

Will We Ever Be Safe & Secure? Amos 6:1-14

The painful reality is that in this life, it is very nearly possible to be safe and secure, and that both are more readily obtained with power and money, than without. That is the reason why we pursue both. For the sorts of scenarios we face in the U.S. – the bursting of the housing bubble, the collapse of the stock market, the loss of job and income – an abundance of money and power is a distinct advantage.

At least in this world. Other biblical texts remind us of another world to come. Even if – unlike Amos’ readers – we manage to evade recompense in this world, it finds us in the next. So we do well now to prepare for life then, when safety and security will depend in part on how we lived this life, not just on how much influence and stuff we accumulated over its course.

Day One: Amos 6:1-3 Leading men of the leading nation

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation. Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours?

Amos is speaking against the politicians and moneyed elite in Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital city of Judah and Israel. So today his words apply most directly to political leaders and elite power-brokers in Washington, D.C. Still, while we are not leaders, we are citizens of the foremost nation, and arguably a large portion of our sense of security comes from the wealth of our economy and the military power of our country. At least until terrorists strike or the economy tanks.

Amos invites his audience to look around at the capital cities of surrounding nations which they had subjugated, and he invites us to consider all world empires before ours. The 20th century began with Europe astride the colonial world, until two major wars permanently sapped its strength, and gave rise to the American century.

Will America long endure atop the international food-chain? Power and wealth do not last forever. They are not a reliable basis for safety and security. We worship the eternal God, who alone is sovereign and unchanging.

Day Two: Amos 6:3 A single evil day is less painful than an long reign of terror. You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror.

Israel’s economic and military power did enable it to hold off all enemies for a time (‘the evil day’), but that only bred arrogance, and the feeling that they could live however they chose, with impunity from divine punishment. In creating this illusion, their power and wealth ensured that when recompense came, it would be all the more severe (‘a reign of terror’).

America’s economic and military power, coupled with our geographical isolation, has enabled us to hold off all enemies. But the danger exists that safety breeds a false sense of security. As a nation, we are still subject to God’s judgment. No less that Amos’ generation, our national future depends on our moral standards and our care for the disenfranchised. Pray for our country and its people, because our personal fate is tied up in our national welfare.

Day Three: Amos 6:4-7 When luxury is a bad thing.

You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

Notably, a word so popular in American marketing is strongly offensive to God: “luxury”. Amos appears to object not just to oppression of the poor, nor simply to pursuing material comforts rather than God. His criticisms are so frequent and strong that he apparently objects in principle to certain levels of luxury.

God has an opinion about the sort of furniture we buy, the cuts of meat (and sushi) that we eat, the way we use our time, the cost of our beverages, and the amount of money we spend pampering our skin. Verse 7 includes biting irony: those who are ‘first’ in the nation’s socio-economic structure (v1) will also be ‘first’ into exile (v7). Are you currently considering the purchase of an unnecessary luxury? How might you put those funds to better use, especially in a time when many are going through severe financial constraints?

Day Four: Amos 6:8,14 God takes his name, but not in vain
The Sovereign Lord has sworn by himself – the Lord Almighty declares ... “I will deliver up the city and everything in it” ... For the Lord God Almighty declares, “I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath [in the north] to the valley of the Arabah [in the south].”

Within forty years, the empire of Assyria invaded, conquered, and destroyed Israel. But here God says it is he who sent the Assyrians. God takes full ownership for the destruction of Israel: he swore an oath in his own name; he delivered up Jerusalem; he stirred up Assyria. We worship God for his grace and mercy, and rightly so. Yet the New Testament, like the Old, recognizes also his sternness (Rom 11:22). Pray for our country, for the church in America, for our church, and for your family, that we might avoid living in such a way as calls down his sternness rather than his kindness.

Day Five: Amos 6:9-11 Total destruction
If ten men are left in one house, they too will die. And if a relative who is to cremate the bodies comes to carry them out of the house and asks anyone still hiding there, “Is anyone with you?” and he says, “No,” then he will say, “Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.”

In Amos 5:3, God held out hope that 10% of the nation would survive: one hundred would go out to battle to defend Israel, but only ten would return. Not much of a hope, yet better than nothing. Now he takes away even that small scrap: of the ten who are left,

all will die. While we have read such before in Amos, this is the strongest warning yet. Recognizing the (legitimate) fierceness of God, let us live with integrity so that we not fall under his wrath.

Day Six: Amos 6:12 A corrupt people
Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness.

The wealthy Israelites treat their farm animals (horses, oxen) better than they treat human beings; they show more respect for their farm tools (plows) than for God’s justice and righteousness. This speaks directly, of course, to judges, politicians, and lawyers, not to abuse either power or law to take advantage of others. Does it leave the rest of us free and clear? While we do not have farm animals, do we spend more on pet care than on the poor? We may not have farm tools, but do we devote more attention to our cars than to the poor?

Day Seven: John 14:1-3,27; 16:33 Peace in a troubled world
 After such strong words from Amos, Jesus’ words offer us the soothing relief of a soft rain after the scorching heat of summer. Positions of power provide no ultimate security. Nor does wealth. Nor, even, does God, if we take advantage of others.

But to those who lack power and wealth – those who are persecuted, weak, and frail – Jesus offers assurance: *“Do not be troubled in heart. Trust in God; trust also in me... I am going to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:1-2). *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (14:27). *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

Jesus does not promise us an easy life in this world, but he has led the way into the next, through struggle, but into glory. He promises that he will guide us safe home through the perils of life. In times of trouble, take comfort in this, and give thanks for it.