

## Pride and Punishment

- Amos 6:1-14
- Vance Havner said once, “My father considered himself to be the head of the family, and the rest of us were inclined to agree with him. He was not opposed to the posterior application of superior force, if necessary. He was not afraid he would frustrate Junior. He saw no conflict between love and discipline. Neither does the Bible. Our Lord said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” (Rev. 3:19) Yes. We have seen that truth in Amos, haven’t we?
- As we continue our study in Amos today, you may have noticed that the prophecy in chapter 6 has a dual audience. Amos speaks to both Judah and Israel here, as we see in the first verse. Zion is Jerusalem, which was the capital of the southern kingdom, called Judah. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, which was called Israel. And once again, it is good for us to be reminded that God brings judgment to His people because he loves us. God sees no conflict between love and discipline, in fact, the two are inseparable. In this passage today, there are only two points that I want to focus on: Pride and Punishment. Or, Condition and Condemnation. It was Israel’s pride (and I use that to refer to the two kingdoms) that provoked God’s punishment. It was Israel’s condition which called for God’s condemnation. I will spend most of our time on the first point, and briefly touch on the second, as it has become a common refrain in Amos.
- **Pride**
- Put simply, pride means, “me first.” It says, “I am more important than you.” I think of what John the apostle wrote in his third letter about a proud man in the church. “I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.” (3 John 9). Yeah, old Diotrephes was going to be the first guy in the pot-luck line. He was going to be the last guy to get up from his table, holding court while boasting about his latest exploits in the business world. He would be the LAST person to lift a finger to help clean up, sighing loudly at the people who are interrupting his monologue as they try to clean around him. Old Diotrephes, whose name means “nourished by Jupiter,” is mentioned only once in the Bible, and John uses him as an example of someone NOT to emulate. “Diotrephes, who like to put himself first.” Pride is a deadly sin, as we will see in Amos 6. You know what is most dangerous about pride? We cannot see it in ourselves without our best friend or God intervening! That’s what happened with Isaiah. He went into the temple and had a vision of the Lord and His holiness and it changed his life. We learn from Isaiah that we can’t say, “Here am I” until we say, “Woe is me!” Stephen Olford used to preach about Jacob’s encounter with God on the wrestling mat and Olford would say, “Before God crowns a man, He has to crush him.” Why? **Because in our natural state, we are all “me-first” people. And even when we come to Christ, that “me-first” orientation is the hardest thing to kill.** Sanctification in its simplest terms is the process of putting away pride, and dying to self.
- How do we know pride was at the heart of the problem in Israel? Well, the most obvious answer is that God says so Himself, in verse 8: “I abhor the pride of Jacob.” That’s an example of synecdoche: where the part represents the whole. He uses the patriarch to represent all of Israel. Strong language! God abhors pride. Two weeks ago, we saw that God hates hypocritical worship: **chapter 5:21-23.** Hypocritical worship is “me-first” religion. When offerings and sacrifices and songs become an end in themselves, we simply check those off a list in order to please ourselves, not to worship God. God hates that. He abhors pride.
- We will get to the fruit of their pride, but let’s go right to the root of their pride. Verse 1: They are at ease in Zion and they feel secure in Samaria. Why? Because in their minds, they are “The notable men of the first of the nations.” In their minds, Israel is first among nations, and in their minds, they are first in Israel. They are the cream at the top of the nation that is the cream at the top of all nations. These guys have arrived! They have made it! Or, have they? These are not God-first men but me-first men, who are

leading the nation to judgment. And God says, “You like being first? Well, you will be the first to go into exile.”

- What do we see here that is a primary indication of pride? It is to think that you are better than others. It is to live in exact opposition to what the Bible clearly teaches. Remember, Paul wrote to the Philippians, “in humility, count others more significant than yourselves.” God says in verse 2, here in Amos 6, “Look at the other nations around you...are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?” It is an interesting question, because materially, Israel WAS better than the nations around them. They were VERY prosperous. So the first question could be answered YES, we are better, at least when it comes to material prosperity. And the second question could be answered NO, because Israel had much more territory than the surrounding nations. But God is using these questions to hold up a mirror to His people. The truth is they SHOULD have been better than the other nations, because of God’s favor. They had more material goods and more and better land, because of God’s favor. But the truth is that NO, they were not better, because God was not asking about their material wealth but about their spiritual health. And in that, they were no better than anyone. They had become just like the pagan nations around them. You may even say they were worse than their neighbors. Jesus said, “Be careful lest the light in you is darkness.”
- But you couldn’t tell Israel that. They saw themselves as the greatest people on earth, and Israel the greatest nation on earth. Does that sound familiar? Is the United States better than all the nations of the earth? Some would say yes, because we have amazing resources, and live in such prosperity, and yes, we do enjoy great freedom. But nations do not have the right to give themselves spiritual priority. Israel could not, so America certainly can not. I love America and want to make that clear. But we are a sinful nation, and a proud nation, and a nation full of ‘me-first’ people. I heard on World’s podcast about a “Walk out for Life” organized in hundreds of high schools and colleges across the nation. At 10:00am on Wednesday, April 11, students walked out of class and stood in silence for exactly 17 minutes. That’s because in those 17 minutes, ten babies would be aborted in the United States. I asked a friend of mine who is on the school board how many schools in Alamance County participated. He said, “That’s the first I have heard that this even happened. None did.” We know why most Americans didn’t even know about this until after the fact. (PAUSE) Our only hope for continued survival is if God brings revival. We know it’s true, and the warning signs are everywhere, but in many ways we have done what Israel did in the 8<sup>th</sup> century as Amos and Isaiah and others prophesied about upcoming judgment. LOOK at **Verse 3**. God says, the longer you put off repentance, the closer you bring the day of judgment and destruction. To reject the call of the Lord to repent is to invite the condemnation of the Lord. How were they doing that? With their pride. Pride, then, living a me-first life, is the root problem. What was the fruit of the pride in Israel for which God was bringing judgment?
- **Their god was their belly.** (verse 4, 6) As we have seen in previous chapters, they pampered themselves into a stupor. They slept on wooden beds inlaid with ivory, and move quickly from the bed to the couch, where they dined on the very best, eating high on the cow, since they didn’t eat hogs. But they “buffeted” their bodies. In verse 6, we see that they drank wine by the bowl, not by the glass. Their basins were large, so God addresses their indulgence and their drunkenness at the same time. Also we see that they anointed themselves with the finest oils, heavily perfumed, but at the same time ignore the ruin of their nation. Amos has already called out the cows of Bashan, and here the irony is, Thomas Comiskey writes, that “the Israelites have become like what they ate—sleek and heavy, heavy of understanding, forgetting the Rock and Savior who gave them birth.” Paul spoke of such people in Romans, saying, they “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.” (Romans 16:18) We must check ourselves to make sure we are not serving our appetites. And to be accountable with someone who will honest with us. And to cry out for help from God. That’s the way to get off the “me-first merry-go-round.”

- **Their songs were idle and frivolous.** (verse 5) Andrew Fletcher said in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.” Music is a powerful indicator of where a nation is and what the culture believes and values. In Israel, the wealthy and privileged people were living like kings, and like David, they had time to write songs. They even had time to invent instruments. But unlike David, their songs were not written to glorify God but to glorify themselves or their works. Me-first people write me-first songs, and me-first books and me-first movies, and even preach me-first sermons!
- **Their justice was poison.** (verse 12). Amos sets this up with question and answer. Question: would you gallop over a field of rocks with your horse? NO! Question: would you plow a field of rocks with your oxen? NO! Implied Question: Then why have you turned justice unto poison? Why does the fruit of your righteousness turn mouths inside out, and make people want to spit? Israel has done the unthinkable in perverting justice. Can we claim to be any different as a nation?
- **Their hope was in their own ‘strength.’** (verse 13) Amos sets this up with the pronouncement that they rejoice in victories over Lo-Debar and Karnaim. It is huge in their imagination, but it amounts to nothing. In fact, that’s what Lo-Debar means: nothing. They conquered nothing, and they boasted that they had done it in their own strength. Their pride is like the teenage boy flexing his muscles in the mirror. When our hope is placed in something WE have or WE do, it’s no hope at all.
- **Punishment**
- As I said, the me-first people would now get to be first in something else: exile. Verse 7. Party time is over.
- Verse 8 and 14: God Himself will deliver them up to the nation He raises up against them.
- Verse 9-10: Great destruction. Terrified silence. The story within the prophecy is interesting. Someone comes to bury his relative, and as he is carrying out the bones, he has a brief conversation with another person, someone hiding in the house. “Is anyone with you?” “No!” And, “Silence! Don’t mention the Lord’s name.” Why would he say that? Possibly because when the Lord brings destruction to His enemies, it is such a fearful thing that His enemies will not even want to whisper His name, for fear that He will come back. The Psalmist said this about God’s justice on the wicked: “The upright see it and are glad, and wickedness shuts its mouth.” (Psalm 107:42) Paul wrote, “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” (Romans 3:19)
- As we have seen over and over in this little book of prophecy, God will not be mocked; whatever a man sows, that shall he reap. And we continue to look with trembling at God’s holiness and justice, while rejoicing at the same time at God’s grace and mercy that is extended to those who humble themselves before Him. He is good.
- What are we to do? Examine our own hearts for evidences of pride. Ask someone we trust to help us see evidences of pride, or seeds of self-reliance, in our lives. What are we to do? Repent for thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. Run to reconcile with those whom we have offended with our pride. What are we to do? Pray for our nation. We are not the first and the best. We are certainly not immune to God’s judgment. We need Him.
- Prayer