

Prayer

Dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Fill us with Your Spirit, so that we may do Your work within the Kingdom and be effective in doing good within this world. We ask this not so that we can become puffed up with pride at our achievements, but so that Your Kingdom may come in our midst, and the Gospel heard by people who need its liberty and power to save. Break new ground in spreading the Good News of the Gospel, we pray, and bring Your glory to this world! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Pray in silence, and leave yourself some clear space to be uninterrupted and quiet, so that the Holy Spirit can reveal God's Word to you

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Afghanistan.** *This nation remains the focus of attention because of the military activity there. Pray for God's will to be done*
- *Give thanks to God for the young children in your church*
- *Pray for the leaders of small nations in the shadow of large superpowers*

Meditation

Do not bear the pain alone;
Let Jesus the healer lead you towards the light
And bring you to a place of peace again.

Do not foster unforgiveness;
Let Him who could love even those who killed Him
Show you the way to loving all, again.

Do not be quick to offer blame;
Let Christ who called the upright to 'cast the first stone'
Suggest that God knows the truth, alone.

Do not let the sinner drag you down;
Let the Holy One of God stir your spirit deep within
To recognise that Satan's traps await.

Do not forget the Lord your God;
Let Him free within your inner being, free to roam, to work
To heal, to mould and change you –
And to save you!

Bible passage - Amos 8:1-8

¹ This is what the Lord GOD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. ² He said, 'Amos, what do you see?' So I said, "A basket of ripe fruit." Then the LORD said to me, 'The time is ripe for the end of my people Israel; I will not spare them any longer. ³ The temple songs will become the sound of wailing in that day,' says the Lord GOD; 'So many dead bodies thrown everywhere ... Silence!'

⁴ Hear this, you who trample on the needy, and ruin the lives of the poor of the land, ⁵ saying, 'When will the new moon be over so we that can sell our grain; and the Sabbath so that we can market our wheat? We will shorten the measure (the ephah) and increase the price (the shekel), and cheat with dishonest measuring scales, ⁶ buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling even the floor-sweepings of wheat.' ⁷ The LORD has sworn by

the majesty of Jacob: Never will I forget anything they have done! ⁸ Will not the land tremble because of this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile, and first swell and then subside again, just like the Nile of Egypt.

Bible Study

Review

Amos prophesies the final destruction of Israel because of her sins. This is an awesome and dreadful prophesy, but we must always remember that Amos was not shouting in the wind. He was right, as history readily shows.

Amos' confrontation with Amaziah (7:10-17) seems to have wound Amos up to more heights of prophecy! Here, he delivers a merciless and damning prophecy proclaiming the death of Israel (8:1-3) followed by a strongly worded portrayal of the dishonest mal-practice that had corrupted the life of Israel (8:4-8). These prophecies are passionate, but as we read them, our first reaction may be to say that we have heard it all before.

How impatient we are with God's Word! For if we study Amos' work, then we will perceive far more. The destruction of Israel is no casual thing, and the prophesy is not to be glossed over as if merely repetitive. Certainly, the theme here is the same as elsewhere in Amos, but he uses different prophetic methods and each one reveals more. We should therefore look carefully for what this one has to say.

The vision in 8:1-3 is the fourth of a series, with the first three found in chapter 7. The first two of these describe natural disasters averted after intercession by Amos. They are followed by a third that says God will no longer be blindly generous to Israel because she no longer measures up to the 'plumb line' of right and godly living, and it ends by declaring that God will destroy His own nation (7:7-9)! This is a highly evocative prophesy and the plumb line illustration is useful even to this day, but it is still only the third vision of the series. The fourth (8:1-3) dramatically urges listeners to accept that Amos' prophesy is not just words; God will no longer wait for His people to turn to Him. The *'the time is ripe'* for judgement!

Amos says more, later on in chapters 8 and 9, but the arrangement of these visions suggests they were written like this for dramatic effect. After the three visions, the story of Amos' meeting with Amaziah is like a dramatic break before Amos' final word of judgement.

The vision in today's reading is shocking. Amos starts with a homey rural picture of a basket of ripe summer fruit. Then, using the natural word play of two Hebrew words that sound virtually the same, 'ripe fruit' and 'the end', he declares that God has finished with Israel; *'I will not spare them any longer'* (8:2). He then announces the awful consequences of God's destruction, which are the replacement of Temple songs with funeral laments for the death of Israel and the awful horror of handling dead bodies. Then in a clever twist, Amos goes on (8:4-8) to bewail the reasons for this destruction. Yes, people would die because they were more concerned with themselves and their profits than with others or God's Sabbath (8:4,5), and they cheated in the market place and swindled the poor (8:5,6). Such sins bring down God's wrath. Also, to signify the end of Israel, God had decided to return the Promised Land to its natural state, rising and falling *'like the Nile'* (8:8).

Amos' prophecies strike at the heart of humanities fickle nature, including our own. We listen to people who say 'such and such will happen', but think, 'Oh yes, let's wait and see, at least until we hear someone else say the same'. If we hear something we do not like, as the Israelites did when they heard Amos, then we tend to ignore it and carry on with life. This prophesy is therefore Amos' final appeal to God's people to hear his word; it was not an opinion. Everything he said was about to happen.

If we think that apart from its literary qualities, this prophesy adds little to what we know of Amos' message, then we miss the point. Each time God's Word is spoken it strikes home. Perhaps this final warning was enough to persuade more Israelites to believe Amos and repent. Certainly, in later centuries after the wipe out of Israel as prophesied by Amos, the Jews attempted to gather as many people as possible from the old Israelites tribes obliterated by the Assyrians. Remarkably, they succeeded, and it is possible that these Israelites were descended from those who heard Amos' message and repented from the sins of the nation.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Debate this subject; does God destroy those who knowingly go against His will?
2. What can you find within this passage that hints at injustices and illegal practices found within our world today, and why are they so wrong?
3. How does God intervene in the world today to bring about justice, and should we pray that He does this Himself, or that He should empower us to do it on His behalf?

Personal comments by author

It is awful to read in Scripture about the dreadful death sentence God placed on His own people, but it is an important part of the history of God's Old Testament people. The complete annihilation of a portion of God's people is rather like the extermination of a branch of the church today; and it has been known to happen, both in small localities and also in large regional communities. Even today, though the church as a whole is growing other churches are still being closed and a witness to God's love is lost when a church dies. What does God teach us by these difficult things? Surely at least, we must consider Amos' message and redouble our efforts to live a life based on Christ.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *The passage we have read asks us to look very carefully at the nature of our world, the societies in which we live and our church life as God's people. Pray and ask the Lord to help you discern the nature of His judgement on your nation, society or your church, and resolve to talk about this to others.*
- *Pray for those who are bewitched by the sins of the world and do not perceive the judgement of God on all sin and wrongdoing. Pray that they will be led to hear the truth and be saved.*

Final Prayer

Keep me in Your presence this day, Lord Jesus; keep me close to Your side as I walk the path before me. Then, when difficulty comes, may I have confidence to deal with everything in the way You would wish of me. Thank You, Lord Jesus; AMEN
