

Exegesis of Amos 6:1-7

OT lesson for Pentecost 18, Series C, Sept. 26, 2010

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I. Background for the pericope of Amos' Announcement of Exile:

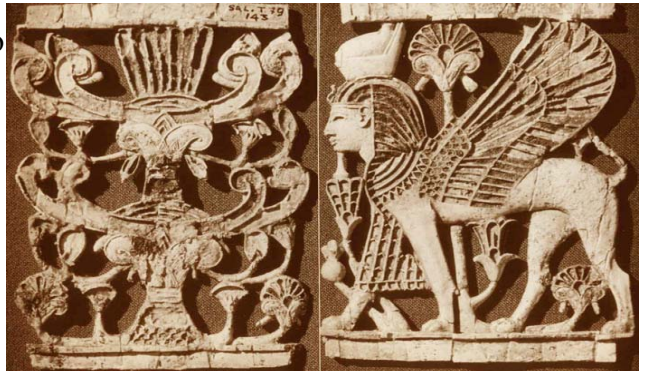
- A. Amos prophesied against the Northern Kingdom of Israel between 760-750 B.C. during the reign of King Jeroboam II.
- B. Amos was not a professional prophet (7:14), like the court prophets under the King's hire, but was sent by God to call the North to repentance.
- C. Historical situation:
 1. Jeroboam II ruled in Israel (also during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah in the south) during a period of prosperity, wealth and military power.
 2. Following in the footsteps of Jeroboam I (who was the first king of Israel after the division), Jeroboam II led the people further into idolatry.
 3. Amos preached against the sins of injustice to the poor, materialism, injustice and immorality in society which would bring upon the nation the Assyrian Exile in 722 B.C.

II. Interpretation (translation from the Hebrew):

- A. v.1a—*“Woe to you, complacent ones on Mount Zion and secure ones on Mount Samaria,”*
 1. These opening phrases are vocative, and so are to be translated as an address to the Israelite elite using a prophetic oracle of warning (as also in v. 3).
 2. The adjectival phrase *“complacent ones”* comes from the root *sha-an*, which means *“to be at rest, care-free, self-confident.”* It refers here to a false sense of security, which avoids change and is complacent.
 3. The second adjectival phrase, *“secure ones,”* points to the fact that Samaria was a city built on a hill 300 feet above a valley where the best trade routes crossed. Because it was highly defensible, the Israelites put their faith in the “security” of the capital city rather than in God.
 4. Amos ties the fate of Israel and Judah together, though he primarily preached against Israel.
- B. v.1b— *“the distinguished ones of the foremost of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes.”*
 1. The verbal root for *“distinguished ones,”* (*nakav*) means “to pierce” (e.g., 2 Ki 12:9), and since the practice of piercing a hole in one's ear could identify a person and establish ownership (Ex. 21:6), the participle form came to mean *“one who is notable/distinguished.”*
 2. The irony of this verse is that Israel thought of themselves as “first/foremost” in prosperity and power during this time in their history, but contrary to this, God pronounces them “first” to go into Exile (6:7)!
- C. v.2a *“Travel to Calneh and look, go from there to great Hamath, and descend to Gath of the Philistines.”*
 1. Amos directs the affluent of Israel to the nations around them, which God would also punish for their pride.
 2. The city names are qualified (“great” may also mean “capitol”) to distinguish the cities from others of the same name.
 3. Calneh may have been previously been conquered by Jeroboam II (2Ki 14:28), and Hamath by King Uzziah (2 Chron 26:6), but all would be taken over by the Assyrian King, Tiglath-Pileser III around 738 B.C.
- D. v.2b— *“Are you better than those kingdoms? Are their territories greater than yours?”*
 1. These rhetorical questions force Israel to consider that if these city-states were vulnerable to an Assyrian attack, how much more would Israel!
 2. The alternative to trusting in military might, like the pagans, was to trust in the name of Yahweh (See Psalm 20:7)!
- E. v.3— *“You who are thrusting off the day of evil, you bring near the seat of violence!”*
 1. The Piel verb, *nadah* means “to exclude, thrust away.”

2. It is act of defiance by Israel’s aristocracy to refuse to believe that they will someday be judged (= *the day of evil*).
 3. The second phrase is to be translated depending on which Hebrew noun is actually being used here: either derived from the verb *yashav*, “to sit or dwell” or from *shavat*, “to cease,” which would either be translated as:
 - a. *a seat of violence* (referring to Assyria’s violent conquest of Israel in 722 B.C. (which is where the NIV gets “reign of terror”)) or
 - b. *a cessation of violence* (referring to God’s bringing an end to Israel’s “violence” against the poor (e.g. Amos 3:10)).
 4. Ironically, it is their very arrogance that will bring upon Israel their own destruction.
- F. v.4— “*Those lying on beds of ivory, sprawling on their couches, eating lambs from the flock and calves from the stall,*”

1. The participle, “those lying (down),” refers to the custom of reclining at a feast, picturing a gluttonous event in the style of pagan orgies.
2. Ivory inlays upon the couches shows the extreme affluence of those who are participating (see example at right from 7th cent. B.C. near Israel).
3. The food of the rich was nothing but the best (“*lambs from the flock / calves from the stall*” connote the choices picks) that should have gone to God (see Numbers 28-29), but was reserved for themselves.



- G. v.5— “*improvising tunes with the lyre, like David they compose [music] for themselves with musical instruments.*”
1. The verb *parat* is a hapax legomenon and it’s exact meaning is unclear, but most likely is related to the participle, “those who pluck [stringed instruments]” or “those who improvise [music].”
 2. The point is that only those who are wealthy would have the time to do such things.
 3. The contrast between David, the premiere musician of ancient Israel, and the armature, self-indulgent music of the upper class, is like comparing Pavarati to the American Idol wannabes.
- H. v.6— “*drinking wine from sacred bowls, with the choicest of olive oils they anoint themselves, but they do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.*”
1. The noun *mitzraq* “sacred bowl,” (32 times in OT) is most often found in passages concerning liturgical worship (e.g., Ex 27:3; 38:3; Num 4:14), indicating here both sacrilegious use and excessive drinking.
 2. Olive oil was used to moisten the skin in the ANE, but the rich wouldn’t settle for regular oil, but [literally] “the first of the olive oils,” which could also refer to the cost, as in oils used as perfumes (see Mark 14:3-5), which were worth more than their weight in gold!
 3. Israel’s materialism has caused them to disregard the plight of God’s people (synonymous to “ruin of his people” in Isa 30:26), referring to the coming Exiles of the North and South.
 4. Paul refers to this same unbelieving attitude of worldliness in 1 Cor. 15:32 (quoting Is 22:13).
- I. v.7— “*Therefore now they will go into exile as the first of the exiles, and the feast of the loungers will end.*”
1. The judgment of God upon the wicked of Israel will come upon them in the form of exile.
 2. Amos says that along with all the whole nation, the aristocrats will go *first* into the exile.
 3. The feast mentioned here could be a technical term for the “Marzeah (Feast),” which was a pagan festival celebrated by 1) wealthy participants, 2) in a religious context with sacrifices to the Semitic gods, 3) involving excessive drinking (Lessing, *Amos*, [St. Louis: CPH, 2009], 397).