

AMOS 6:1 – 14

The woe continues! Just as they were wrong about the Day of the Lord, they are wrong to feel secure.

God hates their songs and melody of their harps, but they keep singing idle songs.

Woe to you ... (cont.)

⁶ Woe to those who are at ease in **Zion**,

<-- 1:2

and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,

Lit. "trust"

<-- 3:9, 4:1

the notable men of the first of the nations,

to whom the house of Israel comes!

<-- 5:1 – 3, 25

² Pass over to Calneh, and see,

(Gen. 10:10) "fortress of Anu"

and from there go to Hamath the great;

then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

<-- 1:8

Are you better than these kingdoms?

NO!

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?

NO!

Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory

<-- 3:12, 15 - These beds will be broken in war and the houses of ivory destroyed

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

<-- 5:23

Woe to those:

* who are at ease and feel secure

* who are the leaders

* who live in luxury but are not grieved by Israel's ruin
(* who long for the Day of the Lord - 5:18)

and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,
(1 Chr 23:5; 2 Chr 7:6; 29:25)
Or "improvise on musical instruments"

6 who drink wine in bowls
← 2:8, 5:11

and anoint themselves with the finest oils,

but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
Lit. "become sick"

7 Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile,
← 5:5, 27

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
← 5:21 "I hate..., I despise..."

and hate his strongholds,
← 3:11

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
← 5:3

relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up to bring the
or "to burn them"

bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of
← 2:1

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."
← 2:12, 5:13

11 For behold! the Lord commands,
← 3:7

and the great house shall be struck down into fragments,
← 3:15

and the little house into bits.

Inclusio of firsts!

NO!

Absurd!

12 Do horses run on rocks?
← 3:3 - 6

NO!

Does one plow there with oxen?
Lit. "the sea"

NO!

But you have turned justice into poison
← 5:7

(Deut. 29:18, 32:32-33) - compare to idolatry and Sodom and Gomorrah

and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—

13 you who rejoice in Lo-debar,
Lit. "for nothing"

They have conquered everything from "Nothing-town" to "Strong-city" - and they pridefully rejoice as if they have done it!

who say, "Have we not by our own strength

captured Karnaïm for ourselves?"
Lit. "horns"
← 3:14

NO!

14 "For behold! I will raise up against you a nation,
← 5:2 - contrast

O house of Israel," declares the Lord, the God of hosts;

"and they shall oppress you from Lebo-hamath

All will be oppressed: from the northern most point - Lebo-hamath, to the southernmost point - Brook of Arabah. Jeroboam II's great nation and expansion project will come to nothing!

to the Brook of the Arabah."

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NOTES:

6:1 - 7

Amos names three cities—**Calneh**, **Hamath**, and **Gath**—as a way to challenge Israel's sense of security and superiority. Each represents a significant regional power that had experienced downfall. Calneh was a prominent Aramean (Syrian) city, possibly the capital of Unqi, a Neo-Hittite kingdom. Its exact location is debated, but most scholars place it in the Antioch plain, near modern Aleppo. It was conquered during the Assyrian campaigns of Shalmaneser III around 859–854 BC. Hamath (modern Hama) was a strategic city on the Orontes River, further north in Syria. At its height, it ruled a regional kingdom. The northern reach of Jeroboam II's kingdom extended nearly to Hamath (see 2 Kings 14:25), making it a point of national pride. But like Calneh, Hamath fell under Assyrian pressure. Gath was one of the five key Philistine cities, located in the coastal plains closest to Judah.

It was captured first by Hazael of Aram around 815 BC (2 Kings 12:17), and then by Uzziah of Judah around 760 BC (2 Chronicles 26:6). These were well-known events in Amos's time. Each city had once been powerful, but had experienced conquest or collapse.

This paragraph describes a lifestyle marked by excessive luxury and indulgence. As with the ivory houses in Amos 3, the **ivory beds** here symbolize elite extravagance. Owning any kind of bed was a luxury—most people slept on mats on the floor. Ivory, likely imported from Syria, was a prized material used to decorate furniture and wall panels. Archaeological excavations in the region have uncovered many ivory fragments bearing Egyptian and Phoenician artistic motifs. Ancient annals also mention ivory objects—including a bed—offered as tribute from Hezekiah of Judah to Sennacherib. The image may recall the bed of King Og (Deut. 3:11) or Solomon's ornate throne (2 Chr. 9:17–19). The **sheep and cows** mentioned are from select breeds raised in stalls—a mark of wealth. Like beds, meat was not part of everyday life for most people and was typically reserved for feasts or festivals. The **large bowls** used for drinking wine were generally associated with cultic rituals, possibly suggesting not only extravagance but also the misuse of sacred objects. **Fine oils** were used for cosmetic and hygienic purposes. Together with wine (as in Ps. 23:5), they often symbolize comfort, pleasure, and prosperity.

The word translated “**revelry**” is rare—used only once elsewhere in the Old Testament (Jer. 16:5). Scholars suggest it referred to elaborate drinking parties, possibly akin to ancient gentlemen's clubs. These gatherings may have been linked to ancestral memorials, deity celebrations, or upper-class social rituals.

6:8 – 11

Verse 9–10 describes a grim and haunting scene: a relative enters a house only to find that all the occupants are dead and must deal with the remains. In ancient Israel, the duty of disposing of the dead fell to family members (see Lev 10:1–5). While cremation was generally not practiced or approved in Israel, there were rare exceptions—such as for capital punishment (Lev 20:14), serious sexual transgressions (Gen 38:24), or for reasons of hygiene and purification when burial was delayed (1 Sam 31:12–13). The mention of burning bodies here may imply that the corpses had been left unattended for a long time, or it may suggest a symbolic form of judgment—as though Israel were now under a sentence of death. Another possibility is that there was simply no time to prepare a proper burial, and cremation was the only option. Some scholars note that the Hebrew spelling in this passage is unusual and could instead refer to anointing or embalming the bodies for burial, rather than cremating them.

6:12 – 14

This passage includes several key place names that would have resonated strongly with Israel's national pride and recent military victory. **Lo Debar** was a city captured by Jeroboam II during his military campaigns (see 2 Kings 14:25). It was located in former Ammonite territory, just north of the Jabbok River. Amos plays on the name by reinterpreting it as Lo-Dabar, meaning “nothing.” The second place, **Karnaim**, lay even farther north, east of the Sea of Galilee near a tributary of the Yarmuk River. The name means “horn,” a symbol often associated with strength and military power. Amos also refers to **Lebo-hamath** and **Arabah**, two locations mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 when the historian recounts how Jeroboam restored the boundaries of Israel. Lebo-hamath (literally, “the entrance to Hamath”) is thought to be modern-day Lebweh, located north of Damascus near the headwaters of the Orontes River. It marked the northernmost boundary of Israel's expanded territory. The Wadi of the Arabah—a dry valley near the northern edge of the Dead Sea—represented the southernmost limit. In naming these two places, Amos draws attention to the full scope of Israel's territorial success under Jeroboam's reign.

COMMENTARY:

¶1: WOE TO YOU.... CONTINUED (6:1 – 7)

This paragraph continues the themes developed throughout Amos, especially chapters 3–6. It closely echoes the previous section (5:18–27) with its cries of “woe,” its pronouncements of exile, and its critique of music and revelry. As before, the people are living with deep spiritual misunderstanding. They need the curtains drawn back—the prophet’s words are meant to awaken them to how God truly sees things.

Amos has already declared that Israel is as good as dead (5:1–3), and yet the elite continue on as if nothing has changed. They do not grieve, repent, seek help, or even complain. Just as they misunderstood the Day of the Lord—expecting joy and blessing instead of darkness and judgment—they now dismiss Amos’s message, assuming that any judgment is far off. They believe they are safe and secure.

So Amos pronounces another woe, this time directed at the complacent elite—those who are “at ease in Zion” and who “feel secure on the mountain of Samaria.” These are the political and religious centers of the Southern and Northern Kingdoms, where nobles and leaders resided. While the focus of Amos’ message is on Israel, Judah is included here as a warning. Injustice and pride, wherever they are found, are detestable to God. These elites take great pride in being “first of the nations”—a reference to their calling as God’s chosen people (Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6). They trust in their fortified cities (2 Kings 14:25–28), their national story, and their positions of influence. People come to them for favor, help, or recognition. But Amos has already exposed their failure—they trample the poor and silence the needy. Their pride in legacy and security blinds them to the reality of coming judgment.

To pierce their delusion, Amos challenges them to visit other great cities: Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. Each had enjoyed power and prominence, but all had experienced decline or destruction. These weren’t obscure places—Amos’s audience would know what happened to them. If those once-great cities could fall, so can Israel. Yet instead of humility and repentance, the leaders dismiss the threat. They push God’s word far away while drawing violence and injustice near. They are willfully blind to what is coming.

Rather than mourn or change their ways, the elite continue their lavish lives. Verse 7 refers to “revelry,” a rare word likely indicating elite feasting gatherings—perhaps associated with ancestor memorials, cultic celebrations, or extravagant upper-class parties. These feasts involved excessive drinking and often sexual indulgence. The wealthy recline on ivory beds—extravagant luxury in a culture where most slept on mats. They dine on gourmet meat from stall-fed animals—another privilege of the rich. They fill their time by improvising songs and playing instruments – even imagining themselves to be like David. They drink wine by the bowlful and they anoint themselves with the finest imported oils.

On one level, Amos critiques their luxury, ease, and disregard for others. Like the “cows of Bashan” in chapter 4, they indulge themselves while the poor suffer. They drown out the suffering, God’s word and warning with celebration. But there’s more: many of the items mentioned had religious associations—festival meats, anointing oil, musical worship, bowls from cultic rituals. Instead of honoring God, they’ve created a rival liturgy centered on wealth, power, and personal pleasure. Their religion has become idolatry. The feasts that should have been covenant celebrations have turned into self-indulgent mockeries.

The irony is piercing. They sing—even though God has said He hates their songs (5:23). They lounge on couches—though God said their furniture will be broken and looted (3:12). They drink wine—though God warned in 5:11 they will not enjoy the vineyards they planted. They eat fine meat—though they behave like the cows of Bashan who trample others. Every act of luxury is a direct contradiction to what God has spoken. Rather than respond to judgment with repentance, they respond with revelry.

They do not grieve the ruin of Joseph. That phrase in verse 6 is telling. Joseph represents the whole of Israel, now collapsing under judgment—and no one mourns. They should be fasting, repenting, praying—but instead, they feast and sing. If their parties were meant to honor the dead, Amos suggests a grim reversal: they are unknowingly honoring themselves. They are the ones dying, and their celebrations are a funeral feast in disguise.

And so Amos delivers the final word. The ones who were first—the prominent, the pampered, the prideful—will be the first to go into exile. Their celebrations will be cut off. Their luxury will be shattered. The word of the Lord they ignored will prove true, but it will be too late.

¶2: NO ESCAPE (6:8 – 11)

God has warned of coming death and destruction. Israel will be like a fallen maiden, and all will mourn her death. He already swore an oath in 4:2—confirmed again in the previous passage—that an unnamed enemy will overtake them. Survivors will be led into exile, with the very leaders who prided themselves on being “first” now going first into judgment. But despite these warnings, no one is paying attention. The people go on partying as if all is well.

Now, for the second time, the Lord—Commander of heaven’s armies—makes an oath. His statement is absolute: since He has declared it, it will come to pass. His promise is this—He will hand over the city and everything in it. An army will overrun Israel, and no one will escape. Though He uses a human force, it is ultimately God’s judgment at work. In a striking reversal, the very crime for which God judged others—delivering entire populations to Edom (1:6, 9)—now falls on Israel. They too are being delivered over as a whole people, not by human betrayal but by divine judgment.

As in 5:21–24, where God declared His hatred of empty worship void of justice, so here He expresses His hatred of Israel’s pride and strongholds. Their pride has made them deaf to God’s voice. They assume their downfall is impossible because of their strength and status—“first among the nations.” Their palaces and military might have become false refuges—their supposed “rock” in times of trouble. But these strongholds have become idols—objects of misplaced trust that cannot save. And because these idols have displaced faith in God, He now stands opposed to them.

To underscore the certainty of judgment, Amos offers a short, grim story. Even if ten people manage to survive the attack and hide in a single house, they too will die—likely from plague or disease, which often follow war. Echoing 5:1–3, where only ten out of a hundred returned from battle, now even these ten perish. It recalls the image from 5:19 of someone escaping danger only to be bitten by a snake at home. Their pride and strongholds will not save them—they are false hopes that end in death.

The story grows more haunting. A family member comes to dispose of the ten corpses. Cremation is mentioned—something rare and generally avoided in Israel unless in cases of plague, punishment, or dishonor (see Lev 20:14; 1 Sam 31:12–13). Perhaps these died of disease, or perhaps this is a sign they are considered cursed—receiving the judgment of criminals. Another person in the house confirms there are no more dead, and then adds a sobering instruction: “Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.” His name, once invoked for help, has become dangerous to speak. It’s as though the Lord, once their covenant-keeping God, has now become like a divine warrior—silent and precise, waiting to strike, like a sniper in hiding. This marks a chilling reversal: their once-loud worship and festivals have ended in silence and dread. Their silencing of God’s voice has now led to their own silencing.

And even the houses themselves collapse as the survivors flee. Their homes—symbols of strength and security—crumble into dust. The destruction is total, from the great house to the little one. Some see in this a reference to the great earthquake mentioned in 1:1. Whether by military invasion, plague, or natural disaster, the message is clear: prideful Israel is not secure. Their strength is a delusion. All will be destroyed—houses, people, pride, and the idols they trusted.

¶3: ABSURD (6:12 – 14)

As he concludes this section, Amos returns to his favored rhetorical device—a series of absurd questions, just like in 3:3–6. These are questions with an obvious answer: “no.” No one would race horses on rocky cliffs. No one would try to plow the sea with oxen. The answer is not only “no,” but absurd! And yet, Amos says, Israel has done something even more ridiculous: they have turned justice into poison and righteousness into bitterness. These were meant to be the foundation stones of the society God was forming among them. But they have twisted what was meant to bring life into something repulsive and toxic. They have flipped the created moral order upside down.

The imagery here echoes the curses Moses used to describe the fruit of rebellion and idolatry. The words “poison” and “wormwood” are used in Deuteronomy 32:32–33 to describe the legacy of Sodom and Gomorrah, and again in Deuteronomy 29:18 to describe the bitter root of idolatry. By rejecting justice, Israel has made themselves look like idolatrous Sodom—an absurd people heading toward obvious judgment.

This line about justice and righteousness repeats the indictment from 5:7. In both places, the prophetic pattern is the same: a description of their coming destruction is followed by a summary of why. Their sin is not simply neglect—it is inversion. They haven’t just failed to practice justice and righteousness; they’ve corrupted them. The repetition shows just how central this accusation is to the whole book. It captures Israel’s condition in a single, stinging line.

Rather than boasting in justice or pursuing righteousness, Israel boasts in their military victories. In deep irony, Amos says they rejoice in having taken Lo-debar—which he twists to mean “nothing.” They’re celebrating “nothing-ville.” He also mentions Karnaim, a city whose name means “horn,” a symbol of strength. Israel boasts, “Have we not taken Karnaim by our own strength?” But Amos exposes the absurdity. Just as no one can plow the sea with oxen, it is equally absurd to think Israel’s success has come by their own might. The prophet has already made it clear (3:6) that cities fall only by the sovereign hand of God. Their boast is not just wrong—it’s blasphemously self-reliant. It is prideful and delusional.

In response, God declares that He will raise up a nation to oppress and destroy them. Earlier they claimed to be “first among the nations” (6:1), but now the true Lord of the nations will raise up another to bring them down. There is a haunting echo here of 5:2, where God said Israel had fallen and would not rise again. But now God does promise to raise something: not Israel, but a foreign nation that will bring His judgment. The coming destruction will be complete—from Lebo-hamath in the far north to the Brook of the Arabah in the far south. This covers the full extent of Israel’s expanded borders under Jeroboam. Everything will fall. Nothing will be spared.

Amos is essentially saying: “Well done, Israel! You’ve conquered Nothingville and Strong-city... and it’s all for nothing. Now God will conquer you—from top to bottom of your swollen kingdom.” With this ironic punch, Amos concludes this major section of his prophecy. What comes next is a new section—a series of visions that will further reveal the certainty and nature of Israel’s downfall.

SUMMARY OF AMOS 6:1 – 14

This final section concludes the main message of Amos’s central message (chapters 3–6). Throughout these chapters, God has repeatedly warned His people of the coming judgment and called them to return to Him. Israel—the nation He redeemed from Egypt and bound to Himself in covenant—was once like a beloved maiden, full of promise. Yet they have rejected the Lord and filled the land with violence, corruption, and oppression. The city gates—meant to be places of justice—have become centers of robbery and bribery. Though God sent prophets and covenant curses to awaken them, they hardened their hearts. Instead of seeking Him and living, they have chased after false gods of power, comfort, and wealth.

So now, the Lord will raise up a nation to surround them, overthrow their cities, and lead them into exile. Their great houses will be shattered—only fragments of former wealth will remain. Neither worship nor sacrifice will protect them, for their worship is stained with transgression and idolatry. God will strike down their altars and stop listening to their songs. The Day of the Lord will come—not as they imagined, but as a visitation of judgment. The God who rescued them from Egypt will now treat them as Egypt—because they have become just as wicked.

Yet despite all this, Israel remains unmoved. This chapter describes their lives of ease and luxury, confident in their fortresses and blind to their ruin. They fill their days with feasting, wine, and music, drowning out the warnings of Amos with self-indulgent distractions. They refuse to grieve the collapse of their nation or see the destruction that looms ahead. But Amos declares they are to be pitied—not envied. Like the great cities around them, they too will fall, and their celebrations will come to an end.

Their luxury and military power have become idols—false refuges in which they trust. But they have forgotten that past victories came only by God's hand. Now they live with two great absurdities: they believe they are too strong to fall, and they have turned justice and righteousness into poison. Their pride and self-reliance are not just foolish—they are offensive to the Lord.

Therefore, God swears by His holy name: He will raise up a nation to bring them down. From the northern border of Lebo-hamath to the southern edge of the Arabah, Israel will be devastated. They who claimed to be first among the nations will be the first to go into exile. War will come, followed by plague, and then even the houses themselves will fall in ruin—perhaps by earthquake. This is the work of the Lord, the God of heaven's armies.

We can only imagine that this message fell on deaf ears and hearts dulled by pride. Truly, “woe” to them—for the God who once covenanted with them has now become their enemy.

APPLICATION – IDEAS ABOUT DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

The people of Israel refused to listen to God's voice. They dismissed His prophet, ignored the warning signs in their society, and denied the coming judgment. This passage stands as a sobering warning for us. As Paul reminds us, these things were written as examples for our instruction, that we might not fall into the same sin and idolatry (1 Cor. 10:1–10). The call is clear: we must stay awake, soft-hearted, and responsive to God's voice.

- In what areas of your life are you tempted to ignore or downplay God's Word?
- Are there signs of spiritual drift that you need to pay attention to?

One of the great dangers exposed in this chapter is the danger of pride. Israel forgot who had rescued and blessed them. They took credit for what God had done, trusting in their own strength, status, and success. But pride blinds us. It hardens the heart and convinces us we don't need to depend on God. Scripture is clear: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

- Where are you tempted to take credit for what God has done in your life?
- What would it look like to daily walk in humility and dependence on Him?

Another reason for Israel's deafness was their indulgent lifestyle. Surrounded by luxury, entertainment, and noise, they silenced the voice of the prophets and drowned out the discomfort of conviction. In a world overflowing with distraction—from streaming shows, endless news cycles, work pressures, social media, and hobbies—we face a similar danger. Unless we intentionally make space to listen to God, we risk becoming comfortably numb to His presence and His call.

- What comforts or distractions might be dulling your spiritual hearing?
- How can you create regular rhythms of silence and attentiveness to God?

Israel also trusted in their strongholds—their fortified cities, their wealth, their houses. These became idols, false sources of security. But no fortress can stand in the face of God's judgment. The only true refuge is in the Lord. Today, we may not trust in stone walls, but we often place our hope in things

like stable economies, military power, insurance policies, retirement funds, or gated communities. None of these can save us. Only the Lord is a sure foundation.

- What “strongholds” or systems are you tempted to trust instead of God?
- How can you renew your dependence on the Lord as your true security?

One of Amos’s sharpest indictments is repeated here: Israel turned justice and righteousness into poison. What was meant to bless and uphold the vulnerable had become bitter and twisted. God takes justice seriously. His people are to reflect His character by caring for the weak, the poor, and the oppressed. This isn’t just about policies—it’s about how we treat the people around us: the migrant, the single parent, the disabled, the economically burdened, the socially excluded.

- In what ways might you—or your community—be neglecting or distorting God’s call to justice?
- How can you actively seek justice and righteousness in your relationships and spheres of influence?

Amos’s audience lived as if the Day of the Lord would never come. They assumed judgment was far off, irrelevant to their daily lives. But it came suddenly. As followers of Jesus, we live with the hope of His return—but we are also warned not to grow complacent. The Judge stands at the door.

- How would your priorities or posture change if you truly believed Jesus could return today?
- What would it look like to live with readiness and urgency?

This chapter ends the main section of Amos’s message and prepares us for a series of visions. But its themes remain urgent: Pride must be humbled, justice must be pursued, and our trust must rest in the Lord alone. Will we listen, or will we harden our hearts?