger of choking our world to death within a few generations! The astonishing thing is that some Christians bury their heads in the sand when faced by the reality of God's judgement today and they refuse to read about why this happens by searching God's Word in the Old Testament! Our judgement now is even more a threat to life and limb than Amos' prophecies of war! When will we learn?

In addition, the terrible death and destruction in Amos' prophecy are not just a story of times past, and God did not just send out this punishment on sinful humanity with heartless disinterest. He knew that even this punishment would not actually change people, just as the tragedies of global warming and the threat of the end of the world as we know it because of global warming will not change people today. God made a plan whereby His own Son would become the recipient of every punishment for sin, so that we could be forgiven through Him. The reason why He has done this is because having lived with us in the person of Jesus Christ, He loves us, and this is the Gospel! We should not think that the terrible blows of sin that Jesus took on the Cross were merely personal; Jesus took all the sins of humanity on himself including bigotry, national ignorance and pride, irreligion, institutional injustice, and all the evils of war. Jesus took on Himself all the punishments of Amos' prophecies, so that those of us who call on His name may be set free from its threat!

Sometimes we need to read about what sin and its consequences really are, on a national and international scale as well as a personal scale, if we are to realise the universal range of the love of God through Jesus. He took the 'poison' of injustice and the 'bitterness' of unrighteousness (6:12), and also the pressures of the nations (6:14) on Himself, so that we might be free. Let us look to Him.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you feel able to deal with what happens when people die, or is it too terrible? How does Jesus Christ redeem death and bring salvation through it?
2. What lies and deception are current in the world today, which fly in the face of the evidence of what is wrong in the world?
3. How may we preach the Gospel so that nations will take notice of what we say?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have struggled with explaining these things ever since I was asked to teach the Old Testament at Bible College. I quickly realised that people ignore the Old Testament because they dislike the fact that God dispenses punishment in its pages. However, people are blind to the judgements of God that He is dispensing even today in our midst! We cannot face the fact that God is not just loving, He is just, and people do not put in the intellectual effort to realise that if God is to be truly loving He must be just, and sin must be judged and condemned.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *If you have an opportunity today, ask someone else at church or in your family about some of the issues raised by this study. Do you agree that Jesus took the sins of nations on Himself so that they may be set free? Or did Jesus' death apply only to individuals as individuals, not groups or nations?*
- *Pray that God will make His judgements clear to His people today, and that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the reality of how God's moral world works.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, You sent Your Son into the world to live the life of a man within this world, and He lived a life of integrity and love. Help us to follow His example and seek every opportunity to do what is right and good in the world, not just for ourselves and those we love, but for all people, and for You. AMEN
