

Prayer

Glory be to You Lord God, for you have made us all with such variety and diverse characteristics! We are all so different! We rejoice in the extraordinary variety you have created within humanity, and we wonder at the powerful way You have provided for all of us by saving us from our sins through Your Servant Jesus Christ. You have done all things, Lord God, and You have done all things well. We praise You, Lord God. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Mission

Pray for the mission activities of your local church, and any particular people who are involved in the administration of this work. Pray that it will be done well and to God's glory.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for electricity and for the good it can do for all
- Seek the Lord's will about wasteful supermarket packaging
- Pray about the issue of worldwide financial regulation

Meditation

Do not bear the pain alone;
Let Jesus the healer lead you towards the light
And bring you to a place of peace again.

Do not foster unforgiveness;
Let Him who could love even those who killed Him
Show you the way to loving all, again.

Do not be quick to offer blame;
Let Christ who called the upright to 'cast the first stone'
Suggest that God knows the truth, alone.

Do not let the sinner drag you down;
Let the Holy One of God stir your spirit deep within
To recognise that Satan's traps await.

Do not forget the Lord your God;
Let Him free within your inner being, free to roam, to work
To heal, to mould and change you –
And to save you!

Bible Study - Amos 8:1-8

¹ This is what the Lord GOD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. ² He said, 'Amos, what do you see?' So I said, "A basket of ripe fruit." Then the LORD said to me, 'The time is ripe for the end of my people Israel; I will not spare them any longer. ³ The temple songs will become the sound of wailing in that day,' says the Lord GOD; 'So many dead bodies thrown everywhere ... Silence!'

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy, and ruin the lives of the poor of the land, ⁵ saying, 'When will the new moon be over so we that can sell our grain; and the Sabbath so that we can market our wheat? We will shorten the measure (the ephah) and increase the price (the shekel), and cheat with dishonest measuring scales, ⁶ buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling even the floor-sweepings of wheat.' ⁷ The LORD has sworn by the majesty of Jacob: Never will I forget anything they have done! ⁸ Will not the land tremble because of this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile, and first swell and then subside again, just like the Nile of Egypt.

Review

You might think that we are picking up Amos' fiery prophecies anew after his confrontation with Amaziah (7:10-17). Amos appears to deliver a yet more damning prophecy (8:1-3) against Israel followed by a strongly worded exposé of the dishonesty and mal-practice that had corrupted Israel to the core (8:4-8). Amos spoke about this with obvious passion, but without spotting one significant feature of his work, we will be in danger of missing what he meant.

In the first half of Amos chapter 7, we read three visions of Amos. The first two began with a picture of God as merciful and concerned for His people despite their many sins (7:1-6), and withholding the punishment of Israel for all they had done wrong (7:3 and 7:6). In the third vision, Amos saw the Lord holding a plumb line against a wall, saying that He would not 'pass them by again', a prophecy that has been used by the church as a rallying call for the people to act justly and live in a godly manner. However, this is not what it meant. It was a vision with a warning, pointing towards the time when God would exact a full punishment on His people for their sins, just as our reading today (8:1-3) says. This, in truth, is the fourth and concluding vision of the sequence begun in chapter 7! The break between the third vision (7:7-9) and the fourth (8:1-3) is a dramatic pause containing the human clash between Amos and his enemies (7:10-17); but the whole series of visions is designed to show the spiritual consequences of the clash between God and His people. It is a combination of high drama and great literature!

So, the ultimate consequence of Israel's sins is announced formally in Amos 8:1-3. Israel is sentenced to death; 'The temple songs will become the sound of wailing in that day ... so many dead bodies thrown everywhere ... Silence!' These are awful words, but if we have not already gathered as much from Amos' prophecies, then we have not been reading his work with care; it has been alluded to throughout his prophecies (2:13-16, 3:11,12; 4:2,3,12, etc). Now, the death sentence is announced with brutal clarity; this is the terrible climax of Amos, the Old Testament equivalent of the Paul's famous words; 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom 6:23). Amos made this clear to us in some Hebrew word-play (which I have attempted to convey in English by means of the word 'ripe – 8:2). The Hebrew for 'ripe fruit' and 'the time is ripe' sound identical, meaning that whilst Israel were enjoying the good times (the ripe fruit), they made themselves ripe for God's judgement. By forgetting their God and forgetting to justice, they set themselves up for judgement.

The last part of our passage is a further description of the sins that had reduced God's people to a mess (8:4-6), with a catalogue of wrongful attitudes and breaches of honesty that have often bedevilled humanity. Amongst God's people, however, none of this was to be allowed. God had chosen His people to be a 'light to the Gentiles' (Is 42:6, 49:6), not a reflection of humanity at its worst. The sins of God's people had consequences of God's entire plan of salvation for the whole world, and without repentance, the covenant had been irreparably broken; not by God, but by His people (8:7,8)

Many readers of Amos wonder how he could possibly prophesy God's destruction of His own people in such a way; it seems incomprehensible. Surely, God was not supposed to be faithful to His people? It is worth observing here that in 721BC, the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and this was 30 or 40 years after Amos spoke. Israel was indeed wiped off the map of human history, never to be seen again. Now if this surprises you, then remember that when the rest of Israel was destroyed, God continued to work in the world through His people in the southern Kingdom of Judah and its capital Jerusalem. They are described in scripture as a 'remnant' of the people of Israel, in whom, through the Messiah, God did indeed work for the salvation of the world.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Debate this subject; does God destroy those who knowingly go against His will?
2. What unjust and illegal practices are to be found within this passage, and how are they practiced today?
3. How does God intervene in the world today to bring about justice, and is it right for us to pray that He does this, or that we do it on His behalf?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The awful death sentence of God on His own people in Amos is a harrowing passage of Scripture to read, but it is an important part of what we must learn about the history of God's Old Testament people. The complete annihilation of a portion of God's people is rather like the extermination of a branch of the church. For example, Moslems overran the 'Donatist' churches of North Africa in the sixth Century and there is no trace of them left today, and today, local church close in various parts of the world today, even though he

church as a whole is growing. What does God teach us by these difficult things? Surely at least, we must consider Amos' message and redouble our efforts to live a life based on Christ.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *The passage we have read asks us to look very carefully at the nature of our own world and the societies in which we live. Does any of this remind you of your own world and your own country? Does it remind you of the life of the church? Pray and ask the Lord to help you discern whether judgement is coming on your nation or your church.*
- *Pray for those who are bewitched by the sins of the world and do not perceive the judgement of God on all sin and wrongdoing. Pray that they will be led to hear the truth and be saved.*

Final Prayer

Keep me in Your presence this day, Lord Jesus. Keep me close to Your side as I walk the path before me; then, when difficulty comes, may I have confidence to deal with everything in the way You would wish of me. Thank You, Lord Jesus; AMEN
