

# CHAPTER 8

## INTRODUCTION TO AMOS 8

In this chapter a fourth vision is delivered, the vision of a “basket of summer fruit”; signifying the destruction of the ten tribes, for which they were ripe, and which would quickly come upon them, (<sup><318E></sup>Amos 8:1-3); the rich are reproved for their oppression of the poor, their covetousness and earthly mindedness, (<sup><318E></sup>Amos 8:4-6); for which they are threatened with entire ruin, sudden calamities, and very mournful times, instead of light, joy, and gladness, (<sup><318E></sup>Amos 8:7-10); and particularly with a famine of hearing the word of God, (<sup><318E></sup>Amos 8:11,12); the consequence of which would be, a fainting of the young men and virgins for thirst, and the utter and irrecoverable ruin of all idolaters, (<sup><318E></sup>Amos 8:13,14).

**Ver. 1.** *Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me*, etc.] Another vision, which is the fourth, and after the following manner:

*and, behold, a basket of summer fruit*; not of the first ripe fruit, but of such as were gathered at the close of the summer, when autumn began. So the Targum,

“the last of the summer fruit;”

such as were fully ripe, and would not keep till winter; or, if kept, would rot; but must be eaten directly, as some sort of apples, grapes, etc. denoting the people of Israel being ripe for destruction, and would be quickly devoured by their enemies; and that, as they had had a summer of prosperity, they would now have a sharp winter of adversity.

**Ver. 2.** *And he said, Amos, what seest thou?* etc.] To quicken his attention, who might disregard it as a common thing; and in order to lead him into the design of it, and show him what it was an emblem of:

*and I said, a basket of summer fruit*; some render it “a hook”<sup>f213</sup>, such as they pull down branches with to gather the fruit; and the word so signifies in the Arabic language<sup>f214</sup>; but the other is the more received sense of the word:

*then said the Lord unto me*; by way of explanation of the vision: the end is come upon my people Israel: the end of the kingdom of Israel; of their commonwealth and church state; of all their outward happiness and glory; their “summer [was] ended”, and they “not saved”, (~~2180~~ Jeremiah 8:20); all their prosperity was over; and, as the Targum, their

“final punishment was come,”

the last destruction threatened them <sup>f215</sup>:

*I will not again pass by them any more*; pass by their offences, and forgive their sins; or pass by their persons, without taking notice of them, so as to afflict and punish them for their iniquities: or, “pass through them and more”<sup>f216</sup> now making an utter end of them; (see Gill on “~~3008~~ Amos 7:8”).

**Ver. 3.** *And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God*, etc.] Not the songs sung by the Levites in the temple of Jerusalem, this prophecy respects the ten tribes only; but those in imitation of them, sung in the temple at Bethel, and other idol temples; or profane songs in the palaces of princes and nobles; that is, instead of these, there should be howlings for the calamities come upon them. So the Targum,

“they shall howl, instead of a song, in their houses then;”

particularly because of the slain in them, as follows; (see ~~3023~~ Amos 5:23);

*[there shall be] many dead bodies in every place*; in all houses and palaces, in all towns and cities; and especially in Samaria, during the siege, and when taken, partly through the famine, and partly through the sword:

*they shall cast [them] forth with silence*; they that have the care of burying the dead bodies shall either cast them out of the houses upon the bier or cart in which they are carried to the grave, or into the pit or grave without any funeral lamentation: or, “they shall cast them forth”, and say, “be silent”; that is, as Kimchi explains it,

“one of them that casts them forth shall say to his companion, be silent;”

say not one word against God and his providence, since this is righteously come upon us; or say nothing of the number of the dead, lest the hearts of those that hear should become tender, and be discouraged, as Aben Ezra; or the enemy should be encouraged to go on with the siege.

**Ver. 4.** *Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy*, etc.] Like a man that pants after a draught of water when thirsty; and, when he has got it, greedily swallows it down at one gulp; so these rich men swallowed up the poor, their labours, gains, and profits, and persons too; got all into their own hands, and made them bondsmen and slaves to them; (see <sup><100></sup>Amos 2:7); these are called upon to hear this dreadful calamity threatened, and to consider what then would become of them and their ill gotten riches; and suggesting, that their oppression of the needy was one cause of this destruction of the land:

*even to make the poor of the land to fail*; or “cease”<sup>f217</sup>; to die for want of the necessaries of life, being obliged to such hard labour; so unmercifully used, their faces ground, and pinched with necessity; and so sadly paid for their work, that they could not live by it.

**Ver. 5.** *Saying, when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn?* etc.] The first day of every month, on which it was forbid to sell any thing, or do any worldly business, being appointed and used for religious service; (see <sup><100></sup>2 Kings 4:23); and which these carnal earthly minded men were weary of, and wanted to have over, that they might be selling their grain, and getting money, which they preferred to the worship of God. Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it of the month of harvest, when the poor found what to eat in the fields; when they gleaned there, and got a sufficiency of bread, and so had no need to buy corn; and hence these rich misers, that hoarded up the grain, are represented as wishing the harvest month over, that they might sell their grain to the poor, having had, during that month, no demand for it; and so the Targum renders it the month of grain: or the month of intercalation, as Jarchi understands it; every three years a month was intercalated, to bring their feasts right to the season of the year; and that year was a month longer than the rest, and made provision dearer; and then the sense is, when will the year of intercalation come, that we may have a better price for our grain? but the first sense seems best;

*and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat*; in the shops or markets, for sale: or “open wheat”<sup>f218</sup>; the granaries and treasures of it, to be seen and sold. Now the sabbath, or seventh day of the week, as no servile work was to be done on it, so no trade or commerce was to be carried on on that day; which made it a long and wearisome one to worldly men, who wished it over, that they might be about their worldly business. Kimchi and Ben Melech, by “sabbath”, understand a “week”, which these men put off the

poor unto, when the price of grain would rise; and so from week to week refused to sell, and longed till the week came when it would be dearer. The Targum and Jarchi interpret it of the seventh year Sabbath, when there was no ploughing, nor sowing, nor reaping, and so no selling of grain, but the people lived upon what the earth brought forth of itself. But the first sense here is also best;

*making the ephah small*; a dry measure, that held three scabs, or about a bushel of ours, with which they measured their grain and their wheat; so that, besides the exorbitant price they required, they did not give due measure:

*and the shekel great*; that is, the weight, or shekel stone, with which they weighed the money the poor gave for their grain and wheat; this was made heavier than it should be, and so of course the money weighed against it was too light, and the poor were obliged to make it up with more; and thus they cheated them, both in their measure, and in their money:

*and falsifying the balances by deceit?* contrary to the law in (<sup><R53></sup>Deuteronomy 25:13-15 <sup><S50></sup>Ezekiel 45:10).

**Ver. 6.** *That we may buy the poor for silver*, etc.] Thus making them pay dear for their provisions, and using them in this fraudulent manner, by which they would not be able to support themselves and their families; they might purchase them and theirs for slaves, at so small a price as a piece of silver, or a single shekel, worth about half a crown; and this was their end and design in using them after this manner; (see <sup><R53></sup>Leviticus 25:39,40);

*and the needy for a pair of shoes*; (see Gill on “<sup><3116></sup>Amos 2:6”);

*[yea], and sell the refuse of the wheat*; not only did they sell the poor grain and wheat at a dear rate, and in scanty measure, but the worst of it, and such as was not fit to make bread of, only to be given to the cattle; and, by reducing the poor to extreme poverty, they obliged them to take that of them at their own price. It may be rendered, “the fall of wheat”<sup>f219</sup>; that which fell under the sieve, when the wheat was sifted, as Aben Ezra, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, observe.

**Ver. 7.** *The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob*, etc.] Not by the ark, as R. Japhet; nor by the temple, as Kimchi; but by himself; which sense Kimchi also mentions, and Aben Ezra; the God of Jacob and his glory, the

most excellent of all Jacob's enjoyments, and of whom he had reason to boast and glory; (see <sup><1018></sup>Amos 6:8);

*surely I will never forget any of their works*; their wicked works, especially those now mentioned; God forgets when he forgives them, or suffers them to go unpunished; but though he had done so long, he would do so no more; on which they might depend, since he had not only said it, but swore to it.

**Ver. 8.** *Shall not the land tremble for this*, etc.] For this wickedness committed, in using the poor with so much inhumanity? may not an earthquake be expected? and which happened two years after Amos began to prophesy, (<sup><1001></sup>Amos 1:1); or that the earth should gape and swallow up these men alive, guilty of such enormities? or shall not the inhabitants of the land tremble at such judgments, which the Lord hath sworn he will bring upon it?

*and everyone mourn that dwelleth therein?* at the hearing of them, and especially when they shall come upon them: as the calamity would be general, the mourning should be universal:

*and it shall rise up wholly as a flood*; that is, the calamity threatened shall rise up at once like a flood of waters, like Noah's flood, and cover the whole land, and wash off and utterly destroy man and beast:

*and it shall be cast out and drowned, as [by] the flood of Egypt*; or the river of Egypt, the Nile, which overflows at certain times, and casts up its waters and its mud, and drowns all the country; so that the whole country, during its continuance, looks like a sea: it overflows both its banks, both towards Lybia or Africa, and towards Arabia, and on each side about two days' journey, as Herodotus<sup>f220</sup> relates; and this it does regularly every year, in the summer solstice, in the higher and middle Egypt, where it seldom rains, and its flood is necessary; but is not so large in the lower Egypt, where it more frequently rains, and the country needs it not. Strabo<sup>f221</sup> says this flood remains more than forty days, and then it decreases by little and little, as it increased; and within sixty days the fields are seen and dried up; and the sooner that is, the sooner they plough and sow, and have the better harvests. Herodotus<sup>f222</sup> says it continues a hundred days, and is near the same in returning; and he says, unless it rises to sixteen, or at least fifteen cubits, it will not overflow the country<sup>f223</sup>; and, according to Pliny<sup>f224</sup>, the proper increase of the waters is sixteen cubits; if

only they arise to twelve, it is a famine; if to thirteen, it is hunger; if to fourteen, it brings cheerfulness; if to fifteen, security; and if to sixteen, delights. But Strabo<sup>f225</sup> relates, that the fertility by it is different at different times; before the times of Petronius, the greatest fertility was when the Nile arose to the fourteenth cubit; and when to the eighteenth, it was a famine: but when he was governor of that country, when it only reached the twelfth cubit, there was great fruitfulness; had when it came to the eighth (the eighteenth I suppose it should be) no famine was perceived. An Arabic writer<sup>f226</sup> gives an account of the Nilometry, or measures of the Nile, from the year of Christ 622 to 1497; and he says, that, when the depth of the channel of the Nile is fourteen cubits, a harvest may be expected that will amount to one year's provision; but, if it increases to sixteen, the corn will be sufficient for two years; less than fourteen, a scarcity; and more than eighteen makes a famine. Upon the whole, it seems that sixteen cubits have been reckoned the standard that portends plenty, for many generations, to which no addition has appeared to have been made during the space of five hundred years.

“This we learn (says Dr. Shaw)<sup>f227</sup>, not only from the sixteen children that attend the statue of the Nile, but from Pliny also; and likewise from a medal of Hadrian in the great brass where we see the figure of the Nile, with a boy upon it, pointing to the number sixteen. Yet in the fourth century, which it will be difficult to account for, fifteen cubits only are recorded by the Emperor Julian<sup>f228</sup> as the height of the Nile's inundation; whereas, in the middle of the sixth century, in the time of Justinian, Procopius<sup>f229</sup> informs us that the rise of the Nile exceeded eighteen cubits; in the seventh century, after Egypt was subdued by the Saracens, the amount was sixteen or seventeen cubits; and at present, when the river rises to sixteen cubits, the Egyptians make great rejoicings, and call out, “wafaa Allah”, that is, “God has given them all they wanted”.”

The river begins to swell in May, yet no public notice is taken of it till the twenty eighth or twenty ninth of June; by which time it is usually risen to the height of six or eight pikes (or cubits, *πηθος*, a Turkish measure of twenty six inches); and then public criers proclaim it through the capital, and other cities, and continue in the same manner till it rises to sixteen pikes; then they cut down the dam of the great canal. If the water increases to the height of twenty three or twenty four pikes, it is judged most

favourable; but, if it exceed that, it does a great deal of mischief, not only by overflowing houses, and drowning cattle, but also by engendering a great number of insects, which destroy the fruits of the earth<sup>f230</sup>. And a late learned traveller<sup>f231</sup> tells us, that

“eighteen pikes is an indifferent Nile (for so high it is risen when they declare it but sixteen); twenty is middling; twenty two is a good Nile, beyond which it seldom rises; it is said, if it rises above twenty four pikes, it is looked on as an inundation, and is of bad consequence.”

And to such a flood the allusion is here. Thus the land of Israel should be overwhelmed and plunged into the utmost distress, and sink into utter ruin, by this judgment coming upon them; even the Assyrian army, like a flood, spreading themselves over all the land, and destroying it. So the Targum,

“a king shall come up against it with his army, large as the waters of a river, and shall cover it wholly, and expel the inhabitants of it, and shall plunge as the river of Egypt;”

(see ~~2887~~ Isaiah 8:7,8).

**Ver. 9.** *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God,* etc.]

When this deluge and desolation of the land shall be, now spoken of:

*that I will cause the sun to go down at noon:* or to be so dark as if it was set; as at the time of our Lord’s crucifixion, to which many of the ancient fathers refer this prophecy, though it has respect to other times and things. Jarchi interprets it of the kingdom of the house of David. It doubtless designs the kingdom of Israel, their whole policy, civil and ecclesiastic, and the destruction of it; particularly their king, princes, and nobles, that should be in great adversity, and that suddenly and unexpectedly; it being a fine sunshine morning with them, and they in great prosperity, and yet by noon their sun would be set, and they in the utmost darkness and distress;

*and I will darken the earth in a clear day;* the land of Israel, the people of it, the common people, who should have their share, in this calamity and affliction; and though it had been a clear day with them, and they promised themselves much and long felicity, yet on a sudden their light would be turned into darkness, and their joy into sadness and sorrow.

**Ver. 10.** *And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation,* etc.] Either their religious feasts, the feasts of pentecost, tabernacles, and passover; at which three feasts there were eclipses of the sun, a few years after this prophecy of Amos, as Bishop Usher<sup>f232</sup> observes: the first was an eclipse of the sun about ten digits, in the year 3213 A.M. or 791 B.C., June twenty fourth, at the feast of pentecost; the next was almost twelve digits, about eleven years after, on November eighth, 780 B.C., at the feast of the tabernacles; and the third was more than eleven digits in the following year, 779 B.C., on May fifth, at the feast of the passover; which the prophecy may literally refer to, and which might occasion great sorrow and concern, and especially at what they might be thought to forebode: but particularly this was fulfilled when these feasts could not be observed any longer, nor the songs used at them sung any more; or else their feasts, and songs at them, in their own houses, in which they indulged themselves in mirth and jollity; but now, instead thereof, there would be mourning and lamentation the loss of their friends, and being carried captive into a strange land;

*and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins;* of high and low, rich and poor; even those that used to be covered with silk and rich embroideries: sackcloth was a coarse cloth put on in times of mourning for the dead, or on account of public calamities:

*and baldness upon every head:* the hair being either shaved off or pulled off; both which were sometimes done, as a token of mourning:

*and I will make it as the mourning of an only [son];* as when parents mourn for an only son, which is generally carried to the greatest height, and continued longest, as well as is most sincere and passionate; the case being exceeding cutting and afflictive, as this is hereby represented to be:

*and the end thereof as a bitter day;* a day of bitter calamity, and of bitter wailing and mourning, in the bitterness of their spirits; though the beginning of the day was bright and clear, a fine sunshine, yet the end of it dark and bitter, distressing and sorrowful, it being the end of the people of Israel, as in (<sup><308D></sup>Amos 8:2).

**Ver. 11.** *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God,* etc.] Which Kimchi interprets of all the days of the second house or temple after Malachi, when prophecy ceased; but it rather has respect to the time of Shalmaneser's carrying captive the ten tribes, when they had no more prophets nor



prophecy among them, or any to tell how long their captivity should last, or when it would be better times with them, (<sup><1749></sup>Psalm 74:9);

*that I will send a famine in the land;* which, in a literal sense, is one of God's arrows he has in his quiver, and sends out when he pleases; or one of his sore judgments, which he sometimes orders to come upon a people for their sins: but here is meant,

*not a famine of bread;* or through want of that, which is very dreadful; as was the famine of Samaria, when an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and a certain measure of dove's dung for five pieces of silver, (<sup><1065></sup>2 Kings 6:25); and as were the famines of Jerusalem, when taken both by the Chaldeans and Romans, when delicate women boiled and ate their own children, (<sup><2008></sup>Lamentations 4:8-10);

*nor a thirst for water;* which is more distressing and tormenting than hunger; and to be slain with thirst is to be destroyed in the most afflictive manner, (<sup><2008></sup>Hosea 2:3). Lysimachus is said to part with his kingdom for a draught of water; and the torments of hell are set forth by a violent thirst for it, (<sup><1065></sup>Luke 16:24); but something worse than either of these is here threatened:

*but of hearing the words of the Lord;* the word of prophecy, and the preaching of the word, or explaining the Scriptures. Of this blessing the ten tribes were deprived at their captivity, and have been ever since; and the Jews, upon their rejection of Christ, have had the kingdom of God, the Gospel of the kingdom, the word and ordinances of God, taken from them, and remain so to this day; the seven churches of Asia have had their candlestick removed out of its place, and this famine continues in those parts to this time; and, by the symptoms upon us, we may justly fear it, will be our case before long. "The words of the Lord" are the Scriptures, which come from him, and are concerning him; the doctrines of grace contained in them, the wholesome words of Christ: hearing them signifies the preaching of them, (<sup><2501></sup>Isaiah 53:1 <sup><1000></sup>Galatians 3:2); by which hearing comes, and is a great blessing, and should be attended to, as being the means of conversion, regenerations, the knowledge of Christ, faith in him, and the joy of it. Now, to be deprived of hearing the Gospel is a spiritual famine, for that is food, bread, meat, milk, honey, yea, a feast; it is food that is savoury, wholesome, nourishing, satisfying, strengthening, and comforting; and when this is took away a famine ensues, as when a church state is dissolved, ministers are ordered to preach no more in such a place, or are

scattered by persecution, or removed by death, and none raised up in their stead; or when error prevails, to the suppressing of truth: all which is done, or suffered to be done, for indifference to the word of God, unfruitfulness under it, and contempt of it, and, opposition to it; which is a dreadful case, when such a famine is; for the glory, riches, and light of a nation, are gone; bread for their souls is no more; and the means of conversion, knowledge, comfort, etc. cease; and people in course must die, for lack of these things; (see <sup><2106></sup>Isaiah 3:1 <sup><2046></sup>Hosea 4:6).

**Ver. 12.** *And they shall wander from sea to sea*, etc.] From the sea of Tiberias, or Galilee; or from the Dead sea, the lake Asphaltites; or from the Red sea, which was to the south of the land of Israel, to the great sea, which is to the west, as Aben Ezra: so the Targum,

“from the sea to the west;”

that is, to the Mediterranean sea:

*and from the north even to the east*; proceeding from the south to the west, they shall turn from thence to the north, and so to the east, which describes the borders of the land of Canaan, (<sup><0343></sup>Numbers 34:3-12); and the sense is, that

*they shall go to and fro*; throughout the whole land, and all over it,

*to seek the word of the Lord*; not the written word, but the interpretation of it; doctrine from before the Lord, as the Targum; the preaching of the word, or ministers to instruct them in it; or the word of prophecy, and prophets to tell them when it would be better times, and how long their present distress should last:

*and shall not find [it]*; there should be no ministry, no preaching, no prophesying; as never since among the ten tribes, so it has been the case of the Jews, the two tribes, upon the rejection of the Messiah; the Gospel was taken from them; no tidings could they hear of the Messiah, though they ran to and fro to find him, it being told them Lo, here, and Lo, there; (see <sup><0374></sup>John 7:34-36 <sup><0172></sup>Luke 17:22).

**Ver. 13.** *In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.*] After the word, for want of that grain and wine, which make young men and maids cheerful, (<sup><0317></sup>Zechariah 9:17); but, being destitute of them, should be covered with sorrow, overwhelmed with grief, and ready to sink

and die away. These, according to some, design the congregation of Israel; who are like to beautiful virgins, as the Targum paraphrases it; and the principal men of it, the masters of the assemblies: or, as others, such who were trusting to their own righteousness, and seeking after that which they could never attain justification by, and did not hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ, and so perished.

**Ver. 14.** *They that swear by the sin of Samaria*, etc.] The calf at Bethel, which was near Samaria, and which the Samaritans worshipped; and was set up by their kings, and the worship of it encouraged by their example, and which is called the calf of Samaria, (<sup><2885></sup>Hosea 8:5,6); the making of it was the effect of sin, and the occasion of leading into it, and ought to have been had in detestation and abhorrence, as sin should; and yet by this the Israelites swore, as they had used to do by the living God; so setting up this idol on an equality with him:

*and say, thy God, O Dan, liveth*; the other calf, which was set up in Dan; and to this they gave the epithet of the bring God, which only belonged to the God of Israel:

*and the manner of Beersheba liveth*; or, “the way of Beersheba”<sup>f233</sup>; the long journey or pilgrimage of those at Beersheba; who chose to go to Dan, rather than Bethel, to worship; imagining they showed greater devotion and religion, by going from one extreme part of the land to the other, for the sake of it. Daniel was on the northern border of the land of Judea, about four miles from Paneas, as you go to Tyre<sup>f234</sup>; and Beersheba was on the southern border of the land, twenty miles from Hebron<sup>f235</sup>; and the distance of these two places was about one hundred and sixty miles<sup>f236</sup>. And by this religious peregrination men swore; or rather by the God of Beersheba, as the Septuagint render it; though the phrase may only intend the religion of Beersheba, the manner of worship there, it being a place where idolatry was practised; (see <sup><3085></sup>Amos 5:5). The Targum is,

“the fear (that is, the deity) which is in Daniel liveth, and firm are the laws of Beersheba;”

*even they shall fall, and never rise up again*; that is, these idolatrous persons, that swear by the idols in the above places, shall fall into calamity, ruin, and destruction, by and for their sins, and never recover out of it; which was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes, from whence they have never returned to this day.