

CHAPTER 6

In this chapter we have,

I. A sinful people studying to put a slight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear trivial, confiding in their privileges and pre-eminences above other nations (v. 2, 3), and their power (v. 13), and wholly addicted to their pleasures (v. 4-6).

II. A serious prophet studying to put a weight upon God's threatenings and to make them appear terrible, by setting forth the severity of those judgments that were coming upon these sensualists (v. 7), God's abhorring them, and abandoning them and theirs to death (v. 8-11), and bringing utter desolation upon them, since they would not be wrought upon by the methods he had taken for their conviction (v. 12-14).

~~<306>~~ AMOS 6:1-7

THE DANGER OF FALSE SECURITY

The first words of the chapter are the contents of these verses; but they sound very strangely, and contrary to the sentiments of a vain world: *Woe to those that are at ease!* We are ready to say, *Happy are those that are at ease*, that neither feel any trouble nor fear any, that lie soft and warm, and lay nothing to heart; and wise we think are those that do so, that bathe themselves in the delights of sense and care not how the world goes. Those are looked upon as doing well for themselves that do well for their bodies and make much of them; but against them this woe is denounced, and we are here told what their ease is, and what the woe is.

I. Here is a description of their pride, security, and sensuality, for which God would reckon with them.

1. They were vainly conceited of their own dignities, and thought those would secure them from the judgments threatened and be their defence against the wrath both of God and man.

(1.) Those that dwelt in Zion thought that was honour and protection enough for them, and they might there be quiet from all fear of evil, because it was a strong city, well fortified both by nature and art (we read of Zion's *strong-holds* and her *bulwarks*), and because it was a royal city, where were set the thrones of the house of David (it was the head-city of Judah, and therefore truly great), and especially because it was the holy city, where the temple was, and the testimony of Israel; those that dwelt there doubted not but that God's sanctuary would be a sanctuary to them and would shelter them from his judgments. The *temple of the Lord are these*, ^{<400>}Jeremiah 7:4. They are *haughty because of the holy mountain*, ^{<400>}Zephaniah 3:11. Note, Many are puffed up with pride, and rocked asleep in carnal security, by their church-privileges, and the place they have in Zion.

(2.) Those that dwelt *in the mountain of Samaria*, though it was not a holy hill, like that of Zion, yet they trusted in it, because it was the metropolis of a potent kingdom, and perhaps, in imitation of Jerusalem, was the headquarters of its religion; and by lapse of time the hill of Shemer became with them in as good repute as the hill of Zion ever was. They hoped for salvation from these hills and mountains.

(3.) Both these two kingdoms valued themselves upon their relation to Israel, that prince with God, which they looked upon as making them the *chief of the nations*, more ancient and honourable than any of them; the *first-fruits of the nations* (so the word is), dedicated to God and sanctifying the whole harvest. The *house of Israel* came to them, that is, was divided into those kingdoms, of which Zion and Samaria were the mother cities. Those that were at ease were the princes and rulers, the great men, that were *chief of the nations*, chief of those two kingdoms, and to whom, having their residence in Zion and Samaria, the whole house of Israel applied for judgment. Note, It is hard to be great and not to be proud. Great nations and great men are apt to overvalue themselves, and to overlook their neighbours, because they think they a little overtop them. But, for a check to their pride and security, the prophet bids them take notice of those cities that were within the compass of their knowledge, that had been as illustrious in their time as ever Zion or Samaria was, and yet were destroyed, v. 2. "Go to *Calneh* (which was an ancient city built by Nimrod, ^{<100>}Genesis 10:10), and see what has become of that, it is now in ruins; so is *Hamath the great*, one of the chief cities of Syria. Sennacherib boasts of *destroying the gods of Hamath*. Gath was likewise made desolate

by Hazeal, and not long ago, ^{<2127>}2 Kings 12:17. Now *were they better than these kingdoms* of Judah and Israel? Yes, they were, and *their border greater than your border*, so that they had more reason than you to be confident of their own safety; yet you see what has become of them, and dare you be secure? *Art thou better than populous No?*" ^{<3488>}Nahum 3:8. Note, The examples of others' ruin forbid us to be secure.

2. They persisted in their wicked courses upon a presumption that they should never be called to an account for them (v. 3): "*You put far away the evil day*, the day of reckoning, as a thing that shall never come, or you look upon it as at such a distance that it makes no impression at all upon you; you *put it far away*, and think you can still put it yet further, and adjourn it *de die in diem* — *from day to day*, and therefore you *cause the seat of violence to draw near*; you venture upon all acts of injustice and oppression, and have *fellowship with the throne of iniquity, which frames mischief by a law*, ^{<1943>}Psalm 94:20. You cause that to come near, as if that would be your protection from these judgments which really ripens you for them." Note, *Therefore* men take sin to be near them, because they take judgment to be far off from them; but those deceive themselves who thus mock God.

3. They indulged themselves in all manner of sensual pleasures and delights, v. 4-6. These Israelites were perfect epicures and slaves to their appetites. Their dignities (in consideration of which they ought to have been examples of self-denial and mortification), they thought, would justify them in their sensuality; the gains of their oppression and violence, they thought, would bear the charge of it; and they put the evil day at a distance, that they might give them no disturbance in it. That which they are here charged with is not in itself sinful (these things might be soberly and moderately used), but they placed their happiness in the gratification of their carnal appetites; and though they were men in office, that had business to mind, they gave themselves up to their pleasures, spent their time in them, and threw away their thoughts, and cares, and estates upon them. They were in these enjoyments as in their element. Their hearts were upon them; they exceeded all bounds in them, and this at a time when God in his providence was calling them to *weeping and mourning*, ^{<2920>}Isaiah 22:12, 13. When they were under guilt and wrath, and the judgments of God were ready to break in upon them, they called for *wine and strong drink*, presuming that *to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more*

abundant (^{281D}Isaiah 56:12), thus walking contrary to God and setting his justice at defiance.

(1.) They were extravagant in their furniture. Nothing would serve them but *beds of ivory* to sleep upon, or to sit on at their meat, when sackcloth and ashes would have become them better.

(2.) They were lazy, and humoured themselves in the love of ease. They did not only lie down, but *stretched themselves* upon their couches, when they should have stirred up themselves to their business; they were willingly slothful, and took a pride in doing nothing; they *abound in superfluities* (so the margin reads it), when many of their poor brethren wanted necessities.

(3.) They were nice and curious in their diet, must have every thing of the best and abundance of it: They ate *the lambs out of the flock* (lambs by wholesale) and the *calves out of the midst of the stall*, the fattest they could lay their hand on; and these perhaps not out of their own flock and their own stall, but taken by oppression from the poor.

(4.) They were merry and jovial, and diverted themselves at their feasts with music and singing: They *chant to the sound of the viol*, sing and play in concert, and they invent new-fashioned *instruments of music*, striving herein, more than in any thing else, to excel their ancestors; they set their wits on work to contrive how to please their fancy. Some men never show their ingenuity but in their luxury; on that they bestow all their faculty of invention and contrivance. They invent *instruments of music, like David*, entertain themselves with that which formerly used to be the entertainment of kings only. Or it intimates their profaneness in their mirth; they mimicked the temple-music, and made a jest of that, because, it may be, it was old-fashioned, and they took a pride in bantering it as the Babylonians did when they urged the captives to sing to them the *songs of Zion*; such was Belshazzar's profaneness when he drank wine in temple-bowls, and such is theirs that sing vain and loose songs in psalm-tunes, on purpose to ridicule a divine institution.

(5.) They drank to excess, and never thought they could pour down enough: They *drank wink in bowls*, not in glasses, or cups (as ^{281E}Jeremiah 35:5); they hate to be stinted, and must have large draughts, and therefore make use of vessels that they can steal a draught out of.

(6.) They affected the strongest perfumes: They *anoint themselves with the chief ointments*, to please the smell, and to make them more in love with their own bodies, and to guard against those presages of putrefaction which they carry about with them while they live. No ordinary ointments would serve their turn; they must have the chief, such as were far-fetched and dear-bought, when cheaper would have served as well.

4. They had no concern at all for the interests of the church of God, and of the nation, that were sinking and going to decay: *They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*; the church of God, including both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (which are called *Joseph*, ^{<801>}Psalm 80:1), was in distress, invaded, insulted, and broken in upon. As to their own kingdom which they were entrusted with the government of, the affairs of which they were directors of, the peace of which they were the conservators of, great breaches were made upon it, upon its peace and welfare; and they were so besotted that they were not aware of them, so indulgent of their pleasures that they never laid them to heart, and had such an aversion to the thing called business that they were in no care or concern to get them repaired. It is all one to them whether the nation sink or swim, so that they can but lie at ease and live in pleasure. Particular persons that belonged to Joseph were in affliction, and they took no cognizance of their case of the wrongs and hardships they sustained and the troubles they were in, nor took any care to relieve them, and right them, contrary to the temper of holy Job, who, when he was in prosperity, *wept with him that was in misery and his soul was grieved for the poor*, ^{<805>}Job 30:25. Some think that, in calling the afflicted church *Joseph*, there is an allusion to the story of Pharaoh's butler, who, when he preferred to give the cup again into his master's hand, *remembered not Joseph, but forgot him*, ^{<842>}Genesis 40:21, 23. Thus they *drank wine in bowls*, but *were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. Note, Those are commonly careless of the troubles of others who are set upon their own pleasures; and it is a great offence to God when his church is in affliction and we are not grieved for it, nor lay it to heart.

II. Here is the doom passed upon them (v. 7): *Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive*, and shall fall into all the miseries that attend captives; and the *banquet of those that stretched themselves upon their couches shall be removed*. Their plenty shall be taken from them, and they from it, because they made it the food and fuel of their lusts.

1. Those who lived in luxury shall lose even their liberty; and by being brought into servitude shall be justly punished for the abuse of their dignity and dominion.
2. Those who trusted in the delights and pleasures of their own land shall be carried away into a strange land, and so made ashamed of their pride and confidence; they shall *go captive*.
3. Those who placed their happiness in the pleasures of sense, and set their hearts upon them, shall be deprived of those pleasures; their banquet shall be removed, and they shall know what it is to fare hard.
4. Those who *stretched themselves* shall be made to contract themselves, and to come into a less compass.
5. Those who *put the evil day far from them* shall find it nearer to them than it is to others; *those shall go captive with the first* who flattered themselves with hopes that if trouble did come they should be the last who should be seized by it. Those are ripening apace for trouble themselves who lay not to heart the trouble of others and of the church of God. Those who give themselves to mirth, when God calls them to mourning, will find it a sin that shall not go unpunished, ^{<324>}Isaiah 22:14.

~~<108>~~ AMOS 6:8-14

THREATENINGS OF JUDGMENT

In the former part of the chapter we had these secure Israelites loading themselves with pleasures, as if they could never be made merry enough; here we have God loading them with punishments, as if they could never be made miserable enough. And observe,

I. How strongly this burden is bound on, not to be shaken off by their presumption and security; for it is bound by *the Lord the God of hosts*, by his mighty, his almighty, hand, which none can resist; it is bound with an oath, which puts the sentence past revocation: *The Lord God has sworn, and he will not repent*, and, since he could swear by no greater, he has sworn by himself. How dreadful, how miserable, is the case of those whose ruin, whose eternal ruin, God himself has sworn, who can execute his purpose and cannot alter it!

II. How heavily this burden lies! Let us see the particulars.

1. God will abhor and abandon them, and that implies misery enough, all misery: *I abhor the excellency of Jacob*, all that which they are proud of, and value themselves upon, and for which they call and count themselves the *chief of nations*. Their visible church-membership, and the privileges of that, their temple, altar, and priesthood, these were, more than any thing, the excellencies of Jacob; but, when these were profaned and polluted by sin, God abhorred them; he hated and despised them, ^{<105>}Amos 5:21. Note, God abhors that form of godliness which hypocrites keep up, while they abhor the power of it. And if he abhors their temple, for the iniquity of that, no marvel that he hates their palaces, for the injustices and oppression he finds there. Note, that creature which we take such a complacency and put such a confidence in as to make it a rival with God is thereby made abominable to him. He *hates the palaces* of sinners, for the sake of wickedness of those that dwell therein. ^{<106>}Proverbs 3:33, *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked*. And, if God abhor them, immediately it follows, He will *deliver up the city with all that is therein*, deliver it up into the hands of the enemy, that will lay it waste, and make a prey of all its wealth. Note, Those that are abhorred and abandoned of God are undone to all intents and purposes.

2. There shall be a great and general mortality among them (v. 9): *If there remain ten men in one house*, that have escaped the sword of the enemy, yet they shall be met with another way; *they shall all die* by famine or pestilence. In the most sickly times, if there be ten in a house, one may hope that at least the one-half of them will escape, according to the proportion of two in a bed, *one taken and the other left*; but here not one of ten shall live to bury the rest. Another instance of the greatness of the mortality is (v. 10) that the nearest relations of the dead shall be forced with their own hands to wind up their bodies, and bury them, for want of other hands to be employed in it; that is all that the *next of kin*, to whom the right of redemption belongs, can do for them, and with great reluctance will they do that. It intimates that the young people shall be cut off soonest; for the uncle that survives is, ordinarily, the senior relation. “When the uncle comes with the sexton (or *him that burns*), *to bring out the bones out of the house*, he shall say to him that he sees next about the house, *‘Is there any yet with thee? Are there any left alive?’* And he shall say, *‘No, this is the last; now the whole family is cut off by death, and neither root nor branch remains.’*” But that which makes the judgment the

more grievous is that their hearts seem to be hardened under it. "When he that is found by the sides of the house begin to enter into discourse with those that are carrying off the dead, they shall say, *'Hold thy tongue; do not stand preaching to us about the hand of Providence in this calamity, for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord; God is so angry with us that there is no speaking to him; he is so extreme to mark what we do amiss that we dare not so much as make mention of his name.'*" Thus *the foolishness of men perverts their way*, and brings them into distress, and then *their heart frets against the Lord*. Even then they will not take notice of his hand, nor suffer those about them to do it. Perhaps it was forbidden by some of the idolatrous kings to make mention of the name of *Jehovah*, as by the law of Moses it was forbidden to make mention of the names of the heathen-gods: "We may not do it without incurring the penalty." Note, Those hearts are wretchedly hardened indeed that will not be brought to make mention of God's name, and to worship him, when the hand of God has gone out against them, and when, as here, sickness and death are in their families. Thus those *heap up wrath who cry not when God binds them*.

3. Their houses shall be destroyed, v. 11. *God will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts*; they shall both be cracked so as to lose their beauty and strength, and to be hastening towards a fall. The princes' palaces are not above the rebuke of divine justice, nor the poor men's cottages beneath it; neither shall escape. When sin has marked them for ruin God will find ways to bring it about. It is by order from him that breaches are made.

III. How justly they are thus burdened. If we understand the matter aright, we shall say, *The Lord is righteous*.

1. The methods used for their reformation had been all fruitless and ineffectual (v. 12): *Shall horses run upon the rock, to hurl or harrow the ground there? Or will one plough there with oxen?* No, for there will be no profit to countervail the pains. God has sent them his prophets, to *break up their fallow-ground*; but they found them as hard and inflexible as the rock, rough and rugged, and they could do no good with them, nor work upon them, and therefore they shall not attempt it any more. They will not be reclaimed, and therefore shall not be reproved, but quite abandoned. Note, Those who will not be cultivated as fields and vineyards shall be rejected as barren rocks and deserts, ^{NOTE} Hebrews 6:7, 8.

2. They had abused their power to the wrong and oppression of many, whose injured cause the sovereign Judge would not only right, but revenge: *You have turned judgment into gall*, which is nauseous, and *the fruit of righteousness into hemlock*, which is noxious; it would make one sick to see how those that were entrusted with the administration of public justice bore down equity with that power which they out to have defended and supported it, and so turned its own artillery against itself. Note, When our services of God are soured with sin his providences will justly be embittered to us.

3. They had set the judgments of God at defiance, and, confiding in their own strength, thought themselves a match for Omnipotence, v. 13. They *rejoiced in a thing of nought*, pleased themselves with a fancy that no evil should befall them, though they had no ground at all for that confidence, nothing to trust to that would bear any weight. They said, “*Have we not taken to us horns; have we not arrived to great dignity and dominion, have we not pushed down our enemies and pushed on our victories, and this by our own strength, our own skill and courage, our own wealth and military force? Who then need we be afraid of? Who then need we make court to? Not God himself.*” Note, Prosperity and success commonly make men secure and haughty; and those that have done much think they can do any thing, any thing without God, nay, any thing against him. But those who trust in their own strength rejoice in *a thing of nought*, and so they will find. Probably they did not say this with their lips, *totidem verbis* — *in so many words*, but it was the language of their hearts and of their actions, both which God understands.

IV. How easily and effectually this burden shall be brought upon them, v. 14. He that brings it upon them is *the Lord the God of hosts*, who both may do and can do what he pleases, who has all creatures at his command, and who, when he has work to do, will not be at a loss for instruments to do it with; though they are the house of Israel, yet he will *raise up against them a nation* which they feared not, but had many a time hoped in, even the Assyrians, and this nation shall *afflict them*, bring them into straits, and put them to pain, from the *entering in of Hamath*, in the north, to *the river of the wilderness*, the river of Egypt, Sihor or Nile, in the south. The whole nation has shared in the iniquity, and therefore must expect to share in the calamity. Note, When men are in any way instruments of affliction to us we must see God raising them up against us, for they are in his hand — the rod, the sword, in his hand. The Lord has bidden Shimei curse David.