

“All the Prophets Testify”: Amos 6:1-14

Midweek Bible Study – 2026 May 27

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<https://www.pilgrimlc.org/bible-studies/prophets>

Invocation & Opening Prayer

Follow-up to last class: pace, depth, other comments or questions?

Outline (the following is adapted from *TLSB* p.1457; we are expanding/collapsing the major divisions as we proceed through them):

- I. Judgment against the Nations (1:3-2:16)
- II. Declarations concerning Israel (3:1-6:14)
 - A. Accusations Lodged against Israel (3:1-4:13)
 - B. Lamentation for Israel (5:1-3)
 - C. Exhortation to Seek Yahweh (5:4-17)
 - D. Judgment on the Day of Yahweh (5:18-6:14)
 - 1. The day of Yahweh (5:18-20)
 - 2. Detestable ritual practices (5:21-27)
 - 3. Warning to the secure and complacent (6:1-7)**
 - 4. Certain destruction for the prideful house of Israel (6:8-14)**
- III. Visions (7:1-9:15)

Note that Amos 6:1-7 is the Old Testament Reading for *Lutheran Service Book* Proper 21 C, for the Sunday on September 25-October 1 in that year of the Three-Year Series, when the Amos Reading is paired with the Gospel Reading of Luke 16:19-31, the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus (without mentioning the Lectionary connection, Lessing refers to the rich man's indifference to Lazarus and the leaders of Amos's day's similar attitude).

Warning to the secure and complacent (6:1-7):

6:1 *Woe*: as noted at 5:18, the interjection translated “Woe” can be “Ah”, “Alas”, “Ha”, “Ho”, or “O”, and, in this case, the interjection is used for the second time in Amos (Laetsch goes on to talk about these two “woes”; the ESV puts a third one at 6:4, but the Hebrew does not have it [compare other translations]). At 5:18 we noted that Lessing cites Andersen and Freedman's saying that the woe is a promise, even an oath, and that Lessing likens the word to the tolling of a church bell at a funeral. As Keil-Delitzsch indicates, the woe is to those as addressed in 6:1-7, but the warning itself seems to be the certain destruction of 6:8-14.

to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria: the recipients of the woe are expressed with an article with an adjective in the first case and with a participle in the second case and rendered as third-person, though Lessing takes them as a vocative address (confer other third-persons and compare second-persons throughout the passage). The adjective “ease” can come from security, as the parallel verb expresses, or the adjective can express carelessness or arrogance (Keil-Delitzsch uses “secure”; Lessing uses “complacent”). The verb can indicate trust, confidence, boldness, and also carelessness (Keil-Delitzsch uses “careless”). Zion narrowly refers to the Jerusalem temple’s hill, but in this case it stands for the southern Kingdom of Judah, just as the mountain of Samaria where its place of worship was stands for the northern Kingdom of Israel with its capital city Samaria. Lessing reads “mountain” also back to Zion. The mention of Zion is often taken as indicating that the southern Kingdom is included as a target of the warning. *CSSB* comments, “Although Amos spoke primarily to Israel, Judah (Zion) also deserved his rebuke (cf. 2:4-5), for Israel properly comprised all 12 tribes.” Laetsch discusses their flourishing conditions’ lulling them into a false sense of security and their trust in their strong fortifications and expectation that God would not forsake them.

the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes: a question is whether the two line-portions are continuing the Judah-Israel split of the first two line-portions or are leaving Judah behind and the first of these two phrases is further explained by the second of these two phrases. If parallel, then “the first of the nations” would refer to Judah, and “the house of Israel” alone refers to Samaria (though compare Lessing). If not, then “the notable men of the first of the nations” are “those to whom the house of Israel comes”. *TLSB* comments, “Those to whom the people come for advice, leadership, and an example to follow. It is doubtful that they were advising as they ought, i.e., the nation needed to heed Amos’s warnings and repent.” On “first of the nations”, *CSSB* comments, “In Israel’s self-complacent eyes in this time of her newly recovered power and prosperity.” Lessing notes the first of the nations here, the choicest of olive oils in 6:6 and the first of the exiles in 6:7, all related in Hebrew but obscured in English. Compare the nation that will be brought against Israel mentioned in 6:14. Keil-Delitzsch sees a reminder of the leaders’ standing in the line of Moses and Aaron. Lessing notes the people should have made pilgrimages to the Lord in Jerusalem instead of to human leaders.

6:2 *Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines*. All the verbs—pass over, see, go, go-down—are second-person masculine plural (confer other second-persons and compare third-persons throughout the passage). Calneh is said to be a Syrian city north of the bend on the Orontes River or in the land of Shinar or Babylonia. Further south, Hamath is said to be an important Syrian city north of Damascus, and, further south still, Gath is said to be one of five royal cities of the Philistines on the coastal plain west of Judah. Note the two capitals in 6:1 and three capitals in 6:2, their conditions indicating the conditions of the whole kingdoms. The “trip” north to south seems intentional (compare the north and south geographical indicators in 6:14); two of the three end up in the Assyrian Kingdom (or all three). *CSSB* speculates about the status of the cities and who may have spoken them (that is, perhaps the house of Israel mentioned at the end of 6:1).

Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory: rhetorical questions expecting the answer “no”. Lessing suggests the first question pertains to the theological condition and the second to size and military strength. *TLSB* comments, “If these three powerful city-states suffered military incursions and defeat, how can Israel expect to be spared the same fate, since by then they were hardly in a better position?” A nation’s G(g)od(s) ultimately determined whether a nation was victorious or defeated, whether the people recognized that controlling factor or not (confer Lessing and his reference to Psalm 20:7..

6:3 *O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence:* “the ones putting” is arguably third-person as in 6:1, but “bringing near” is second-person masculine plural, so construing the first half-line as “you-all” seems legitimate (continuing the second-person address from 6:2). Putting far away the day of disaster would seem to be thinking and telling others that the disaster would not happen; Roehrs-Franzmann says “ignoring” it. Lessing notes the day is the same as the Day of the Lord in 5:18-20, evil or good depending on one’s status as an unbeliever or believer. Regarding bringing near the seat of violence, *TLSB* comments, “Amos repeats his charge about Israel’s pervasive injustice and their oppression of the poor...As a result of their callous and even brutal behavior, Israel’s leaders will bear a special responsibility for precipitating the very disaster they claim will never occur.” (Their treatment in the exile is explicit in 6:7.) Putting far and bringing near are a contrast of their own. With a slight change to one Hebrew letter, Roehrs-Franzmann has “year” of violence, thought to be a better parallel contrast than “seat”. Keil-Delitzsch understands “seat” as “throne” of violence being moved nearer and nearer to them. Kretzmann adds, “that they become guilty of these transgressions with ever-increasing frequency”.

6:4 *Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches:* as noted at 6:1, “Woe” is not in the Hebrew. The construction again is a participle in one case and an adjective in the other. The switch back to the third-person is consistent. The “lie” and “stretch out” seem parallel (confer the stretching out in 6:7). Lessing notes the reference may be to people reclining to feast or sleeping off the effects of an alcoholic party; similarly Lessing says the stretching out can be draped over as in a drunken stipur. The beds of ivory and couches seem parallel. *TLSB* notes, “Symbols of luxury. Numerous pieces of furniture inlaid with ivory in the Phoenician style have been unearthed in Israel.” We may remember the corner of the couch and part of a bed rescued in 3:12 (there is no indication that the “seat” in 6:3 leads to the beds/couches of 6:4).

and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall: *TLSB* comments, “Choicest meat, normally eaten only at feasts”, continuing “Extravagance points to misplaced priorities and hearts far more concerned with opulence than righteousness”, and quoting Luther that “The Lord is not condemning the possession of wealth but the misuse thereof (AE 18:170).”

6:5 *who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music*: worship or a perversion of it may well be in view, given what precedes in 6:4 and what follows in 6:6. *TLSB* comments, “The idle rich frittered away their days singing and making merry”, so that the reference to David is “An ironic comparison, since David was renowned for his contributions to sacred music, i.e., the compositions he dedicated to the Lord and the provisions he made for the temple worship”. (Of course, the psalms of David ultimately were Divinely inspired.) Laetsch notes the unnatural manner of singing, and Keil-Delitzsch take the playing as upon stringed instruments invented by David, while Lessing wonders whether David actually invented instruments or composed new music on existing instruments. Regardless, Lessing comments, “The Israelites described in Amos 6:5 (wrongly) imagine that they too are composing God-pleasing worship music.”

6:6 *who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils*: *TLSB* notes that not just cups but bowls of wine were consumed, and the bowls were those used for sprinkling sacrificial blood on the altar, suggesting abuse by the priests or Levites. Lessing gives a modern example of drinking communion wine straight from the bottle. *TLSB* comments, “Hedonistic [pleasure-based] excesses were ironically dressed up in religious garb.” Keil-Delitzsch contrasts their ancestors’ service of the Lord with their service of their god, their belly. Similarly the anointing is said to be that associated with ritual anointing. Keil-Delitzsch says the anointing was a sign of unbridled rejoicing suspended in times of mourning and contrasting with what follows.

but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph: the earlier lamentations are associated with grief. The ruin could be the result of their bad leadership or of God’s resulting destruction. As noted previously, Joseph was a son of Jacob/Israel but his sons Ephraim and Manasseh inherited in their favored father’s place. Lessing recalls that Joseph’s brothers ate a meal while Joseph languished in a pit (Genesis 37:25). *TLSB* comments, “Because of their misplaced priorities, the rich pamper and indulge themselves while ignoring the spiritual depravity and impending destruction of their nation.” The Hebrew translated “grieved” can be “ill”, and Laetsch comments, “They may often have returned feeling sick and ill at ease because of the overindulgence in food and drink; but they were always ready for another bout. Yet never did they grieve for the ruin of Israel, the spiritual downfall of the nation, their utter lack of trust and faith in the God of salvation, the total absence of loving obedience to His will”.

6:7 *Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile*: because of all of the things described, arguably going back to 6:1, those alternately referred to in the third-person and addressed in the second-person, will lead the way into exile. *TLSB* comments, “Additional irony. The rich, whose attitude was famously ‘me first,’ will have the distinction of being punished first. They will be at the head of the column of deportees, leading the march into exile.”

and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away: Regarding the revelry, *TLSB* comments, “Near Eastern version of a drinking party”, while Lessing discusses a *marzeah* feast, a pagan feast that can be connected with a funeral banquet. On the stretching out, confer 6:4. *TLSB* comments, “This opulent class, though at ease and seemingly without a care in the world, will soon stop its partying.” With reference to Psalm 137, Lessing refers to the day their music died. With Geoffrey Chaucer's 1374 poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, all good things must come to an end? Not the eternal joys of heaven for those who are sorry for their sin and trust God to forgive them for Jesus's sake!

Certain destruction for the prideful house of Israel (6:8-14):

6:8 *The Lord God has sworn by himself:* as back at 4:2, the Lord affirms what He says with an oath sworn by what *TLSB* calls “the highest referent possible”.

declares the Lord, the God of hosts: nothing had been explicitly attributed to God since 5:27, not that all of it is not in some sense God's Word. The use of the Lord's Name that infers military might seems especially appropriate in this context. (Confer 6:14.)

I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it: “abhor” and “hate” are not bad words when referring to God's righteous wrath. “Pride of Jacob”, “strongholds”, and “the city and all that is in it” seem roughly parallel. *TLSB* comments, “Because Israel's ‘strongholds’ have become a symbol of the people's prideful self-sufficiency, the Lord is revolted by them.” Laetsch suggests the single “city” is used collectively of both capital cities (and so then implicitly both kingdoms). *GWfT* notes that the consequences of the leaders' actions ultimately fall upon all of the people. Lessing notes that the city is delivered up to a nation in 6:14.

6:9 *And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die:* we might remember the fraction of survivors from 5:3 (the opposite of “decimation”), but in this verse the mortality at first seems to be 100%, though Lessing says the ten may be the survivors of 5:3. *TLSB* comments, “Impending disaster will be unprecedented. No one will escape unscathed.” Keil-Delitzsch notes that ten in one house is a large number assumed to emphasize that no one escapes. Lessing says the feasting may be taking place in the house.

6:10 *And when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the innermost parts of the house:* *TLSB* comments, “A family member comes to empty the house of its dead because none at the house are able or willing to perform the duties of burial.” *CSSB* commenting on the NIV text refers to burning the bodies or a memorial fire for the dead since cremation was not generally practiced. Roehrs-Franzmann thinks cremation was done contrary to custom because of the number of the dead. Keil-Delitzsch notes an obligation to burn them in such cases to prevent the air from being polluted by decomposition. Lessing refers to an “embalmer”, though that does not seem right. Lessing also mentions the possibility that the house with rotting corpses was burned for purification and the bones removed for interment.

and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house: apparently all ten who remained in the house did not die as seemed to be the case in 6:9? *TLSB* comments, “Back room of a pillared house, dark and good for hiding.” Or, maybe the person in the back of the house came in with the “relative”; several commentators refer to a “helper”, though Lessing refers to one person as a “kinsman-embalmer”.

“Is there still anyone with you?”: *TLSB* comments, “So many have died that the burying relative has last track.”

he shall say, ‘No’; and he shall say ‘Silence! We must not mention the name of the Lord’: *TLSB* comments, “Rather than invoking God’s name in prayer (as we respond, ‘Oh, my God’ when surprised), they are afraid to speak it, knowing God has brought the punishment.” *CSSB* thinks the relative forbids the survivor to pray. Laetsch sees hopeless despair. Luther thinks no one will preach the Name of the Lord and that worship and praise will cease. The Lord’s bringing the punishment is more explicit in what follows, but the house need not be the same house, though Lessing (with reference to Stuart) refers to house as a catchword for the section.

6:11 *For behold, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits*: we may remember 3:6’s asking if a disaster comes to a city unless the Lord has done it. Lessing suggests 6:11 gives the reason for the end of 6:10. And, Lessing explains that the greatest house and smallest house includes all houses in between. *TLSB* comments on this verse, “Neither rich nor poor will be spared. Significantly, Amos repeats why this all-encompassing tragedy came: fed up with Israel’s apostasy, the Lord has commanded this destruction.”

6:12 *Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen?*: Lessing notes that some horses can negotiate some rocks on moderately rocky ground. Roehrs-Franzmann refers to scaling cliffs with horses, and Lessing is similar with horses running on a cliff. *CSSB* notes the second question is sometimes translated “plow the sea with oxen”. *TLSB* comments: “Absurd rhetorical questions. Israel’s injustice and unrighteousness are so extreme they go against nature.” Lessing points to Luther’s remembering Amos’s agricultural background.

But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood: *TLSB* comments, “Israel’s wickedness is so perverse that it unnaturally corrupts what is good.” Keil-Delitzsch comments, “The perversion of right into its opposite can no more bring salvation than horses can run upon rocks, or any one plough upon such a soil with oxen.”

6:13: *you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, “Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?”*: Lo-debar is said to be an Ammonite city in northern Gilead, but the name means “nothing”. *TLSB* comments, “Sarcastic wordplay; vanity of Israel is such that they rejoice at nothingness.” Karnaim is said to be an Aramean city north and east of Lo-debar, the name of which means “two horns” or “horns”, which are a symbol of military might and strength. *TLSB* comments, “Also wordplay...Amos criticizes Israel for placing its trust in human strength rather than in God.” *CSSB* refers to the places as being taken by the Assyrians soon after Amos’s day. In this case, the answer to the rhetorical question is “no”, their victory depended on God; God is mocking their self-confidence and contrasts it with what follows.

6:14 “*For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel*”: *TLSB* counts this as the third time, presumably in the passage, that “the Lord repeats that Israel’s crushing defeat is in accord with his plan (vv 8, 11)”. God through Amos also already said that the Lord would work through an adversary (for example, 3:11). Compare the nation raised up to Israel as the “first of the nations” in 6:1. The specific nation, Assyria, is still not mentioned.

declares the Lord, the God of hosts: confer above at 6:8. The words can function as an *inclusio* (confer Lessing).

“and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.”:

Lebo-hamath is said to be city in northern Lebanon, beyond Israel’s northern border.

Kretzmann refers to the entering point of the Assyrians. The brook of the Arabah is said to be the southern border of the northern Kingdom, near the northern end of the Salt/Dead Sea or alternatively the southeastern corner. (Compare the north and south geographical indicators in 6:2.) *TLSB* comments, “By means of these geographical references, Amos conveys yet another way that the impending devastation will be all-encompassing.”

Roehrs-Franzmann thinks the northern and southern limits take in the northern and southern kingdoms.

What are you taking home from the prophecy considered tonight?

TLSB’s Law and Gospel Application Note for chapter 6 says, “Many in Israel made pampering themselves a full-time occupation, smugly imagining that material wealth was clear-cut proof that they were right with God. People today make the same mistake, interpreting their material prosperity as a sign that they need not humble themselves and turn away from complacency. However, God desires to give Himself to us. This is why His Son became incarnate for us and for our salvation.”

Material wealth is really no indicator of relationship with God. The Lord can bless with material wealth or not. The devil can be permitted to take it away, as was the case with Job. The only reliable indicators of relationship with God are His Word and Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit is given and works to create and sustain faith in Christ.

Next time, June 3, Amos 7:1-6

Closing Prayer & Benediction