

# OpenTheo

## August 25th: Amos 6 & John 19:38-42

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The Lord's hatred of Israel's pride. The burial of Jesus.

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## Transcript

Amos chapter 6 Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes. Pass over to Calnaean Sea, and from there go to Hamath the Great, then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, O you who put far away the day of disaster, and bring near the seat of violence? Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.

Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away. The Lord God has sworn by himself, declares the Lord, the God of hosts, I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it. And if ten men remain in one house, they shall die, and when one's relative, the one who anoints him for burial, shall take him up

to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of 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.

For behold, the Lord commands, and the great house shall be struck down into fragments, and the little house into bits. Do horses run on rocks? Does one plough there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. You who rejoice in Lodibar, who say, Have we not by our own strength captured Carnaeum for ourselves? For behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, declares the Lord, the God of hosts, and they shall oppress you from Lebohamath to the brook of the Araba.

Amos chapter 5 was a chapter of laments and woes, and chapter 6 also opens with a proclamation of woes. The prophetic message seeks to shock Israel out of its presumption and complacency. In the preceding chapter we saw the way that many assumed that the day of the Lord would be a positive thing for Israel, a day of vindication and deliverance.

The prophet, however, declares that it would be a day of darkness and judgment, a terrible day in which the iniquity of the people would come upon their heads. Coupled with this presumption is the complacency of the elites of Judah and Israel, who imagine that they are secure on account of their wealth and within their walled cities, not realizing that the floor is going to fall away from their walls. Their complacency is both a false sense of security and also their lack of moral unease concerning the wickedness and the oppression that they are practicing.

Their moral insensitivity is supported by their overconfidence in the military capacity of their nations, the strength of their cities, the affordances of their wealth, and by their misplaced assurance that the Lord is on their side. They seem to regard themselves as the first of the nations, presumably on account of their privilege. Not only is their nation elevated above others, but they are elevated within their nation as its elite, with the people of the land coming to them for judgment and help.

Mount Zion and Samaria are both mentioned here, reminding us that Amos' ministry is not exclusive to Israel. He also speaks to his own nation of Judah. Kalne, Hemath, and Gath were all cities that, by this time, had been much reduced in their power and standing.

Kalne was an old Hittite capital, while Hemath was Assyrian city-state. Daniel Carroll mentions a number of ways in which verse 2 could be understood. Some critical commentators have seen this as a later addition to the text, from a time after the destruction of those cities by Assyria.

Another suggestion is that, due to the success of Israel in expanding its borders during

the reign of Jeroboam II, the elites were here boasting about their superiority to other cities in the region that had declined, and that the first half of verse 2 is their words. However, the prophet would then puncture their confidence by disputing their sense of superiority to those kingdoms in the rhetorical questions that follow. Alternatively, Carroll maintains that the prophet is probably the one directing the people's attention to these kingdoms.

He's challenging them that, just as the Lord had humbled those once great powers, so he could humble Israel and Judah. Israel and Judah had no grounds for their presumption. While Gath, for instance, had not yet been destroyed, we should note its absence from the oracle against the Philistines in chapter 1, where judgment was declared primarily upon Gaza, and along with it, Ashtar, Ashkelon and Ekron.

Gath, formerly a great city of the Philistines, was notable by its exclusion. The elites of Judah and Israel had put far away the day of disaster. They had blinded themselves to the precarious nature of their situation and the imminence of their destruction.

In but a few decades, although it would survive, Judah would be brought down to its knees and Israel would be overwhelmed by the Assyrians. However, to those at ease in Zion and feeling secure on the mountain of Samaria, such threats could not be further from their minds. They ignored the signs of their times, paid no heed to the warning shots the Lord had been firing across their bows and proceeded without regard.

While putting away the day of disaster from their awareness, they had been bringing near the seat of violence. Perhaps this refers to the destruction about to come upon them. It could also refer to the injustice and oppression that they were perpetuating in their societies.

Verses 4-7 depict the scene of a feast. The decadent elite of the land are lounging on their couches, enjoying an extravagant meal of the finest food, drinking large quantities of expensive wine, anointing themselves with costly oils and diverting themselves with idle songs and music making. They are carefree and unmindful of the ruin of Joseph, the moral state of the nation and the fate that is about to come upon them.

They have rendered themselves insensible to the rapidly approaching disaster, a disaster which both their own actions and continuing oppression have largely precipitated. When the disaster actually strikes, they would be the first to be struck. Their revelries would be put to an end.

Verse 8 is an intense statement of the Lord's loathing of Jacob's pride, a pride that was seemingly founded in the supposed impregnability of his strongholds. The pride, complacency and presumption all serve to accentuate the moral indifference and insensibility of Israel. The Lord feels so strongly about this that he swears by himself in making the statement and is presented as a declaration of the Lord the God of hosts, the

solemn oath being accompanied by a pronouncement formula.

His abhorrence of their pride is yet further emphasized by the emotive language of the statement itself. For Jacob's pride and hubris, their city in which they had placed so much of their confidence would be delivered up with all who were dwelling in it. From the general city, the text focuses upon a single house, just one of many such residences.

All of the members of the household would die, its entire life snuffed out in the day of disaster. Yerub Yerumias suggests that verse 10, an exceedingly difficult verse to translate and interpret, might look back to chapter 5 verse 3. For thus says the Lord God, the city that went out a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went out a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel. Here there are ten people in the house and just one survivor.

The verse imagines a situation where upon searching the house where the ten people, presumably dead, had lived, one survivor was surprisingly discovered. However one questioned, it is clear that no one else survived the ruin. Perhaps the point of the exchange at the end of verse 10 is that the situation is so charged with the electricity of the judgment that has just occurred that the lone survivor is terrified lest the name of the Lord be invoked and that utterance be the spark that leads to a new disaster.

The Lord would bring destruction upon all, the rich elite in their great houses and the poor in their little houses. We might here think about the earthquake that would soon strike the land, anticipating the more comprehensive national judgment yet to arrive. In chapter 5 verse 7 we read, O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth.

Verse 12 presents two pictures of unfitting or contradictory situations. Horses running on rocks would ruin their hooves. The second rhetorical question likely refers to plowing the sea with oxen, as two words were amalgamated in the Masoretic text.

The Lord desires justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, but they had poisoned the waters of justice and made righteousness bitter. Once more the arrogance of the nation is seen at the close of the chapter. The people celebrated the nation's military successes in the Transjordan under Jeroboam the second, believing that these were proof of their strength and power.

Eurimius suggests that there might be an intentional play upon the meaning of the place names here. He renders the verse as follows, You who rejoice in a thing of nothingness, who say, Have we not by our own strength taken horns for ourselves? However, such boasting would be very short-lived. The Assyrians would be raised up against them, and would oppress them throughout the whole length of the land, from its very north to its very south.

A question to consider. The Lord's abhorrence of his people's pride and complacent ease is a prominent and pervasive theme of this chapter. Why do you believe that the people's pride is so singled out and so detestable to the Lord? John chapter 19 verses 38 to 42.

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

At the end of John chapter 19, after Jesus has died, secret supporters of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, come and take Jesus' body away and bury it. Nicodemus is taking a risk at this point. He originally came to Jesus at night to avoid being seen, and he's already come under suspicion in previous chapters, but now he is doing something on a grander scale and more openly.

None of the disciples or even the women seem to be directly involved at this point. The women come later on, as in the other gospel accounts. They see where the body is laid, and they come to bring more spices.

Of course, this is not the first time in the gospel that there has been reference to spices in association with Christ's burial. In chapter 12, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with nard, and he declared that this was for the day of his burial. But yet the quantity of spices that are brought here are fit for a king.

Some have estimated that they would be even 100 times more costly than the nard used to anoint him. There are other accounts from this period of people bringing such costly spices for a burial, but this really stands out. This is the sort of thing that you would have expected for one of the rulers of the Jews.

Jesus is here being given treatment, fitting for the king of the Jews, by figures who are themselves rulers of the Jewish people. The purpose of the spices was not to preserve the body, but to mask the smell and to honour the deceased person. With the reference to spices and a garden here, a background from the Old Testament is being evoked.

The term used for garden is not the one that we typically find of the Garden of Eden in the Septuagint, but is a word that is commonly used in Song of Songs. Here we might think of a passage like Song of Songs, chapter 4, verses 12 to 16. A garden locked is my

sister my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.

Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices, a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O North Wind, and come, O South Wind, blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. We find references to spices in connection with royalty as well, in places like Psalm 45, verses 6 to 9. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces, stringed instruments make you glad. Daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor.

At your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir. Myrrh and aloes, then, are connected not just with death and burial, but also with these themes of love. The garden and the spices remind us, I think, primarily of Song of Songs.

This is the king entering into his spiced garden chamber, a chamber from which he will later come forth, with the wind that awakes these spices, and the fountain that is opened up so that its life is brought outside. The opening up of the garden so that its living waters will flow out is something that should recall a number of Jesus' statements already in this Gospel of John. He's the one who will let the spices flow out into the world, as the wind awakes and blows them out.

The wind, of course, is the wind of the Spirit. These are all themes that the evangelist delicately evokes at this point, by the way that he describes Jesus being laid to rest. Reading the Gospel, we've also seen a number of cases where there are references to love, themes of love taken from the Song of Songs, for instance the allusion to Song of Songs 1.12, the king on his couch and the nod of the woman filling the room in the story of the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany.

Jesus began his ministry to wedding feast. He was announced by the friend of the bridegroom, John the Baptist. He's the bridegroom, the one who comes to the woman at the well and speaks about himself as the man who is to come.

He's the true Messiah, the true bridegroom of Israel. He's the one who will later meet with Mary in the garden, in another scene that evokes marital themes. I think then that we should see the Song of Songs in the background here.

Jesus is the royal lover, and this is preparing his bed, preparing the room of the king, the room of the royal lover from which he will later come forth. Throughout the Book of John, the glorification of Christ is focused upon his death and his burial, not just upon his

ascension. And so it seems appropriate to see in the way that the burial of Christ is described, these themes of glory.

He's being buried like a king. He's being brought into this chamber, this garden, this garden that's going to release its spices and its living water, filling the world. We should have a sense of expectation here.

When is the bridegroom going to come forth and open up the garden, allowing its spices and living water to flow out? We might also faintly hear the way that John is setting things up for a birth event. This is nowhere near as strong as it is in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke, we see the parallel between Jesus being wrapped in linen garments and laid in a manger, and then wrapped in linen garments and laid in a tomb.

There's a Joseph and a Mary at Jesus' birth, and then a Joseph and some Marys at his death and resurrection. There are a Joseph and a Mary here, but yet the theme that is more prominent, I think, are the themes of love. These themes look back to the Song of Songs, and perhaps beyond that, also to the Garden of Eden.

In John, the proximity of the cross and the tomb is mentioned. I think this highlights the connection between the two of them. These aren't detached things.

They belong very closely together. And Jesus' burial is not just appended to the story of the cross as something purely incidental to the main event. In John, as in the other Gospels, the burial itself is charged with symbolism.

It too is an integral part of the story of Jesus' bringing of salvation. A question to consider. We're told that no one was previously laid in the tomb.

What other things in the Gospel might this remind us of? And what significance could be found in the fact that this is a tomb for Jesus, and Jesus alone?