

Amos
“Cold Comfort”
Amos 6

Please open in your Bibles to Amos chapter six, and we're going to read Amos 6:1-14.

This is the word of the Lord. Please stand.

“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! 2 Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, 3 O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? 4 “Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, 5 who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, 6 who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! 7 Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.” 8 The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts: “I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.” 9 And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. 10 And when one’s relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, “Is there still anyone with you?” he shall say, “No”; and he shall say, “Silence! We must not mention the name of the Lord.” 11 For behold, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits. 12 Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood— 13 you who rejoice in Lo-debar, who say, “Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?” 14 “For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord, the God of hosts; “and they shall oppress you from Lebo-Hamath to the Brook of the Arabah.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Please be seated.

Well, shortly after I moved here, I was still learning how to navigate the roads here in southern Birmingham. And in case you grew up here and didn't realize that the rest of the country doesn't have a bunch of two lane roads that are weaved in up and down and have no shoulders on the sides of them. And so I was learning as I was driving home one night, I was learning the lesson of how to drive on these roads, and that is particularly at night. Take some of those turns

slowly. You don't know what's on the other side of the turn. And it happened, I think it was leaving a Sunday night service. And I was driving back home and I came around the corner and right as I came around the corner, there was a pickup, a big, full size pickup that was parked in the middle of the road trying to take a left hand turn, but was blocked because of oncoming traffic. So I came right up on him, hit the brakes as hard as I could. Kind of scared. It didn't quite make a screeching sound, but zoomed right up to right behind him and stopped. And as soon as I did, I saw that his car was actually ringed in blue lights, which then turned on, flashed for a second, and then as he turned, he looked out his window at me and I did this. And he kept driving. Okay. All right. Now I want to tell you. How do you think I felt about that? Did I say that jerk flashing his blue lights at me? No, I did not say that. What did I say? Oh, thank the Lord. He warned me, but he didn't arrest me. He could have. He could have given me a ticket. He probably could have got me on something even worse. But what did you do? He taught me a lesson. Be careful about these roads. Drive slowly. Take the turn slowly. You don't know what kind of danger you can get yourself into. Right. And that's true of all kinds of situations like this. Any time you get pulled over by a police officer and they give you a warning when they pull away, you're usually not mad. You're relieved. Right? It was an act of kindness to you to warn you.

Or if you're a parent of a child and you say, don't do that. You know, don't touch the oven. And the child goes like this. He said, don't, don't do it, honey. Don't touch the oven. Right. And they get a little bit closer. Right. As a parent, you're not being mean by warning them. You're being kind. You're being life giving to them. You're caring for them, particularly if you warn them ahead of time.

It's important that we remember this as we're reading the prophets, because even now, as we're coming out of chapter six of Amos, we've been in a series of judgment oracles where the Lord is telling them, I'm going to destroy you if you keep doing these things.

I'm going to lay out exactly where you're airing. I'm going to tell you what you're doing wrong, and I'm going to warn you. Look at these. Look at these by words. Look at these examples of my judgment. Don't be like them. And yet he's doing this all decades. Decade, probably two decades. Depends on exactly how you date these.

It's not exactly easy, but this is probably about two decades before the fall of Samaria. He's giving them enough time. He's warning them. He's shouting at the top of his lungs through his prophet Amos. And we need to remember that this is not meant to be harsh or cruel. This is a warning. It's grace to these people. They need to hear. Just like we need to hear. So as we turn to this last of the judgment oracles and we're about we're leaving now just to remember where we've been in chapters one and two, where the oracles against the nations remember that that culminated in Israel. We then started a covenantal judgment in chapter three. That's continued

on now to chapter six, where we're getting the judgments of how they've broken the covenant with the Lord.

Now, in chapter seven, what we get to next week, we're now going to turn to, another interesting section where the Lord now lays out for them and says to them, what should I do? What would you do? Prophet and the prophet, by describing this interaction with the Lord is really asking Israel, what would you do if you were the Lord? Israel? Would you judge them or would you show them mercy? So that's where we're going, but we're still here at this last chapter. Now, dealing with judgments and this judgments here are really dealing with two problems that have arisen in Israel.

But also you'll notice in this chapter, Judah is brought back into the picture. This is not just about Israel. This is also about those who reside in Zion. That's Judah, that's Jerusalem. And the Lord is telling them here. My plan was always for you to be one kingdom. I was never by plan. You know the endgame. I should put it this way. This is all a part of God's plan. But the endgame was never that you would be divided. Two kingdoms. The dynasty of Omri in the north and the dynasty of David in the south. It was always meant to be one kingdom under David. And so we see here that it's not just Israel, but it's also Judah and Jerusalem who are receiving the scrutiny of the Lord and their two being warned here. So this isn't just about Judah.

We'll see here who says what? Those who are at ease in Zion. Those who feel themselves secure on the mountain of Samaria. That's the two capital cities that he brings into the picture here. Now, Jerusalem had long been an old city. It was a sort of storied city, was kind of like, a lower, you know, a lower level Babylon, you know, Babel and Babylon goes all the way back. The name means gate of the gods. It's kind of like, you know, Rome or actually modern day Jerusalem to, you know, these great historic cities. And yet Samaria was a relatively new city. As a matter of fact, we have a story in in I Kings 16:24 where Omri goes to the area where Samaria is, he buys the land, and then he develops the kingdom. So it's a relatively new city. It's not one of the old glorious cities, but it's a new city. And what do they hear here? Both those in the glorious Old City of Jerusalem and those in this new city of Samaria are under judgment. You can't take refuge in saying that we are of one of the great old cities.

You also can't take refuge of saying, no, we're a new city. We're doing it a different way. Both are under the judgment of the Lord. Now, if you'll notice, this whole oracle that we get here is really divided up in two ways. It's one long. We get one long poem from verse one to verse seven. And that is dealing with the national pride and the national decadence of Israel and Judah.

Okay. So verses one through three are dealing with national pride. And then verses four through seven are dealing with national decadence. Okay, now I know I'm dividing it up. I'm dividing it actually, as the ESV divides it. When we get to verse three, though, I'm going to translate verse

three a little bit differently. I'm going to offer you a different translation that I actually think makes a little bit better sense, not only of the Hebrew, but just of what's going on here in this passage.

So notice he starts off those who are at ease in Zion. In other words, what are they doing? They are so confident. They're so prideful in their security that they don't even feel the need to be concerned about any outside threat. You might remember the temple sermon of Jeremiah when Jeremiah goes to the temple down in Jude and he says, do not trust in these words. Temple, the Lord temple, the Lord temple of the Lord. And what does he tell them? That because they're using those words that we have the temple, we're the grand story, we're the grand city of Yahweh that goes way back for centuries.

They're using that for a kind of false security. He even says, go, go, look and see the other places like Shiloh where the tabernacle has dwelled. And if you go there now, it's just an empty valley because of the sins of hafnium. Phineas the sons of the of the high Priest Eli the Lord is willing to take even his house out of a city and leave it to ruin if they turn against the Lord.

And if that's true of Jerusalem, then that can also. That is also definitely true of Samaria. Those who are at rest at ease in Zion, those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria. They're the ones who are receiving this judgment. So first, and we just look at this. He talks about national pride. This is in verses one through three.

And then verses four through seven. As I said, he talks about national judgment. Excuse me, national decadence. So let's talk about the national pride. There it is. They feel secure because they don't need to trust in the Lord, because they themselves are so great. They don't have anything to fear. Now notice what the prophet does here. He says something interesting, and if we don't know the history around it, then this might not make sense.

But he says something like this. Go look at other cities that have fallen and ask yourselves, am I? Are we greater than those cities? Are? Look, for instance, said Kellner and Hamad, these are two cities in, in Syria which were subjugated by Judah earlier in, biblical history. Later, however, around 738 B.C. so this is possibly 10 to 20 years after Amos is preaching.

Okay, these two cities will fall to the Assyrian king, to Goliath. Police are the third. Now, now, here's the question. If you want to do the hard, the hard work of trying to date passages, ask this question. What does he mean when he says, go look at those cities? Is he telling them those cities fell to you? O Israel, Judah, are you greater than them?

Do you think you're better than them? In a way, he's trying to. He may be calling out this idea that battles are really battles, not between armies or kings, but battles between gods, right? And that my God is facing off against your God. And if we win that, that shows that my God is the better God. I'm a better person because I'm worshipping the right God.

And he might be saying something like this. Do you think that you worship the Lord in such a way that he was fighting on your side when you went and conquered those cities? Do you think you're better than them in some way? He's asking this question is kind of introducing is, as we say in sort of modern parlance, he's problematize their victory over these cities.

Karna and Hamar, and then also Gath, which is down, and Philistines. We know it because that's the hometown of Goliath. But it was a town that was known for its wineries. It had had kind of an incredible wine facility. That's actually what the word Gath means. It just means it's a wine complex. Okay. And Judah had conquered. And he's saying, are you think you're better than Gath?

What is he doing? You get to calling into question this idea of national pride. Now, that might be what he's saying. It might be, however, that we should date this to a much later period, maybe coming up on 738 as to glass to is coming through the countryside and conquering the cities around them. We know that it's around that time that the northern Kingdom is in fear.

They're worried. They're nervous that Assyria will also conquer them. And that's why they try to force the southern kingdom, Judah, to join into a coalition with them. Does anyone remember Isaiah seven? That's where we actually get that Emmanuel passage that we'll be talking about in a couple of weeks? The passage about the Virgin having a child, you actually go back and read that passage.

That passage is actually about what should Ahaz of Judah do? Because the northern kingdom of Samaria is joining up with the Syrians to fight against the Assyrians. Okay, I know that sounds complicated when I say it. Okay, but what is he doing? He's saying, do you think you're better than these cities that are about to fall to Assyria?

Do you think that God won't let you fall to them as well? As a matter of fact, the Northern Kingdom will fall about those about 16 years later, in 722 BC, Samaria will fall to the Assyrian kingdom. So it's not exactly clear which argument he's saying here. But we can say this. He's saying, don't think of yourselves as better than these other cities.

Don't think that you are in some way, you know, more esteemed to me. You haven't been faithful. You haven't been trusting in me. You haven't been following the covenant. What makes you think that I would protect you against the coming threats? Are you better than these kingdoms? Is their territory greater than your territory? All right, so notice how it starts.

Those who are at ease, those who are secure. He's talking about the disposition of the nations of Israel and Judah, that they are prideful. Then he gives us 2 or 3 examples rather of nations who they're not better them. Okay, then he ends this section. This is one through three again returning to their demeanor, to their what how they think about the world.

Now, your ESV says this, O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence. Okay, that is a possible rendering of the Hebrew. And we have to admit, there are points, particularly in poetry, when we don't know exactly what they're saying. Okay, just kind of like in modern day poetry too. In poetry, you can play with words.

Sometimes there's a deliberate ambiguity or double entendre. Words have multiple meanings in them. And so the same thing can happen in Hebrew poetry. As a matter of fact, they love doing plays on words. They love words that sound like other words. So it's possible this is saying something like this O you who think that the day of disaster, that is the day of the Lord, remember?

And last chapter he said, don't long for the day of the Lord, for you will be a day of disaster or day of darkness, not a day of light. He might be saying something like this don't or don't try. You who are trying to keep away the day of your disaster and yet are being people who are violent. You're sitting in a seat of violence, but you're trying to keep away the day of your judgment. That's possible. The problem is, that's just kind of weird Hebrew, if that's what he's saying, there's a possible another trends, another translation that I think actually works better here. It would go something like this o you who would forecast a bad day, you would forecast a day of disaster.

Would you also divine a week of trouble? Okay. So what's he saying? They're sitting at ease in Zion. They're secure. They don't think that they're going to fall. They think they're better than all these nations. And what's one of the reasons why now we know that they were doing this because they're basically using divination and probably something like astrology to say, oh, no, no, we've looked at the stars, we've looked at the omens.

We know that we're okay. It's not that they're trusting in the Lord, it's that they're divining, they're trying to prognosticate apart from God, and they're saying, it's okay, we'll be fine. They're using all kinds of other signs and omens and paraphernalia to try to divine the future and control it. Now, this would fit with what we know about Northern Kingdom.

Apart from this, when we talked about how they're focusing on the stars and God says, don't you want to know the God who put those stars in the cosmos? So it's possible what he's doing is starting with their disposition. They're at ease. They feel secure. He's saying, who do you think you are better than these other nations? You're not.

And then what? Does he end with their disposition again, of using astrology and using divination to try to control their outcomes, their situations? It is interesting to me how even today, mysticism is a temptation to the wealthy, right? Those who think of themselves being at ease, being secure. How often do we hear about celebrities? And they're involved in some kind of a cultic thing, like astrology or Kabbalah or these kinds of things.

Why? Why that temptation? Why do go there? Why not just love God? Why I just read scripture and I think there is something that the mysticism offers us, that astrology, that superstition offers us, that is unique. It's the reason why it's such a consistent temptation of those who are falsely at ease. Mysticism. One gives the user a sense of control.

If you notice when you're doing astrology, it's you who's going out. You're looking at the stars, you're looking at the signs. When you're getting your palm read, right? When you're trying to read the tea leaves, you're the one who's in control. You're the one who's kind of setting out the scientific control set. And you're looking at the thing saying, okay, so this line usually goes this way, and now it's going this way, and now I can come up with my interpretation for what that thing means.

It gives you a sense of having power over the world, of having somehow hacked life. Right. You've probably even been tempted by this yourself, trying to discern how things are going by just looking at the numbers in the right way. And don't get me wrong, I'm not talking about trying to discern actual patterns that might help us understand, you know, human behavior or something like that, but rather having a mystical like view of things as if there are spiritual forces behind everything around us.

And we're supposed to be putting out little talismans or little omens to discern what we ought to do. There's even a Christian way to do this, okay? There's a way that feels kind of righteous. You ever had known somebody who flips open their Bible and they put their finger down and they say, okay, what verses? Then they read the verses, and that's what the Lord is telling me today.

Okay, that's not how the Bible works. Do you know that when Gideon lays out that fleece, that's not an example of what we ought to do? That's God being kind to Gideon because he's a superstitious Baal worshiper, and the Lord is saying, you know what? I'm going to even work through your failed superstitious omen. I'm going to go ahead and I'm going to do it so that you can hear me.

Okay. It's interesting that we all have this temptation towards trying to control circumstances around us. And yet if you notice in the Bible, God is constantly resisting that he doesn't let us manipulate him. He doesn't, he doesn't. He's not like the false God. So you can kind of twist their arm. You can. You can persuade them and manipulate them, maybe even kind of holding them in a sort of like, you know, extortion, divine extortion to get them to do the things that you want them to do.

All you have to do is go read the epics of Baal, go read about Asher Bone and El, the bull god, find out that they don't know everything that's out there in the world, and you can actually trick

them. You can trick them into doing the things that you want them to do. That's often what's behind this kind of mysticism.

It gives you a sense of control where you really don't have control. Secondly, it makes the events around you seem meaningful. Now, suddenly, the way the clouds move in the sky tells you something about your life, not just about the glory of God, but something about what God's doing for you. It creates meaning where perhaps there is no meaning for you.

And thirdly, it relieves you. This is important. It's important for what Amos is saying superstition, astrology, mysticism, the occult. It relieves you of a sense of guilt or culpability for the things that are going on in your life. Now. It's not a matter of something I did. It's just bad luck. Yeah. The stars were aligned against me, right?

Yeah, we were lovers, but we're star crossed lovers, right? As Shakespeare would say. Yeah, it's not us. It's forces more powerful than us that are keeping me from succeeding. It keeps you from looking inward. You ever notice that superstition never asks you to look inward? It always says, look outside and see the spiritual forces that are at work against you or for you in this matter.

You see, Amos is saying they're at ease, but it's a false ease. They have comfort, but it's a cold comfort. They're not actually protected. They're not actually secure. So chapter of verse three rather ends with that. And then he begins his second section, now not talking about pride, but rather talking about national decadence before his national pride. They think more highly of themselves than they should.

Secondly, now he talks about national decadence. Look at verse four. What does he say there? Woe to those notices. Beginning a Second World War oracle started with the word oracle in verse one. Now verse four, he's starting a second World War two and he says, woe to those who lie on their beds of ivory, and stretched themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stable.

He's describing here now just an incredible, overwhelming opulence and self-indulgence. They've got enough time that they don't just sleep on mattresses, they don't just sleep on beds, they sleep on beds of wood that have ivory inlays that in them, that are decorating the legs and the headboards. So they stretched. They're depicted as just being totally self-indulgent, stretching out, laying around.

Stretching themselves out along there, along their couches. What about the eating of the lambs and the calves? Well, you have to understand, of course, that in the ancient world, as in much of the world today, it's not like the industrialized West. Okay? You don't get a lot of access to meat over the course of a year. As a matter of fact, your run of the mill Israelite probably didn't eat meat more, much more often than the three main festivals of the year.

And now in the Northern Kingdom, we don't know exactly what their liturgical calendar looked like. They it seemed to be a sort of copy of the Southern Kingdom's, liturgical calendar that was built around Jerusalem. But they were doing some kind of thing, and maybe that's when you would eat meat, when you finally got to go and offer sacrifices.

But, man, you would save up for that. It was a big deal to eat meat. And yeah, notice these people are not just eating meat. You know, they're having filet mignon right there. They're sitting down with, well, they're not eating suckling pig, as it were. I was in Indonesia a couple of years ago. And suckling pig was the thing you want.

And you want to have little, little baby pigs that were cooked. And it is it was great. The meat was incredible. But it's an extravagant thing because, you know, when you when you slaughter the cow, when you slaughter the lamb, you're not getting the most meat possible. What are you doing? You're slaughtering a small animal. You're not doing it for quantity, for how many people you can serve, but rather you're doing it for the taste of it right?

They're not just eating meat, they're eating the choicest parts of the meat. So as we saw in the previous section, they're marked by pride and superstition and mysticism. Now we see that that's not it doesn't just stop there. They are self-indulgent. They're enjoying food without thinking about the cost. Now he's going to come back later and tell us a little bit more about what the cost is.

So notice in verse four he says they're self-indulgent laying on their ivory beds. Look at verse five. He says, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and, like David, invent for themselves instruments of worship. Excuse me, instruments of music. This is a picture of empty artistry. They're all about the esthetic pleasure. But it's not art that's communicating truth.

I want to be clear about this. Art does have a purpose. Amos is using art. He's speaking in poetry. That's art. He's speaking esthetically. If you could hear this in Hebrew and you understood, you'd hear the beat and the rhythm. He's crafting these oracles and they're well crafted. They're like spoken word, they're well crafted. They follow a beat.

They have a crescendo to them. He's not saying art is wrong, but what is he saying? It's this idle art. It's kind of the worst kind of art. I remember a friend of mine who was going down to get his Master's of Fine Arts degree is a painter, and he's an extraordinary painter. He's a believer, too, but he's expressing to me a frustration about a lot of the people who ran in the painting circles that he ran in, because he said, if you talk about something like beauty, everybody kind of laughs.

You know, if you're if you're a real painter today, he said, you don't want to talk about beauty. That's considered kind of nostalgic and old and silly. And you talk about beauty or glory in your

art is kind of shot away as passé, he said. Rather, the art that most people talk about nowadays is all self-referential art. It's kind of referential.

Back to the theory of the art. You're not trying to create something beautiful or something glorious. Rather, you're just doing things that refer back to themselves. And he said, I'm trying. I'm trying to kind of fight against that in the way that I'm doing art. And he's actually been quite successful. He's a successful artist. You see, this is empty artistry.

This is an aesthetics for pleasure, but not for truth, not for edification. It's interesting. We should remember that in the previous chapter, chapter five, verse 23, the Lord says to them in northern Israel he says, take away from me the noise of your songs to the melody of your harps. I will not listen. In other words, they're known for being quite the artists, and yet the art that they're producing is not pleasing to the Lord, so they're self-indulgent.

They're filled with empty artistry. Look at verse six. They enjoy selfish pleasure. And here's, by the way, here's where we find out why this is all so hollow and meaningless. He's not saying there's something wrong with eating, you know, lambs and calves. It's not the evil. It's nothing wrong from enjoying the fat of the land. There's nothing wrong like David producing musical instruments so that you can create worship to the Lord.

Look at verse six when he says they drink wine, but not in cups. They drink it in bowls. It's kind of uncouth. They don't just enjoy the wine, they're chugging it out of bowls. They anoint themselves, which is a common hygienic practice in the ancient world. You ever wonder why this whole thing about putting oil in your hair? It's not just so that you smell good, or you can kind of make it the right hairdo or anything like that. Any parent of young children knows that oil in their hair has another facility.

There's another use. It gets rid of lice, right? We know that. My wife's laughing. We had about three years of oiling hair in our household because there was a lice pandemic in Washington, DC, okay? And we were fighting against it. Why? Because that's how you would keep clean. You don't have a lot of clean water. You definitely don't have soap. So one of the ways that you can keep yourself clean and deal out right through anointing with oil. But notice they're not just anointing with oil. They're finding the rare oils and they're using them indulgently. You see, if you were to meet these people, they'd seem like they're having a good time. They seem artistic, relaxed, laid back, are the kind of people you might even say they're a good hang.

But notice, while they're doing all of these things, what are they ignoring? Verse six at the end, they are not grieved. They're not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. Now notice he starts with those who are at ease in Zion. And now he ends this two part poem with not being grieved with the sins of Joe, with the ruin of Joseph.

Now when he says, Joseph, remember I talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Israel is called multiple things. Israel can be used to talk about the whole nation, Israel and Judah. But when you're talking about the northern Kingdom, you'll often call them Jacob, Ephraim, Joseph. This is these are just metonymy. They're representative terms to represent the whole of the people, says they're enjoying all of these things, but they're not even grieving at all about the sin, the unbelief, the poverty, the stricken, this the oppression, the exploitation of the people living in their own cities and their own kingdom.

This reminds me of the unrighteous feast that Isaiah talks about in Isaiah 58, where he talks about not a feast tarry unrighteous fast, where the people gather together to offer up a fast to the Lord so that they can pray to the Lord. And then Isaiah says, but while you're not eating yourselves, you have people who are outside of the temple who are starving, and you're not feeding them.

He's like, at least give them the food that you're not eating for yourself. But by starving them, forcing a fast on them who didn't ask for it so that you can feel righteous about yourself offering a fast. Because guess what? You are now fasting unto yourself. Judgment. We have the kind of opposite here. They're not even trying to act religiously faithful.

They're not trying to act sort of hypocritically righteous. They're partying. They're putting oil in their hair, they're drinking wine out of bowls, and they're ignoring the ruin of Joseph. That's where the problem is. So as a result, the prophet then moves on from national pride and national decadence to national judgment. And that's where we come to verse eight.

This is a fascinating chapter because there's a couple of things here that are quite difficult. And here's the next one. The verse eight begins. And notice we drop out of poetry. We're now into prose. Your translators seem to be correct in that they're saying, okay, now we're in a paragraph. This is just regular writing. And what happens?

The Lord is now giving his, his, his judgment, his verdict. He's sworn by himself. He said, I swear as I live, says the Lord. What does that mean? That means this will definitely be done as I live, declares the Lord, the God of hosts. I abhor the pride of Jacob, and I hate his strongholds. And I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.

The Lord is saying, because they have done these things, and I've warned them over and over and over again. I'm warning them now I'm going to bring destruction to them. Now I would point something out and we're going to talk more about this next week. I think even though the Lord has said, as I swear by myself, I think even though he said that if now upon hearing this, the northern Kingdom now repented, they said, have mercy upon us, Lord.

It was a heartfelt repentance. They said, please have mercy upon us, please. We have done wrong. And they pour out their fragrant oils and their bowls full of wine, and they take the meat

that they've been eating, and they give it to the poor, and they go down to Jerusalem. They offer sacrifices at the temple. Say that happened.

It doesn't. But let's say that happens.

We totally know from other parts of the Bible that the Lord would likely show them mercy. You would likely say something like, this has been a spiritual exile for you, but now I'm going to restore you kingdom. We know this because Jeremiah will, throughout his ministry in the South, about a hundred years later, Jeremiah will say this over and over again.

He'll say, that's it. The Lord says, you're done. He's going to destroy you. And then as we follow Jeremiah, even as the Babylonians are coming through the gates, as Jeremiah is getting dragged out the back door and he's got his hands on the door jambs, he's yelling out, even now, if you repent, the Lord will let you dwell in this place.

So he's telling us, the Lord loves to show mercy, even this, even the strong language I'm going to set the city aside is a warning, so that the people might repent. Now we get this interesting little story. This is where it gets really fascinating in this chapter says, and if ten men remain in one house, they shall die.

And if you remember in the previous chapter, he says, 100 will go out, but ten will return. It's possible that he's kind of continuing that theme. In other words, the Lord is decimating literally decimating the Northern Kingdom. 100 go out ten return. If now those ten are living in the city or living in one house, they will all die.

He's another is he's increasing the judgment that is to come. But then this little story, this little vignette continues. So if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. And when one's relative, this is one of the men who were in the house who died, when the one comes, anoints him for burial, and then take him up in order to bring the bones out of the house.

Now this seems to be referring to Israelite burial practices, where you put a body in a family sarcophagus until it was only skin, and there's only bones, and then you would take the bones out and put them in an accessory, which is a bone box. Okay. If you've ever been to Israel, you've probably heard about these things. And then you put them in a bone box and also area, and then you bury that by itself.

This was the typical practice seems to be describing something like that. So he's going to get the body in order to take it out, to put it in the sarcophagus, so that later you can get the bones out and put it in the ossuary. I don't know why he's giving us all this information, but he's just telling us about this very old procedure.

But in this little vignette, he goes in to get the body and he yells to someone who is within the house, are there any more in there? And the person says, no, and he says, ush. This is really

what it says in Hebrew. Hush. We must not mention the name of the Lord. It seems as if I may read between the lines.

There's a lot more going on here than we can understand. But what are they saying? They're saying this. The Lord now is not is a name that we do not call upon to save us, because he has become our enemy. There were once 100, now there's ten, now there's zero. There's none left. Don't even say the name of the Lord. We don't want to draw his attention to us lest he come back in judgment. For behold, the Lord commands, the great house shall be struck down to the fragments, and the little house to bits. So the judgment is going to be complete. It's going to be absolute. There's not going to be anyone left. He's warning me, saying, doesn't this sound terrible?

This is the blue lights flashing around the truck, right? Doesn't this sound terrible? Okay, repent. But he knows that their religious theological logic has become absurd. Verse 12 he says, do horses run on rocks? There's one plow there with oxen. The answer to those questions are no, that's ridiculous. You can't plow rocks with an oxen. You can't have a horse hopping around on rocks.

They can't run on rocks. That's crazy. And he says, then why do you take the food of justice and turn it into poison? Okay, justice isn't supposed to be poison. Righteousness is not supposed to be wormwood. Saying you're thinking is ridiculous. It's absurd. It makes no sense. You rejoiced when you had victory in this town of Lo-debar.

And this is a play on words. Okay? Anybody know what Lo-debar means? But you know what low means in Hebrew? Right. Lower me. Not my people. Right, says Hosea. If you've ever been to the Middle East and you've heard Arabic speakers, what do they do? They use a kind of like we use the word like or okay, right. If you're bartering or something down at the Cirque, when they say la la la la la la, they're saying, no, no, no no no no no, no lo debar, no thing, no thing. You rejoice in this victory that you had out of over a town that was called no thing. In other words, you rejoice in nothing. It's absurd, you say, when you conquered the Syrian city of Corneum. Carnelian means horns, two horns. Right? So seems to be talking about strength. It's often horns are associated with the strength of a king. He's saying, do you think you're so strong because you conquered the city of Carnelian? For behold, I will raise up a nation that is much, much greater than you. And here we have now a strong hint, the strong suggestion that Israel will indeed fall to a nation greater than herself.

One that will conquer her from the most northern city of liberal Hamas to the southern, it's most southern city of the brook of Arabah. Of course, the Assyrian army. Now, this is what many of the prophets are doing. Remember, they're not just warning, they are warning, but they're also explaining history. They're explaining why these things are going to happen.

These are kinds of Theodosius more turned to theology. Theologians use the Odyssey means a justification of God in the face of suffering. They're answering the question, how is it that Assyria will be able to conquer Samaria, the northern kingdom, and wipe them out? Because the Lord warned them for decades and they didn't listen. And finally he saw, finally I'm speaking in eminent terms.

Of course, this is all coming out of his eternal decree. But finally he saw that the only way to purify them would be through the crucible of the exile. I want to remind you, this is not about rejecting Israel as his people. This is not about denying Judah her place as the covenant nation out of which all of the families of the earth would be blessed, right?

Going all the way back to Genesis 12. This is not about that. This is about purifying and disciplining his bride, his child, so that she might produce the kind of blessing that he had in store for the whole world. I want to close, but briefly before I do. It's our temptation to read about national pride and national decadence and say, oh, that tells us something about the United States of America, or that tells us something about France or wherever, wherever you live.

You might read this as, oh, this is telling us about the country that I live in, our national pride and our national decadence and the judgment that we should be worried about. And that's true. Okay, I want not argue this. That's true, but it's not true. Maybe in the way that we might think. I want to argue first that actually the more immediate application of this, as we're reading about Israel and Judah, the covenant people of God, is to apply it today into the covenant people of God. This is first and foremost about the church. How are we not listening to what the Lord has called us to in the word? How have we become prideful? How have we thought, oh, look at how good we've done. We've even pointed at victories that we've had. Have you ever heard of churches doing this? Churches to say even though our leaders are corrupt, they say, but don't say anything about it.

Haven't you seen what the Lord is doing through us? Haven't you seen the victories that we've been having? Have he's been a part of the revival. You don't see anything about what he did. Okay? The Lord's using him. Okay? We've got to be careful about this. This is a temptation that every church offers. I remember teaching a class in seminary where we talked about this.

We talked about the dangers of overemphasizing our present community and ignoring our past community that is heritage, and ignoring our own private judgment. And one of the things that can happen is that you can become a toxic environment. You can become a cult where people say, don't say anything about the leaders. Don't say anything about the people who are in our midst.

Don't talk about our personal holiness. Don't you see what the Lord is doing? I would argue that is very close to what's happening in Israel. Here. If people who are pointing to their little victories over Kelner and Gath and other cities that we don't even remember, they're saying, can't, can't you see what the Lord is doing? And they're ignoring those who are reclining on their beds and paying no mind to the ruin of the people of God.

So we have to be disciplined in this too. Why? Because the Lord will discipline us. He will call us to account. Okay? It's not it's not a matter of condemnation. He loves his people, but he will discipline his people. And what is he telling us in books like Amos? He's saying, repent, come back, turn back, return to me. Love, justice, love, mercy, love, holiness. That's what I'm calling you to in Christ. So the first application that we have of past is like this should be to us now, we should remember that Amos begins with two chapters of oracles against other nations. So what does that mean? That means that the Word of God is appropriate to be proclaimed against the nation around us.

We should be looking at the nations in which we live and saying, are they being prideful? Are they countries of decadence? How do we call them to account? We know that the Lord will hold even those outside of his covenant. We'll hold them to account because of the word. The word of the Lord tells us so. So there is a message for our country.

There is a message for our city. There's a message for our neighborhoods as we read this book. And yet we don't want to step over the fact that the message is first and foremost for us.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we come before you hearing a difficult message of discipline, I pray, Lord, that our hearts would not be those who are hardened against it, that we wouldn't. We wouldn't rise up in defense like those we just read about in Amos chapter six, but rather, Lord, our hearts would be softened that we'd be willing to learn to be taught, dear Lord, willing to have hard conversations and willing to turn to you and peace. Lord, we want to see Joseph not in ruin, but Joseph in Siloam. And we pray that Lord, for our nation. But we also pray that more specifically and immediately we pray that for the church as it's at work proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world, it's in his name We pray.

Amen.