

Amos 8:4-7
“On the Edge of Disaster”
5th Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2015
Our Redeemer
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] Game almost over! Second left on the clock!
Israel is on the edge of disaster.

In 930 BC, King Solomon dies, and the kingdom is divided, split, torn in two.

Jeroboam, king of Israel, king of the north,
builds a temple in Dan (in the far north)
and in Bethel (near the southern border of his kingdom),
so the people will have a place to go to worship
without having to travel to Jerusalem,
to the Southern Kingdom, to worship there.

Now for 180 years, the Lord sends prophets to Israel,
warning of the idolatry in these temples,
calling the people to repent,
and threatening destruction if they refuse.

Now Amos is there, in the year 750, in Bethel, in Israel, in the north,
and he is preaching against the people’s idolatry,
warning them of the destruction we know was only 28 years away,
for the Assyrian army would destroy Israel in 721 BC.

It is now the last “high point” of the Northern Kingdom’s short history,
stability under Jeroboam II and the dynasty of Jehu
has allowed substantial affluence...

But Amos preaches...
Amos roars against Israel’s idolatry (sin against the 1st Table)
and lovelessness (sin against the 2nd Table), misuses of their prosperity.

Amos is preaching around 750 BC, only 28 years before the Assyrians
would come along and destroy Israel.

Amos, then, stands calling Israel to repent with the threat of this looming destruction.

The Book of Amos has three major divisions:

- eight oracles against the nations (chs 1–2),
- the Lord’s complaints against Israel (chs 3–6),
- and five visions of Amos, foretelling Israel’s destruction (chs 7–9).

Our text, Amos 8:4–7, follows the fourth of Amos’s visions, the vision of summer fruit. Like the fruit in late summer, Israel is ripe for the picking.

In the verse before our text,

Amos threatens that the music of the temple will stop
and the new songs sung will be “So Many Dead Bodies,” “They Are
Thrown Everywhere,” and “Silence!” Imagine singing those hymns!

You see, Amos stands on the edge of disaster and preaches. His message:

ONLY REPENTANCE WILL TURN AWAY GOD’S WRATH.

[*Wealth*] Israel trusted in their wealth instead of in God.

It was a time of prosperity in Israel,

but God’s people completely misunderstood his blessings.

1. A series of strong kings had enabled Israel to grow in affluence.
2. But instead of seeing this prosperity as opportunity to serve the neighbor, the people saw their wealth as proof of God’s love.
3. If riches are a mark of God’s favor, then poverty must be proof of God’s rejection.
4. The Israelites, then, felt no guilt in abusing the poor.

Maybe you don’t understand, but their wealth was their idol.

They invented any number of exotic ways to break the Seventh Commandment (vv 4–6).

They cheated.

They lied.

They used false weights.

They sold bad products.

And they and even put their neighbors into slavery.

Oh! They went to church,

but they couldn’t wait for the service to end so they could go and make more money.

They were egregious sinners; their religion was a sham to cover up their sin.

Jesus warns about the idol of money, “Mammon.”

“You cannot serve God and money” (Lk 16:13).

Luther says that money is the most common idol in the world,
and we see this in our world, even our own hearts.

We trust wealth and think it makes us safe, secure.

Health insurance keeps your health.

Life insurance keeps your life.

Your retirement account keeps your retirement.

But do they really? Like the eagle on the dollar, wealth quickly flies away.
Greed is not simply breaking the Seventh Commandment, but also the First; it is
having another god.

[Angry about Sin]

God is angry about such sin—with real wrath!

Israel, in her pride, didn’t think God would destroy them.

God had been good to Israel. Why would he change now?

After all, we go to church, give sacrifices, say our prayers.

God’s wrath and anger seem so far away, and this leads to a carnal security.
The same is true today.

We think God is a “nice guy,” that he isn’t troubled with our sins.
We think that there are no consequences for our sin and our unbelief.

God’s wrath is real.

The threat of destruction was a real threat to Israel, and in fact it came about in 721 BC.
The threat of hell is real; it’s the eternal punishment for all unbelief.

[Repentance]

Amos preaches repentance—to Israel and to us—to turn away God’s wrath.

The Lord does not want to destroy Israel, so he sends the prophets to warn them (v 7).

1. God’s anger is his “strange work.”

2. God’s anger is preached precisely to prepare an escape from that
anger.

You see, Amos is preaching the Law with such severity only so that the people
would repent and God would turn away the threatened destruction.

As God sends preachers to warn with the Law, so they preach to save with the Gospel.
God's anger is preached so that the Gospel can assure us
that his anger has been satisfied, can assure the sinner of God's mercy.

And does repentance at the preaching of Amos turn away God's wrath?

1. Israel doesn't repent and is no more.
2. We do repent, we turn from our sin, when we despair of our efforts to earn God's favor and we trust in what Jesus Christ has done for us through his suffering, death, and resurrection.
3. There we see the wrath of God spent, not on us, but on Jesus. All the anger of God for all the sins of all the people in the world is poured out on him in our place.
4. By the death of Jesus, God does forget our sins (Jer 31:34) and gives us the gift of eternal life.

[Conclusion]

We've seen the wrath of God
—the flood, fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Israel.

We heed these warnings.

We know God has a hot wrath that burns against sin, against *our* sin, and we repent.

But we also know that the Lord has spent that wrath on Jesus,
that his anger is turned away from us, and we rejoice.

We rejoice because our fear of judgment has been replaced with hope...

Hope that can only come from the Gospel.

We are not left hanging in terror but are given a confidence in which we can rejoice.

We rejoice in the Lord's forgiveness of our sins

and that, in the place of his anger,

we have his smile, he lifts his countenance upon us.

We have his delight, he gives us grace and his mercy, which gives us peace. Amen!

You are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it. Amen!