

Message #3

Amos 2:6-16

On one of our stamps that we may purchase to mail something are the words “USA Forever.” Now that is a nice sentiment. It sounds real good. I am not sure what the idea was when the decision was made to put that on a stamp, but it is a nice, feel good motto. Probably it had something to do with the fact that we are a strong and prosperous and free nation. Whoever decided to place that idea on a stamp assumed that the USA would be this forever.

That is what Israel thought in the days of Amos. She was thriving and she was free. The economy was flourishing; there was peace in both Israel and Judah and the people were enjoying a plush life. She thought she was secure and that it would last forever.

That is until Amos surfaced. This country boy prophet from the south went to the big cities of the north in Israel and started proclaiming you will not be this way forever; in fact, your world is about to come tumbling down because you have drifted farther and farther away from God and God has kept track of your sins; all of them.

The United States of America is on a slippery slope heading down toward judgment. Don't be fooled by the political rhetoric that says we are Americans and we always come out on top. The fact is we are Americans and we are drifting farther and farther away from God. Sunday for most is not a day to worship God; it is a day to play baseball, basketball or football. Marriage is not only between a man and woman; it can be between man to man or woman to woman. All religion is good just as long as it is not dedicated to the written Scriptures and the God of the Bible. Our country does not want the Bible in schools, it does not want you praying to the God of the Bible in schools, but we will hand out condoms. Then we promote an idea USA Forever. Don't kid yourself; the book of Amos says God will see that it will all come crashing down.

To this point in the book of Amos, I am sure Israel loved what they were hearing in those other oracles. They loved the preaching of Amos. Amos was pronouncing pending judgments on surrounding nations and even on Judah in the south. **But let us remember that Amos has been raised up by God to confront Israel (Amos 1:1; 7:15).** So all of the previous prophetic oracles have been a prelude to what God wants Amos to tell His own people, Israel. What Amos was about to tell Israel would not win him popularity contests. In fact, the political and religious leaders would want to shut this guy up.

Everything was fine for Amos as long as he was preaching about others, but now when you come to this text, he is going to preach against Israel. He will attack their morality, their arrogance, their self indulgence, their religion and their ingratitude. What Amos says is:

GOD'S JUDGMENT IS COMING AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE BECAUSE HIS OWN PEOPLE HAVE COMMITTED TRANSGRESSIONS AGAINST GOD AND HAVE LIVED IN BLATANT REBELLION AGAINST HIM AND HIS WORD.

As **verse 6** opens the section, God says, “I have also kept your sin record.” Amos uses the same numerical formula “for three transgressions of Israel and for four.” When you add three plus four you get seven; so God has kept the complete record of Israel’s sins and, as you will see, it is way more than just seven.

What God is saying is I have all the sins on file that you have ever committed as my own people and “I will not revoke punishment.” In other words, your sin has reached a level that God says He will punish and nothing will stop Him.

What is so ironic is that for the other nations, God seems to zero in on one specific sin that brought His judgment; but when He comes to Israel, He unloads a multitude of at least eleven sins she has committed.

Now the list of sins here is terrible and keep in mind that these sins are being committed by people who claimed to be right with God. They went to worship services and they sacrificially gave their offerings and they were involved in all the religious ceremonies and they were telling people how much God had blessed them. But their hearts were not right with God.

There is a debate on how many sins God names here for Israel. Some have said there are seven, which is the number associated with the three plus four; some suggest there are eight. But as we carefully analyze this it seems to me that there are at least twelve specific transgressions God mentions here.

This is interesting because with the other groups, He simply keys in on one sin that pushed Him over the edge; but when it comes to Israel, He lists twelve sins that made Him angry:

SIN #1 – God’s own people sold the righteous for money. **2:6a**

Now this gives us insight as to how Israel was operating and how some were making their money—they were taking advantage of righteous people. We don’t specifically know how they were taking advantage of these people. Perhaps they were literally selling people as slaves to make money. Perhaps some righteous person needed something and they weren’t able to pay it back as quick as they wanted, so they were sold as a slave.

We do know if you had money you could buy your way out of trouble. You could pay the judge some bribe and if you gave him enough money, he would actually make a decision in your favor even if it went against what was Biblically right.

The big money people were taking advantage of the people who were really right with God. Now keep in mind that this is a very religious group of people, but you certainly see what really drove them: money. They would sell out the righteous for money. If they had a choice between hearing the truth from someone righteous and taking or making money from someone who was not righteous, the money wins.

Isn't that like what is happening in many churches? Aren't there a lot of churches that have mega dollars, but they are not getting those dollars because of a careful teaching of the righteous Word of God. They are not getting those dollars through a careful exposition of the Scriptures. Fact is many churches do not want the Word of God carefully expounded because it would affect their offerings.

Not much has changed since the days of Amos.

SIN #2 – God's own people sold the needy for sandals. **2:6b**

These were hard-hearted people who apparently would even sell a person into slavery for sandals. Now this may mean that they would sell into slavery someone who could not pay for a pair of sandals. Another possibility is that they would sell a needy person for a new pair of sandals for themselves. In either case, these were stingy, hard-hearted people.

It was more important to some of God's own people that they have new sandals and they would sell the needy to get them. In other words, they did not care if people had food to eat as long as they had their good shoes to wear.

Now God's Word was given to His people and in His Word He told His people that He wanted them to be very generous and open-handed to a poor brother and God said that if His people would do this, He would bless them and prosper them in all their work (Deut. 15:7-11). Obviously a great number of affluent people in the days of Amos could care less about the Word of God.

The Apostle Paul gives exactly the same counsel to the church (I Tim. 6:17-19). We will never lay up treasures in heaven by hoarding, but by generously giving and sharing. God's people lost sight of that in Israel.

SIN #3 – God's own people took advantage of the helpless. **2:7a**

These people were actually treating the helpless people like dirt. They were not generous to them; they made them work like dogs and then did anything they could to put more money in their own pockets. The attitude was not one of helping the helpless; it was taking advantage of the helpless to get more for self.

People who are hard-hearted, successful and shrewd know what they are doing. They are not out to help the helpless people, they are out to get more money for themselves. That is what drives them. They don't care if the helpless person is in such a state of misery that he has dust on his head.

Now I am about to say something here that probably will be slightly controversial. I believe we have the responsibility to make sure we do not take advantage of people when we do business with them.

I know of a case in which a certain businessman has made millions of dollars by taking advantage of migrants who are so poor that 10-12 of them live in a small trailer. He is putting the money in the bank and these poor people, who are in no position to question anything, have a hard time buying enough food and clothes for their families. This is exactly what God is judging His own people for doing.

Now the principle we want to glean from this is we need to be as generous as we can. If we are in a position to hire someone, we need to be good and fair to those we hire. Otherwise, we will answer to God.

SIN #4 – God’s own people refused to be humble. **2:7b**

Not only did they refuse to humble themselves, they would not have anything to do with one who was humble. In other words, these people would turn away the humble servant of God. These were proud, successful people and they did not want a thing to do with those who did not fit in with their upper class arrogant mindset.

Over and over again the Scriptures are crystal clear; God hates the proud and loves the humble. The Scriptures warn in both the O.T. and the N.T. that the proud will be brought low and the humble will be raised high.

Think about this, God’s own people hated humility and anyone who was humble. God says, “I will bring you down.”

It reminds me of the attitude of the USA. It doesn’t matter what God does—hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, mudslides, snow storms, ice storms, power outages—no one says we need to turn to this God; we arrogantly say, “we are Americans and we rise to the top because we are proud.” That was exactly the mindset Israel had.

SIN #5 – God’s own fathers and sons were immoral with the same woman. **2:7c**

What is described here is evil. Fathers and sons were going out for a night of sin and getting involved sexually with the same woman. The woman may have been a prostitute or some servant girl or concubine. The text does not say.

It is very possible that this was actually taking place right at various idolatrous religious services at various shrines. In fact, this kind of immorality was practiced at various cult temples. So these fathers and sons were going out for a night on the town and intentionally getting involved in immoral behavior. This kind of thing is detestable in the sight of God.

Instead of a father telling his son this is evil. Instead of a father telling his son God hates immoral behavior, he was actually taking his son out for a night of immoral debauchery.

These were supposedly God's own people. These were supposedly men of God. But it is very clear that what drove these people was not the righteousness of God; they were driven by greed and sex. They were not interested in being taught the Word. They wanted religion but not the Word, and they were led by their own greed and lusts.

When I read this text, I could not help but think of the Kennedy family. That family pretended to be so religious and so interested in God, but if you read the history of their family, they were not driven by a desire to understand God's Word so they could apply it; they were driven by power, greed and sex. Joseph P. Kennedy, the patriarch of the family, was a millionaire many times over by the time he was 40. He was the founder of what was called "the greatest political dynasty" in American history. It has been written that he was "An ostensibly immoral man" and he taught his sons that immorality was just a part of life.

But in the end, it didn't matter how much they had or how many immoral flings they had, because one by one they all died. In fact, one news commentator said it is almost as if a curse is on the Kennedy family.

God says to Israel, you have mocked Me and you have mocked My morality and I am going to curse you.

SIN #6 – God's own people profaned God's holy name. **2:7d**

Everything these people did profaned the sacred name of God. Their whole existence was lived in contempt to God's holy character. God's own people did not want God's Word and they did not care that they were actually doing horrible things that profaned the name of God.

SIN #7 – God's own people took away people's clothing. **2:8a**

Some people were so poor that they would borrow money to get some food or basic needs from wealthy people and God's rich people would take their coats as a pledge. God's Law warned against this very thing (Deut. 24:17). If a person used his coat as collateral, the wealthy person was to give the coat back before nightfall so the poor person would not be cold. But they were not following the Word of God. They were so interested in their money that they did not care if a person had to go out into the elements without their coat. They would take the coat to various religious altars and display it to show how successful and wealthy and powerful they were. The more coats they had the better.

SIN #8 – God's own people stretch out before sacred altars. **2:8b**

They did not treat God's sacred places as sacred. You are not supposed to be stretched out before an altar. This was a place that was supposed to be reverent and serious. It is possible that this means they would take those coats and lay them on the ground and get involved in immoral behavior right at these altar sights. Or they would go to these places of worship and lie down. Nothing was sacred.

This is happening in churches today. People go to various churches and there are pop machines and popcorn machines and big screens. There are rock bands on a platform at church and dancing girls on a stage and call it worship.

God is being mocked and He will not be mocked forever. Amos says He has the record and He will settle the score.

SIN #9- God's own people fined people by taking their wine and drinking it at the house of God. **2:8c**

What these people were doing was taking the wine that the poor people had to drink as a fine and they were going to the worship services and drinking it up. Notice in **verse 8** that God says this is being done in "the house of their God."

Amos says in **verses 9-10** that while you are strutting around thinking you are so high and mighty, what you have forgotten is that it was **God who gave you everything you have**. It was God who destroyed the Amorite when he was so proud and arrogant and it was God who brought you out of Egypt to even live in this land. So Amos is saying **you did not do this and accomplish this, God did**.

SIN #10 – God's own people refused to listen to prophets God raised up to warn Israel. **2:11**

Then in **verse 11** He says it was God who raised up some of your sons to be prophets and some of the young men to be Nazarites. These were individuals who completely dedicated themselves to the Lord. They challenged the people to listen to God's Word and obey it but they would not listen to them.

SIN #11 – God's own people caused those under a Nazarite vow to disregard it and disobey the Word of God. **2:12a**

Now this is a reference to some special temporal Nazarite vow that a person took for some temporal period of time in order to devote themselves to God. During the vow period, the Nazarites were supposed to grow their hair and not cut it and refrain from drinking wine and vinegar. He was also not to drink grape juice or eat any grapes or raisins (Num. 6:3-4).

Apparently, what these people of Israel were doing was they were going to those Nazarites, who were under the Nazarite vow, and forcing them to drink wine and violate the Word of God. In other words, they were actually causing their religious people to do the opposite of what the Word of God actually said.

SIN #12 – They commanded that God’s prophets not prophesy. **2:12b**

I read of an old Bible expositor who was known for carefully expounding every book of the Bible at church and he said it has been his observation that most of the hearers were never shaken out of their sin with a desire to accurately understand more of God’s Word. In fact, he said that he was invited to a church to preach and an older man from the church said, “You must not say that kind of thing here, or you will not be invited again” (Cited from Thomas Constable, *Notes on Amos*, p. 21).

In **verses 13-16** God says I have had enough, I am going to judge my own people.

In **verse 13** God says your sin is weighing me down to my limit. God says your sin is like an overflowing weighed down wagon and I have seen enough.

In **verse 14** God says I don’t care how fast or strong or mighty you think you are, you will not be able to stop My judgment and save yourself.

In **verse 15** God says you will not be able to fight against my judgment with a bow, you will not be able to outrun it nor get on a horse and save yourself by riding away.

God says in **verse 16** I don’t care how brave you are, you will not escape my judgment.

Now much of this judgment was literally fulfilled less than 40 years later when the Assyrians destroyed Samaria, Israel’s capital in 722 B.C. and took many of the people into captivity.

However, Israel still has not learned her lesson. She has not turned to God and His Word. In fact, when her own Messiah, Jesus Christ, came to Israel, she hated Him, rejected Him and killed Him.

So God has been doing the math and He has been counting the sins and there is another moment in history coming when God will pour out wrath the likes of which He has never poured out before. During the Tribulation, Israel will be one target of the wrath of God.

But before that happens, let’s think a moment about the good ole USA. USA Forever is a joke. If God will judge Israel, you better believe He will target the United States.

We are mocking God and His Word in every area of life and God is counting it all up and it will reach a point when He says, “I have had enough.” When Jesus Christ addressed the seven churches of Revelation, He said, “I give you time to repent,” but if you don’t “I will come and I will judge My own people.”

May God keep us always sensitive to His Word and will so this does not happen to us.