



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Amos 8: 1-14

Amos

“Ripe for Judgment”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, it's time to begin and we're going to look at Amos chapter 8 tonight. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank you for this time together this evening and the opportunity we have to study the prophet Amos, known as one of the minor prophets but what a great prophet he was. His words are so relevant for today. And if we read with a comprehension, if we think carefully about what he said, even if some of it's a bit abstruse, nevertheless, we get the main idea and it should bring conviction to each and every one of us because the problems that Israel had are problems that we have. And not so much we as Americans, though certainly the evils that he dealt with are true in America, but they can be within the church and we have the same failures. We don't value you and your word as we ought.

We get caught up in the world and in the experiences of life, and that's a sin. It's idolatry. So Lord, keep us from that. Help us to see our error and help us to dedicate ourselves to you. May our time together this evening be to that end and be a joyful time of learning, a time of conviction, a time of worshipping you. Thank you for giving us this book, thank you for the time you've given us to be together and may your blessings be on each one of us materially and certainly spiritually. And I pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] It has been said, and I've even given the quote probably more than once, the mills of God grind slowly yet they grind exceed small. Divine justice may

be slow due to God’s patience. He’s a long-suffering God, but it always comes and it always comes at the right time.

That’s the message of Amos 8. Actually it could be the message of every chapter in the Book of Amos because every chapter is about judgment and divine justice is always timely. But that seems to be the specific meaning of the vision that begins the chapter.

God has been giving Amos a series of visions which are revelations in pictures. He has, Amos, has seen three visions of locusts, fire and the plumb line. Now God gives him a fourth vision, it’s a basket full of ripe fruit. The vision of the plumb line which we looked at last week, you’ll remember, showed how far off the mark of God’s righteousness Israel was.

It was like a leaning wall about to fall over. It wasn’t straight. It was crooked, it was bent. It was not in line with God’s truth and righteousness, the nation wasn’t. And now he gives a fourth vision to Amos. He gives him the vision of ripe fruit. And the judgment that’s indicated here of the fruit that’s ripe is the judgment of famine. Israel rejected instruction and they would have famine. And it would be a famine of hearing, a famine of God’s word, a famine of revelation. God would no longer speak to the nation.

Proverbs 10:17 says, “He is on the path of life who heeds instruction. But he who forsakes reproof goes astray.” Israel had gone astray and part of their judgment is that God would no longer give them instruction. He would stop speaking to the nation. He would leave them to themselves. They’d shown no interest in His revelation, they turned from it long before this prophecy comes to them. And so they would not get revelation.

God’s judgment is always timely and God’s judgment is always appropriate. If we don’t want His word, He won’t give it to us. If a church goes after other things, God will let them go after other things. And they won’t have His truth and knowledge. That’s very serious. That’s what Amos tells the people is going to happen to them.

Well, the prophecy begins with the same words that introduced the other visions. “Thus the Lord showed me.” So again, he lets us know from the beginning that these are not Amos’ words. Amos is not speaking, he’s telling us what God said to him. This is the word of God. “Behold,” he says, “there was a basket of summer

fruit.” Then the Lord asked Amos what he saw and Amos answered, “A basket of summer fruit.”

The harvest is over, the fruit is picked and ripe, it must be eaten or thrown away. It is at its end. That is how the Lord then explains the vision. It represents Israel. Israel is ripe fruit. Its end is near. “The end has come for my people Israel.” The Lord said, “I will spare them no longer.” So judgment would come upon the nation, but wouldn’t come prematurely. It all follows the natural course of events just as with fruit that grows naturally until it is ripe and picked. And so too, God has been patient with the nation, long-suffering and allowed it to ripen in its sin until the time of reckoning is inevitable. The mills of God grind slowly yet they grind exceedingly small.

In verse 3 the Lord describes Israel’s response to the disaster. The songs of the palace, the levity, the joy, the happiness in the palace, songs that were sung by people enjoying the good life he said will be turned into wailing. And the reason why is the destruction that they will experience is that great. “Many will be corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence.” So people who have for a long time enjoyed peace and prosperity and again, remember, this is during the time of Jeroboam II, this was probably the northern kingdom’s most prosperous era. It lasted quite a while. I can’t remember how long Jeroboam reigned but decades.

So they had enjoyed peace and prosperity for a long period of time. Suddenly it’s all going to come to an end and it’s going to come to an abrupt end violently. Bodies will be flung everywhere. It’s a grisly picture of mass slaughter. The Assyrians would come and do God’s work of judgment on the nation.

The indictment or accusation is given in verse 4, the reason why this judgment is coming. The affluent were trampling the needy and it was so severe that they were doing away with or they were eliminating the poor from the land. This was the very opposite of what the Lord expected of His people. It’s the very opposite of the way the Lord is. He takes care of these people. These people abuse them. All through the law that’s expressed. All through the law there is expressed an interest in those who are needy, those who are less blessed than others.

Those who have land that’s fruitful, they’re to take care of those who are needy and the formula that is used is widows and orphans. That encompasses I think more than just those two groups, but it’s those two groups that sort of represent

everyone who's in need. But certainly widows and orphans are the most extreme case. They're weak, they're unprotected. The people of God were to take care of them.

You see this for example in Deuteronomy 10, in fact, you might turn over to it briefly. I'm going to just read a couple of verses, but in Deuteronomy 10:12-26 the Lord tells Israel who He is, tells Him about His character and what He expects of them if you're going to be my people and I'm your God, then I want you to behave the way I do. They were to fear him, they were to walk in His ways, they were to love Him and serve Him.

He is the Lord of Lords He says, the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. You can't bribe God, you can't influence Him, you just walk before Him as He told Abraham in Genesis 18 and be blameless. God doesn't take a bribe. God's not a crooked god. He's straight, He's righteous, He's pure, He's just and He requires the same of His people. And He states that much in line with what Amos is saying here in verses 18 and 19. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.

“So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” Be kind to these people, you were like them at one time yourself. This is the Lord God and this is what He expects and this is the exact opposite of what they were doing. They were grinding the faces of the poor as Isaiah said. He's a contemporary, remember, of Amos, writes a little bit after him, but basically the same time. What's going on in the north was going on in the south.

I like that expression of grinding the faces of the poor. Then in verses 5 and 6, Amos quotes the merchants of Israel and exposes their real attitude which was all about making money at the expense of others. Didn't matter, they just wanted to make money and if they crushed people doing it, that was fine. “When will the new moon be over,” this is what they say, “so that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market.”

Now these are religious people, remember, and the series of oracles that Amos is giving is probably given there at Bethel, one of the religion sites, Bethel and Dan and so these are religious people. They observe everything. They observe the letter of the law. They were obedient about closing their shops on the Sabbath and on the special feast days they participated and they didn't go to the marketplace. I wonder if

that isn't true of us sometimes. We're here on a Sunday morning, we're here on a Sunday evening, you're here on a Wednesday night. But what's really filling our hearts? Is it the word of God or are we there because it's kind of a perfunctory thing, it's sort of a routine we go through?

We've talked about this before, but this is really what's the nature of this problem here. They're outwardly obedient, but there's no inward reality and we can fall into that. We all do. I'll include myself in that. I don't preach against you or without putting myself where you are. I think we struggle with that. And we should. Well, we shouldn't, but we do, but we should recognize that we do and we should seek to focus our hearts on the Lord.

That's one reason we have the Lord's Supper every Sunday night. We do it, one, because we believe that's what the scriptures teach, it's what the Lord would have us to do, but there's a very practical benefit to it: it is intended to focus our minds on the person and work of Jesus Christ. A great time to do it is at the beginning of the week so that that sets the tone for the week.

What's in our hearts? Are we here to sit under the word of God and be instructed and think about it? Everything I say is not true so you need to at least – I mean for it to be, but I probably make plenty of mistakes and you need to think critically. And are you doing that, thinking about it? These are the things we need to examine about ourselves in light of this.

How important is worship to us? Worshipping the Lord wasn't important to the men and the merchants of Israel. Making money was. It was all about making a sale. In Colossians 3 Paul gives a list of sins and one of them in verse 5 is greed which he calls idolatry. Have to think about that. That's kind of odd. We think of going to the Temple of Diana or something like that and seeing this image and worshipping it, that's idolatry or bowing down to Baal.

So you might wonder how is greed idolatry? How is greed false worship? We get an understanding of that right here in Amos 8:5-6 where the prophet charges the merchants of Israel with greed and in effect making earnings or profit their god. Now there's nothing wrong, and I want to mention this – I haven't listened to all of Dr. Johnson's sermons on this, I did listen to one in which he said something like, “Amos wasn't against capitalism,” and he wasn't. He's not against making a profit. He's not against hard work and these guys were evidently hard workers.

There’s nothing wrong with that, but that should never be the first thing in one’s life and it was certainly the first thing in their life. And it shouldn’t be so important that you will crush people to make money off them and destroy them in order to get your money. But that’s the case here. They had made earnings and profit their god and they would do anything for their god of greed. They would cheat if necessary, in fact, they certainly did cheat. That was one of the complaints.

They wanted to get through the Sabbath to get back to business. That’s what they say, “To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, and to cheat with dishonest scales.” So evidently what he’s describing there is they would make the container into which they measured wheat to be sold, they would make that container small than normal without telling anybody but charging the buyer for the full bushel. So they’d sell them less wheat for the same amount or they would use dishonest scales as he said, to cheat their customers, anything to make money.

I remember years ago hearing a sermon by Donald Grey Barnhouse and I don’t remember the sermon but I do remember one brief illustration or quote that he gave. He mentioned a man, a butcher who said that when he became a Christian he quit weighing his thumb. That’s a very easy thing to do that, to cheat people in small ways, you know, put a piece of meat on the scale and you just kind of put your thumb on it to make sure that there’s a little added weight to give you a little more money, fixing the scale so they show false weights in a way that favors the seller.

These were things that were going on, and they can be small things. Won’t amount to a whole lot of money, but over time the seller makes a lot more money by doing that. But they can be small things in the mind of the person that’s doing them and yet they’re not small to God. God cares about these things. He cares about weights and measures. He cares about honesty and His people. He cares about fairness and He despises cheating.

But Israel was greedy. They cheated their neighbors and worse. They wanted to get through the Sabbath and back to the market so that they could – well, they want to do that because that’s where their heart was. That’s where they made money. They wanted to do that because that’s where their heart was in the market, not at the shrine or worshipping the Lord. But they were so eager to do it because they wanted to buy their own countrymen.

That’s the crime of verse 6 which says that they, “Buy the helpless for money.” Evidently they did that by cheating the poor and by cheating them so much that the poor accumulated debts and those debts were debts that became too great for them to pay so they were either forced to sell themselves into slavery or the courts gave them over to their creditors.

However, we understand that the oppression of these merchants bankrupted, ruined and enslaved those who are less fortunate and who had less means. But that’s these merchants. They were so bent on making money that they cared nothing about other people. They cared only about themselves. The last line of the verse, “And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat,” in connection with buying the helpless seems to indicate the value that they put on people.

They didn’t value them any more than the scraps that are left of the wheat. They’re selling all the wheat and then there’s some dust there. They even sell that and that’s kind of, in their minds, the value of the people they sell. That’s all the same to them. They didn’t value the people, certainly not as the Lord did. They didn’t care. But the Lord does care and He knew what was happening in Israel and that Israel was a basket of summer fruit. It was ripe for judgment.

So in verse 7 Amos says that God would judge them and His decision to do so was irreversible. He puts himself under oath to do that. “The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds.” What is pride of Jacob? Well, one suggestion is it’s the city of Samaria, the capital city. That’s a pretty common view, I think. It was Israel’s prized possession, their capital city and so the Lord swears by that city that He’s not going to forget the evil that they’ve done.

That doesn’t seem to me to be a very strong oath from a standpoint of the Lord. Maybe it’s viewed in a kind of ironical way, but I think that a better understanding of the pride of Israel is the Lord Himself since the author of Hebrews tells us that he can swear by no one higher. And earlier in the book, actually the Lord did speak of swearing by Himself and back in chapter 6 and verse 13, so I take it that that’s what He’s saying. He’s swearing upon Himself that He’s not going to forget what they’ve done.

And what they’ve done is destroy other people. He should be their pride, that’s – if you want to see some irony in all of this. The Lord should be their pride, He really wasn’t their pride. They boasted, in other things, they boasted in

themselves. But He swears upon Himself and He would deal with them and really take away the things that they did put their pride in.

And so they say, God put Himself under oath to deal with the injustice, then that makes it irreversible and flexible. This judgment is going to come and the destructive nature of it is indicated in a rhetorical question that He asks in verse 8. “Because of this will not the land quake and everyone who dwells in it mourn? Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile, and it will be tossed about and subside like the Nile of Egypt.”

The answer of course is will not it be tossed about, yes, it will be. The land will quake it will rise up like the Nile, as He says, which may mean that there’ll be physical catastrophes, earthquakes and floods or this may be a figurative way of simply describing how calamitous the judgment will be. It’s going to be like a flood, it’s going to be like an earthquake. However we understand it, the point of this statement in verse 8 when He’s describing the nature of this judgment is that it will be calamitous and God swore to it.

He has vowed by himself that this will take place and so it must take place. Now in verse 9 Amos moves forward in time to the last days. He speaks of events that will occur in that day and that’s an expression that very often refers to a future day, a future day to us. Prophets would do that. You know, you read through the Old Testament, you can find examples where prophecies take place – they’re juxtaposed. I mean one verse is about one thing and the next verse is about something years, centuries, millennia later. So there can be long scratches of time between verses. And I think that’s so here. He speaks of judgment on the world when the day would be turned into night.

Verse 9, “‘It will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord God, ‘that I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. Darkness symbolizes judgment. So it can be seen as a symbol, as a metaphor, but it can also be understood literally because this literally happened. It happened when the Lord was crucified. At noon it turned dark and darkness covered the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, from 12:00 noon to 3:00 in the afternoon. And they were also happening in the last days.

The Lord describes the earth before His second coming and Matthew 24:29 in that way. He says during the tribulation period, the sun will be darkened. That

literally happened at the crucifixion. It may literally happened during the tribulation, I'd take it to be that way. But in both, God demonstrated and will in the future demonstrate His judgment. Darkness signifies that. At the cross, His full judgment was poured out on His son for His elect and the last days it will be poured out on the world on the non-elect and it will demonstrate His judgment. It will be poured out on the guilty.

And this is what Amos is preaching. He's looking to the future, but of course it all applies to his own day. If it's going to happen then it would happen to them, but it'll happen to the future day because the same things that were being done in Amos' time that Amos has preached against will be done then. And so the point would be whether it's then in Amos' day or in the future or even now, it's deserved because these are sins, sins of dishonesty and oppression.

Well, judgment will come and the sorrow will be great. It is described in verse 10. Their festivals will be turned into mourning and it will be, Amos says, “Like a time of mourning for an only son.” That's the worst kind of mourning. It is the worst kind because – or it's intended to be seen in that way because of the natural affection that a parent has for his or her child, but it's also unique because it signaled the end of hope for the future of that family. If they lose the firstborn, there's no heir.

So he's certainly saying that to Amos' generation. This is what's going to happen when the judgment comes on you. When it happened to Israel and when it will happen to the world in the future, it will happen again, as I said, righteously, justly. It will come when after much patience the nation in Amos' day, the world in our time would become ripe for it like summer fruit.

God doesn't judge impetuously. I mentioned Genesis 7 today where He says, “I'm the Lord God, walk before me and be blameless.” But 18, He comes to Abraham and these three visitors come and Abraham serves them a meal and then it becomes increasingly apparent to Abraham who these are and one in particular is the Lord. And the Lord is going down to Sodom and Gomorrah because the outcry of those cities has come up to Him. And He says it's going down to see if the outcry is what it is said to be. In other words, He's going to examine it carefully.

And I think that's what the picture the Lord is giving us. He doesn't need to – he knows what Sodom and Gomorrah were like. He didn't need to go examine it, but He pictures Himself in that way, scrutinizing Him because He looks at things

carefully. When judgment comes, it comes after much patience and after God has scrutinized its perfect justice.

And this will be perfect justice in Amos' day and in the future for the world. But in verse 11 He gives a description of what's going to come, how the summer fruit is going to result in judgment that is appropriate to the vision and it's going to be famine, no fruit. Famine was prophesied earlier back in chapter 4 in verse 6. Remember, the Lord said that He would give them cleanness of teeth. They wouldn't have any food to eat.

That's a terrible thing. There's probably very little worse than famine. We've never experienced it, but you see it on the news sometimes and that famine that goes across the world and oftentimes it's because of war and things of that nature. It's a terrible thing, particularly when you see little children suffering from it. But the famine of chapter 8's different. And I would say really it's even worse. It's the worst kind of famine there can be. This is a famine of hearing the word of God which God withholds from His people.

Verse 11, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, ‘when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord.’” There's that expression again, “Days are coming, behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord.” So this looks to the end of the latter times as Paul says. I think it applies to Amos' day as well, but I think what He's saying about the future is going to happen to them as well.

But those expressions, “Days are coming,” project into the future, which is similar to what Paul says, as I said, the latter times. In the latter times, Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:1, some will fall away from the faith. In 2 Timothy 3:1-9 he describes the last days as a time when men will be lovers of self, just as the Israel that Amos preached to was. They were lovers of self.

Paul goes on to say, “They will be always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Why is that? Well, because there will be a famine of hearing, a famine of the word of God. There'll be no knowledge. God will not be revealing things with to them. He is withholding knowledge in that future day. That would happen to Israel in Amos' day and it is a terrible thing. The seriousness of it is given in this word famine, “Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water.”

Now that indicates the seriousness of it because bread and water are essential for life. We die soon without them. That goes without saying. We cannot live very long without water, we cannot live without food, but the point here is that God’s word is even more important. That’s important for physical life, the word of God is essential for spiritual life. There’s nothing more important than that. And we cannot live without the word of God.

Jesus made that very clear when He was being tempted by the devil in the wilderness and the devil tells Him to, “If you’re hungry, turn these stones into bread,” and Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” But when men reject God’s word as Israel proved it had done by its disobedience, by the merchants cheating and enslaving the poor and remember last week, Amaziah the priest persecuting Amos in chapter 7.

When all of that happens, when men harden their hearts to God’s revelation, they don’t obey it, they resist it, they reject it, then God withholds His word from them. Why would He give His word to people who don’t want it? He gives men over to their sin. When they willfully pursue immorality, God gives them over to a depraved mind.

When they accept ignorance, when they really pursue ignorance, God gives them over to darkness. One of the commentators wrote, “The absence of prophecy depriving men of the divine word is regarded throughout the bible as a dire portent of God’s wrath. And I’m sure that’s true and I wouldn’t quarrel with the statement if this did foreshadow, it did indicate that judgment was coming, a portent of God’s wrath. But I think you could say that that is God’s wrath.

He’s forsaken the people. This is the end of the line, the fruit is ripe, it’s done. It’s over. This nation is lost. This generation that He’s addressing is lost. That’s why they’re describing verse 12. People will stagger from sea to sea and from the north even to the east they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they were not find it.

It happened before in Israel. You remember it happened in Saul’s reign. It happened to Saul. He had rejected the Lord’s will and so the Lord stopped answering him. He was silent and Saul was made increasingly foolish and made increasingly foolish decisions. He ended up, was it the last night of his life visiting the witch at

Endor. He couldn't get a word from the Lord, so he turned to a witch to find revelation.

So when God is silent, men become foolish. They're foolish to begin with because they're resistant to God's word and they're going a foolish direction, but God gives them over to their folly and they adopt false world views. They adopt false policies. They seek folly and fall increasingly into bad decisions and I think Saul is just one example of that.

Amos describes men staggering over the world seeking truth and not finding it, always learning as Paul said but not able to come to the knowledge of the truth. What a picture that is of men today. We need the word of God. We need the bible. It is essential. It is a necessity. It's the most valuable treasure a person can have is God's revelation. It gives light in the darkness. It is a lamp to our feet Psalm has said. It reveals salvation, it reveals the Lord Christians need to value it.

We need to read it. It's not enough – I imagine every one of you are saying, “That's true. That's exactly right, the word of God is God's revelation, we need to value it. Then read it. We all need to do that. We need to be reading it, we need to be studying it, we need to be doing what we can to lean it. When a nation departs from it, it dies. That's true of Israel.

And to bring that over into our situation, that's true of the church. If we ignore the word of God, we will die. God's work won't die, He'll just move somewhere else, but we will. Chapter ends with that warning, verses 13 and 14, “In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint from thirst. As for those who swear by the guilty of Samaria, who say, ‘As your God lives, O Dan,’ and, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’ they will fall and not rise again.”

The young people are the hope of a nation, hope of a church. It's the next generation of a church, next generation of a nation. And here, they're described as fainting. They will stagger seeking truth because evidently their parents didn't teach them the truth. They failed to be faithful in that way, and so the next generation has lost the light. The young will suffer.

I read an interesting book review and excuse me, but this is just going off the top of my head, but if you get the *Wall Street Journal*, I think it was Monday, it was a review of a book that's come out by three different professors at the University of Southern California about why one generation carries on with church or synagogue

and maybe others don't. And they had statistics that six out of ten children who grow up in a home where the parents go to church and they analyze it from the mother who goes but the father doesn't, looks at it in every different way. But like six out of ten continue where there's a devotion to teaching and to the things of God and that it was particularly high when the father was the one that was the leader in all of that and not just that he taught the word of God to them, taught the scriptures. These are my words, not the way it was described in the book review.

But when he is engaged with his children and has a personal relationship with them. It's not just teaching them the catechism, it's taking care of them, it's building a relationship with them. But also looked at others that didn't and I kind of looked at this generation Xers or whatever, I'm not too clear on all that terminology and who they all are, but young people in this generation wouldn't seem to be people to go to church and that's just sort of the spirit of the generation. And they gave some examples, but they traced things back and a lot of the young people that don't go to church today don't go to church because their parents didn't go to church because their parents didn't go to church.

And so when they cut them off from the word of God, this is what happens and that's I think what Amos is describing, that young men and beautiful virgins basically stumbling around. They don't have the truth. Why? Because their parents cut them off from it. They were rich merchants. They were making money and they were living the good life, but they weren't teaching the truth and so this is the consequence. They stumble, they fail. Blindness comes over them and the light is taken away.

Yeah, it's possible to have the bible and not possess it. That characterized Jerusalem in Jesus' day. Mark is teaching those of you in the adult Sunday school the Book of John and you'll remember in John 5 Jesus has this debate with the Jews and the leaders of the people, and at one point in verse 39, John 5:39 Jesus said, “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.”

And of course that's true, the words of eternal life are in the scriptures and they search the scriptures. He said, “It is these that testify about me and you are unwilling to come to me that you may have life.” Well, they had the scriptures, but they didn't. They owned them, they read them, but they didn't really possess them.

Why? Because they were unwilling. When people are unwilling to believe the light that God gives, they lose the light. And that can happen to Christians in churches. They become spiritually lazy and indifferent to the truth. We can become worldly like Israel did and fail to value the word of God and we can pursue other things. And the result of that is we lose the word of God.

And instead of getting the word of God, we get a famine of hearing. So may God guard us against that and enable us to willingly come to Him and seek Him and hear Him and learn of Him and from Him and obey Him. Let's close with prayer.

[Prayer] Father, thank you for the prophecy of Amos to Israel and the warning of a famine of hearing. Guard us from that, Father. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, desire to read your word and hear it and live it. And that ultimately comes from you, so we look to you for all of that. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.