

• *Consequences*

Complacent pride and carelessness amidst privilege is followed by calamitous punishment.

3. *Calamitous Punishment*

3. **Calamitous punishment.** If the people of Israel and Judah think they are 'the first of the nations', they will be 'the first of the nations' in going into exile ^{□1}! Their feasting will come to a bad end ^{□2}.

□1 6:7a
□2 6:7b

• *The first nation – first into exile!*

⁷'Therefore they will now go into exile as the foremost of the exiles, and the banqueting of these loungers will pass away.'

Amos 6:8 focuses more closely on the underlying pride.

^{8a}'The sovereign Yahweh has sworn by himself, – oracle of the Sovereign Yahweh Almighty – "I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, and I hate his citadels..."

• *Irreversible oath*

Pride arouses the anger of God, and the greatest thing He can do in His anger is to take an oath. An oath 'confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument' ^{□1}. It is God's final word; no change of plan can take place once it has been given.

□1 Hebrews 6:16

What God's punishment will involve is told in fuller detail in 6:8b–10.

• *Punishment – invasion with no survivors*

*^{8b}"...Therefore I will deliver up the city and everything in it."
⁹And if ten men are left in one house, they will die.
¹⁰Then the nearest relative and the one who burns the corpse, will lift him up to carry out his body from the house. The relative will call to anyone who might be in the innermost parts of the house, "Is anyone else there with you?" And then he will say, "No one". Then the relative will say, "Keep quiet. For the name of Yahweh is not even to be mentioned."*

• *Stunned silence at God's awesome judgement*

When relatives come to the scene of disaster after an Assyrian invasion they will find no survivors ^{□1}. They will call for awed silence at the judgement of God ^{□2} – like Revelation 8:1 when the seventh seal of God's judgement was opened and heaven was stunned for half an hour. The severity and thoroughness of God's punishment is emphasized ^{□3}.

□1 6:9-10a
□2 6:10b
□3 6:11

¹¹'For behold, Yahweh will give command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.'

• *While God is still speaking there is still hope*

Amos says all of this in the name of God, because it is God's last word before it all happens. There is hope in the possibility of a last minute change. God is just on the verge of making His very final decision. Yet the very last word has not quite been spoken. God is saying 'I am about to raise up a nation against you' ^{□1}. Amos is speaking of it because the oath of God (mentioned in 6:8) is just about to be taken. The funeral song is already being sung. Yet if the situation were entirely hopeless God would not be saying anything at all. Once an oath is taken God has nothing more to say! God would not speak to king Saul, after He had made a final decision about him. Jesus would not speak to Herod – his day of opportunity had gone by. While God is speaking to us, there is still hope. 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart' ^{□2}. If you no longer hear the voice of God, then that situation has closed down. There is no hope until God speaks again – perhaps about something else or a new plan.

□1 6:14

• *When God stops speaking the opportunity is lost*

□2 Hebrews 3:7-8, 14; 4:7 quoting Psalm 95:7-8

• *Very last warning*

Amos is giving a very last warning. Instant repentance might avert the judgement. Otherwise Israel will come under Assyrian invasion and the nation will cease to exist, only to be taken up again centuries later, in another form.

4. *Certain principle*

4. **Certain principle.** As this section comes to a close, and Amos speaks of final and fixed extermination for northern Israel, he puts it in terms of a sure

□1 6:12a
□2 6:12b

• Illustrated by a comparison with three equally absurd suggestions

and certain principle. It is settled and incontestable that God will punish sin. Verses 12–13 look at three absurdities: driving horses up a cliff face ¹, ploughing the sea with a team of oxen ², and expecting God to take no notice of poison ³, bitterness ⁴ and arrogance ⁵. Yahweh will stir up a mighty nation – Assyria – and Israel will go into exile ⁶.

³ 6:12c
⁴ 6:12c
⁵ 6:13
⁶ 6:14

^{12a} 'Do horses run on rocks?
 Or does one plough the sea with oxen?'

¹. See footnote

• Absurd to think that God will do nothing about Israel's sin and injustice

Both ideas are ridiculous suggestions. Yet the point is that it is equally ridiculous to think that God's people can sink so low in sin and injustice and yet nothing be done about it. It is equally ridiculous to think that a country can continue as a 'holy nation' and yet allow such monstrosities as the ill-treatment of the poor, whom God specially loves.

^{12b} 'Yet you have turned justice into poison,
 and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,
¹³ you who rejoice in Lo-Debar – A Thing of Nothing,
 you who say "Have we not by our own strength
 taken Karmaim – A Pair of Horns – for ourselves?"'

• Meaningless military successes

'Wormwood' is the plant, already mentioned in 5:7; it has a bitter taste. 'Lo-Debar' and 'Karnaim' are towns in Transjordan – the area east of the river Jordan. Apparently Israel had recently recaptured them from Syria. But the names of the towns have meanings. 'Lo-Debar' could be translated 'A Thing of Nothing', 'Karmaim' has the meaning 'A Pair of Horns'. So the people of Israel were rejoicing in their military successes.

But their recent successes mean nothing. 'Lo-Debar' is exactly that, 'A Thing of Nothing'. They might think that they are so clever as to have captured a powerful town – 'A Pair of Horns'. But God will have the last word. Will they be able to cope with the might of Assyria coming against them?

• Assyria - God's instrument of punishment

¹⁴ "For behold I am about to raise up a nation against you" – oracle of Yahweh God Almighty – "and they will afflict you from the gateway of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah."



• From north to south

The 'gateway of Hamath' was in the extreme north; the 'Arabah' was in the south. The entire country will be afflicted and deported. Pride, social carelessness, arrogant self-confidence, affluent indolence – they are all certain to be punished. It is a mercy to them that Amos is giving them a last warning. The hatred of such sin and the certainty of its arousing God's anger is a fixed and certain principle in God's dealings with the world. His judgement might be slow in coming, but it will surely come. Upon 'Israel', a nation uniquely chosen by God, the judgement is even more certain. For God will not tolerate for long such sin in His people.

• God will not tolerate for long such sin in His people

Footnote

¹ The Hebrew text could be translated 'Can one plough it with oxen?' but it is likely that the Hebrew bbqrym ('with oxen') should be read as two words, bbqr ym ('the sea with oxen').

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