

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: AMOS 8:4-9:10**

To understand what the coming day of judgment for Israel looked like.

Power Outage

There are few things that are more startling and disorienting than a sudden power outage. Especially at night, when the sun has set, a power outage can feel very unsettling. Even in a home you are very familiar with, without light (and by extension, sight) you can quickly find yourself bumping into furniture, knocking things over, and frustrated. Most outages are caused by relatively minor issues and are resolved within a few hours, and are typically very local to one specific area due to a blown generator or a downed power line. The worst outage in United States history, known as the Northeastern Blackout, took place in 1965. The outage lasted for 13 hours and affected Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.

In Amos chapter 8, Yahweh describes what the coming day of judgment will look like for Israel, and it's akin to the worst power outage imaginable: “‘It will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight’” (Amos 8:9). God will bring about a judgment on the nation of Israel that will include several curses, marked by a total lack of light in the middle of the day. Apart from it being far worse, it's also not repairable. The judgment that began did not end until God had depleted their numbers and moved them into exile.

A Doomed Message

Verse 4 begins with the phrase, “Hear this,” which is a herald's summons to his audience (Ps. 49:1). God addresses those He is about to judge, and then describes what they are like. Below is a breakdown of some of the key terms and concepts.

BROUGHT TO AN END

Verse 4 says that they, “bring the poor to an end” (ESV), “do away with the humble of the land” (NASB), or, “to make the poor of the land to fail” (KJV), depending on the translation you are reading. The Hebrew, literally translated reads, “to cause to cease.” Their treatment of the poor and the needy leads to their death, but even more subtle, it leads to their non-existence. They are seemingly *erased* by the unrighteous actions of Israel.

THE TONGUE REVEALS THE HEART

Verses 5 and 6 reveal their inward intentions. They had apparently closed their shops in observance of the law relating to New Moons and the Sabbath, but their true motive was not to honor God through worship, but to simply do what was required so that they could get back to their dishonest practices. They, “make the bushel smaller and the shekel,” and, “cheat with dishonest scales,” (Amos 8:5), indicating their business practices were shady and crooked. Their hearts were not oriented towards the Lord, but profits.

The Looming Day

A large majority of chapter 8 and into chapter 9 discusses what the coming judgment will look like, “on that day” (Amos 8:9). Below is a breakdown of some of the different aspects of this judgment.

NATURAL DISASTERS

One major aspect of the judgment they face is the prevalence of natural disasters. They will experience massive earthquakes (Amos 8:8). The indication of a rising and falling of the Nile, an experience that was both destructive and common in this day, is used to illustrate the rise and fall of Israel (Amos 8:14). These natural disasters are native to Israel’s experience, but they might be understood typologically as well, in that they point to an even greater day of judgment with far worse natural disasters that precede the coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:29-30; Rev. 1:7).

DAY INTO NIGHT

There will be a massive blackout that will take place as well, which is consistent with the curses of breaking the covenant mentioned in Deuteronomy 28:29: “At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark.” This imagery is also consistent with a natural phenomena that had occurred in Amos’ time. There were two recorded solar eclipses visible in that region, one on February 9, 784 B.C., and one on June 15, 763 B.C. as well. The kind of blackout that is referenced here would, of course, be much worse, but it at least picks up on a tangible experience that would have heightened their fear of the incoming punishment.

COMPLETE DESPAIR

Verse 10 captures the ultimate despair that they will face. Their, “festivals will turn to mourning and all your songs into lamentation.” It will be like the worst and most gut-wrenching human experience: “I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son.” The loss of a child is incomprehensible, and that it is the only son not only means a loss of a loved one, but the loss of a future for that family line since there will be no more offspring. This is reminiscent of the, “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” of hell (Matt. 13:42).

SILENCE

One other detail described, and for certain the worse detail, is a special kind of famine that will come upon them: “I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of Yahweh” (Amos 8:11). God will stop speaking to them. Part of the covenant that Israel enjoyed was communication with God. Yet, God had communicated regularly with them through the prophets and they shut them up and told them to no longer prophesy (Amos 2:12).

The Lord's Hand

Chapter 9 reminds us that these are not merely things that God is allowing to happen to Israel, but rather things He is causing to happen to them. This is a reminder, as He has already told us that in Amos 3:6: “Does disaster come to a city unless the LORD has done it?” Again, remember that God’s operation towards His covenant people was different then than it is now for us. God operates through patience, waiting until the final Day of the Lord (Rom. 9:22-23). For more on this, see Session 4. God’s actions towards Israel are harsh, because their sin is harsh in His sight. He will take down the capital, causing the thresholds to fall and kill those that are there, while others will die by the sword; none will escape (Amos 9:1). Verses 2-4 indicate there is nowhere one could hide to escape the wrath coming.

One interesting detail comes in verse 6, where God says that He is, “the One who builds His upper chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth” (Amos 9:6). This counters the growing (and absurdly ridiculous) theory of a flat earth. The Scripture has always maintained what science has only recently confirmed, that the earth is a globe shape (Is. 40:22). The summation comes in verse 8, and it’s bad news: “Behold, the eyes of the LORD God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth.” God’s destruction of the northern kingdom will be comprehensive. The one shred of good news comes at the end of verse 8: “Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob.” While God’s judgment will be all-consuming, it will also leave a remnant for Him to one day redeem. God’s grace takes stage yet again even in the midst of brutal justice, and next week, we will look at the coming promises of restoration.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Amos 8:4-6. How is Yahweh’s audience described here? What sort of things do they say? What do their words indicate about how they feel about worship?

2. Read Amos 8:7-8. What physical occurrences will take place during this judgment? What is the Nile compared to (Hint: See verse 14)?

Day Two

1. Read Amos 8:9-10. What will Yahweh do according to verse 9? How will people respond to this judgment? How devastating will it be?

2. Read Amos 8:11-14. What kind of famine is coming to the land? How will this affect the people?

Day Three

1. Read Amos 9:1-4. Who is responsible for the destruction described? What will happen, according to verse 1? In your own words, write down the ways God gives that people will try to escape this judgment. Will they succeed?

2. Read Amos 9:5-6. How is God described in these two verses? What does the, “vaulted dome” indicate?

Day Four

1. Read Amos 9:7-8. What will God do to, “the sinful kingdom?” Will they be *fully* destroyed?

2. Read Amos 9:9-10. In your own words, what is God saying in these final two verses?

Week 9 Discussion: Silence is Not Golden

Amos 8:11-12, describes a time when God will send a famine, “not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD.” God’s judgment on Israel will result in divine silence for some time. One of the covenant promises that Israel enjoys is the ability to commune with the living God. Silence would leave them in darkness. Today, as God’s people, we have the ability to commune with the living God as well through the power of His Holy Spirit and the revealed Word of God, and yet often Christians *choose* a kind of silence that was seen as a curse to the ancient people of God. Talk as a group about the importance of God’s Word to you, and how you can continue to grow in your fellowship with God through His Spirit.

1. Icebreaker: How often do you get into the Word?
2. Do you see studying God’s Word as more of a learning experience or a communing experience? Why?
3. How different is Bible study with other people in comparison to Bible study alone?
4. Have you ever had a, “Holy Spirit” moment while studying the Scripture? Talk about it with the group.
5. Do you notice a difference in the way you treat other people and think about yourself when you have not been in the Word of God? In other words, does it have an impact on how you think and act?
6. How would you feel if the Bible was taken from you and you could never read it again? What effect would that have on you? What effect would it have on your community?

Takeaways:

1. God outlines what the coming day of judgment will be like.
2. God promises that even though the incoming judgment will be thorough, there will be a remnant that will survive.

PRAYER REQUESTS: