

Prayer

Gracious and powerful Lord, sometimes it seems as if too much that happens to us is not part of Your will and purpose, and we struggle to keep close to You and do what we know to be right and true. Take these dark moments of life and transform them by the power of Your Holy Spirit; may Satan be defeated, and the suffering we endure be turned into glory for the sake of Your Kingdom. All praise to You, Almighty God and gracious Lord: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Give praise to the Lord by thanking Him for His salvation. Praise Him for His power to save!

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Afghanistan.** *Pray for general Petraeus, who is in charge of military forces in the country.*
- *Pray about the arms trade across the world, and pray against the illegal weapons trade that feeds much conflict in the world*
- *Give thanks to God for the young children in your church*

Meditation

Be comforted, you who have felt the power of sin,
There is One who has the victory over Satan's evil sway.

Be strengthened, you who know cruel oppression,
There is One who has the courage to bring you freedom.

Be heartened, you who struggle with your burdens,
There is One who takes the weight you suffer on Himself.

Be encouraged, you who need to hear good news,
There is One who broke through death to bring you love.

Be enlightened, you who have the heart to understand,
There is One who taught the way of life, and lived it perfectly.

Be enthused, you who are willing to speak your faith,
There is One who works through you in authority and power!

Be blessed, you who have walked in hope and joy,
There is One you know who has a place for you in heaven!

Bible passage - Amos 8:9-14

⁹ 'On that day,' says the Lord GOD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into funeral songs; I will make you all wear sackcloth and shave your heads; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and the end of the day will be bitter.'

¹¹ 'The time is surely coming,' says the Lord GOD, 'when I will send a famine throughout the land; not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² They will wander about from sea to sea, and from north to east; they will run all around to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.'

¹³ 'On that day beautiful young women will swoon and the young men will thirst. ¹⁴ Those who swear by the idol of Guilt in Samaria, and say, "As your god lives, O Dan," and, "As the Way of Beersheba lives," they will fall, and never rise again.'

Bible Study

Review

Amos warns Israel of a coming day when God will judge them, and they cannot escape. His words speak prophetically of the end times, and God's 'Last Judgement'.

It is not easy to come to terms with the prophecy of Amos. We would like to be able to take some of its great themes such as justice or righteousness and apply them, but this is only one aspect of a bigger message. The book is the record of a man called by God to tell the people of Israel that they had wandered away from their God and would bear the consequences. Amos describes God's repeated attempts to draw His people back, but his prophecies are full of gloom, because Israel was unrepentant, and heading for destruction. Frankly, it is hard to draw spiritual lessons for today from such a scenario! Yet despite the problems, this passage reaches out beyond the confines of Amos' day to connect strongly with the New Testament, and as we will see, it gives us some helpful background to some of Jesus' own sayings.

Today's reading contains no more information about God's judgement of Israel; it focuses on His punishment. Israel has been judged, and Amos has already said in various ways that Israel would be overcome by an enemy (2:14-16, 3:12, 4:2,3), so Amos now gives further details about the punishment of war yet to come. Each feature of this prophecy can be readily understood as something that happens at a time of war, smoke and darkness over the land due to fire (8:9), death and funerals (8:10), famine (8:11), lack of freedom and mobility (8:12), panic and confusion (8:13,14), but the passage says much more than this. We might have expected Amos to tell us who would invade Israel or when it would happen, but he does not; instead, he paints a picture of Israel's defeat that hints at something far more important.

Here in this passage, Amos does not use the phrase 'the Day of the Lord', although he has already used it earlier (5:18-20), yet as soon as he begins by saying '*on that day ...*' (8:9), the idea of a day of God's judgement dominates the passage. His prophecy speaks about the turning around of day and night, but he does not appear to be describing merely the confusion of war, for his words capture the awesome majesty of the God who made time and controls it (8:9). This shift in emphasis is important, because ever since Amos' day, the phrase 'the day of the Lord' has been used both in Scripture and in common language to describe God's coming to judge the earth at the end of time. So Amos' vision is in truth an apocalyptic vision of God's wrath and is one of the first glimpses within Scripture of what today we call the 'Last Judgement'.

One remarkable feature of this passage is that each picture painted by Amos appears in Jesus' own words about the End Times (see Matt. 24). But more than this, they also crop up in His teaching about the Kingdom of God. Amos paints a picture of darkness, funerals, famine, wandering, panic and confusion. Now, the turning of light into darkness (8:9) is similar to Jesus' teaching about the values of the Kingdom of God, which are opposite to those of earthly life. The picture of mourning (8:10) is a reminder that true repentance is required of anyone who would seek God's forgiveness. Amos himself says that the famine at these end times will be a '*famine of hearing the words of the Lord*' (8:11), a phrase that highlights the need for spiritual nourishment. Then, the picture of restless wandering (8:12) is the remarkable background to Jesus' well-known words '*seek, and you will find ...*' (Matt 6:33), and lastly, the fruitless worship of idols (8:13,14) is something Jesus warns us against, as well.

Amos' awful prophecy does not serve merely to rub salt into Israel's wounds. Here, Amos is truly led to declare words that God has used over the centuries to draw people's eyes towards His judgement, and ultimately, His Last Judgement. We should therefore study the text as a passage that reaches beyond the circumstances of Amos' own life and times to speak to generations yet to come. This was the first such prophecy in Israel.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In your group, discuss the ways in which this prophecy by Amos offers warnings to God's people today.
2. Is it correct to say that God has created a famine of His Word today, and if so, what does this might mean?
3. Discuss verses 13 and 14, and how they might be interpreted. What do these verses mean?

Personal comments by author

It is hard to read these words and not think about Jesus' own words about the coming 'day of the Lord' in Matthew 24 (and other Gospels). Every text in the Bible that alludes to the final judgement of God are both terrifying and also extraordinarily comforting. It is terrifying because none of us can be entirely sure what will happen; and it is comforting because we know that in Christ, we may be sure that God, through Christ, will help us and save us. All this is very important for our faith. Some people try to ignore it all, but if you read the Bible, the subject never goes away!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How can you respond to the interesting and special challenge of this passage of Scripture? Which part of this passage speaks to you? Do your best to discuss this passage with others so that you do not become isolated in your understanding of it.*
- *Pray for the world in which we live, and the debates that take place almost constantly about whether it can continue to sustain life given the pollution of the world. Pray that God's people will make sense of what Scripture says about the end of the world, and not be ashamed of it.*

Final Prayer

Give us humility, Almighty Father, in the face of the great truths of the Gospel. May we handle them with dignity and care, and always remember that we are dependent upon You for everything, including our wisdom and understanding. Guide us in all truth, Almighty Father; AMEN
