

• **Two accusations**

Amos now starts a new section, which runs to Amos 6:14. Once again it is marked out by Amos' habit of beginning and ending a section with the same thought. He begins with a description of Samaria as a ruined and shattered kingdom <sup>1</sup>, focusing on its powerlessness in holding on to what it has accumulated by violence <sup>2</sup>, and on the uselessness of its religion <sup>3</sup>. A dangerous enemy will soon surround the land. At the end of the section Amos returns to the same theme. God says He is 'raising up a nation' against Samaria <sup>4</sup> and He will devastate the land. Between those two points <sup>5</sup> we have Amos' further analysis of Israel's corrupt society, produced by a corrupt religion. In 3:9–15 he has two accusations.

<sup>1</sup> 3:9-15

<sup>2</sup> 3:9-12

<sup>3</sup> 3:13-15

<sup>4</sup> 6:14

<sup>5</sup> 3:9; 6:14

**1. Israel was full of chaos and violence**

**1. Israel was full of chaos and violence**, and so God was raising up an enemy to destroy the land <sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 3:9-12

First, Amos invites two pagan peoples to witness what is happening in Israel: Ashdod, a Philistine town,<sup>1</sup> and Egypt. Two groups of people which were the traditional enemies of Israel are invited to see what is happening. The residents of the palaces of Philistia and Egypt are invited to judge the residents of the palaces in Samaria.

1 See footnote

• **Israel's enemies invited to see what is happening**

*“Cry out to the palaces in Ashdod, and to the palaces in the land of Egypt. Say to them, ‘Gather yourselves on the hills of Samaria, and see the many uproars inside it, and the oppressions in its midst.’”* <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3:9

• **Even pagan nations know enough to judge Israel**

‘Uproars’ means tumult, agitation, instability in the nation. There is such wickedness in Israel that even pagan nations know enough of right and wrong to pronounce judgement upon Israel.

The violence in Israel has become so normal, that people hardly think there is anything wrong with it.

*“‘For they have no knowledge of doing right,’ says Yahweh, ‘These people who accumulate the rewards of violence and robbery in their palaces.’”* <sup>1</sup>  
*They will be utterly overthrown.*  
*‘Therefore thus says the sovereign Yahweh: “An enemy! An enemy surrounding the land. And he shall pull down your strength from you, and your palaces shall be plundered.”’* <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3:10

<sup>2</sup> 3:10

• **Israel's fall to Assyria fulfilled 30 years afterwards**

The enemy is Assyria. Actually about thirty years later an Assyrian king marched west, invaded the kingdom of Syria and brought Israel under its power. Israel tried to resist Assyrian power but did not succeed in doing so. In 723 BC Israel fell; the people were exiled and Israel as an distinct nation ceased to

exist. They had been warned by Amos more than thirty years before.

• *An illustration of devastation taken from the Mosaic law*

To explain the cause of God's anger, Amos uses an illustration taken from the Mosaic law.

*“Therefore thus says Yahweh:  
“As a shepherd rescues from the mouth of a lion, two legs, or a piece of an ear,  
so shall the people of Israel be rescued,  
those who dwell in Samaria,  
leaving only the corner of a bed,  
and a piece<sup>2</sup> of a couch.”* <sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See footnote

<sup>1</sup> 3:12

Amos' point is based on the law of Exodus 22:10–13. When a sheep was attacked by a lion and killed, the evidence of the incident had to be produced, if the shepherd was not to be accused of theft. After the lion had done its work perhaps only a few scraps of the sheep were left but these had to be produced as evidence of what had happened.

When Assyria has done its work, Israel will be utterly devastated. Nothing will be left except a few scraps. Amos says what will be left will be *'the corner of a bed, and a piece of a couch'*! This will be all that will remain of Israel. As the few remaining scraps indicate what sort of animal was killed by the lion, the few remaining scraps of Israel will show what sort of nation it was: a nation whose remains are beds and couches! A nation that had got used to a lazy and sensuous lifestyle.

*2. Israel's religion was powerless to help*

**2. Israel's religion was powerless to help.** The important question to ask about our faith is: does it deliver us from the degenerate ways of the world around us. In Israel it did not!

“Hear and testify against the house of Jacob.” Oracle of the sovereign Yahweh, the Almighty <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 3:12

*“For on that day when I will punish the transgressions of Israel,  
I will also punish the altars of Bethel.  
And the horns of the altar shall be broken  
and shall fall to the ground. <sup>1</sup>  
I will strike the winter house and the summer house  
and the houses of ivory shall perish,  
and the great houses shall come to an end”  
Oracle of Yahweh.’ <sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> 3:14

<sup>2</sup> 3:15

In 3:9–12 Amos was concerned about fortresses and the rewards of war. In 3:13–15 Amos is concerned about altars, and religious sanctuaries. Just as the palaces were doomed, so the religion of Samaria was doomed also.

• *Israel's powerless religion did not change hearts*

It was a religion that did not get rid of 'transgressions' or 'rebellions'. True faith in the promises of God leads to submission to the ways of God. Fake religion does nothing about rebelliousness. It does not change the heart.

• *Israel's powerless religion did not bring the people to know God*

• *Israel's powerless religion did not bring people into a life of discipline*

It was a religion that did not bring people to know God. 'Bethel', which means 'house of God', was famous as the place where Jacob the ancestor of the nation had met with God. Now people admired Bethel, but they knew nothing of Jacob's God or Jacob's experience of knowing God. Bethel itself would come under judgement.

It was a religion that did not bring people into a life of discipline. As Amos 3:12 has suggested, the people lived a life of luxury. They had their summerhouses and their winter houses. There is nothing wrong with wealth, but we have to ask questions about how it is used. The wealth of Israel was used to make the people lazy and indolent. They loved luxury but they did not love God. And at this point their religion did not help them. It left them unchanged.

Footnotes

1 Possibly we should read 'Assyria' here (as the Greek Old Testament has it) but in a difficult textual decision I prefer to give the Masoretic text the benefit of the doubt.

2 The Hebrew word here is of unknown meaning. 'A piece' gets the idea but which piece is unknown.



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