

# Amos 8:11-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-8/amos-811-14/>

*Amos predicts a widespread famine and drought that will plague the nation Israel. It will not be a famine of food or thirst for water, but rather a starvation for hearing the words of the LORD.*

This oracle begins with the statement “*Behold, days are coming*” to alert the Israelites of the imminent nature of what was about to be said. The phrase “*declares the Lord GOD*” is added to affirm the truth of the matter. What Amos was saying would surely come to pass because it came from the Lord, Israel’s master who is perfect and righteous in all His ways (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Through the prophet, the LORD said that He would *send a famine on the land*. Amos stated in earlier chapters that the LORD had sent famine to the Israelite land, and it covered all their cities and all their places (Amos 4:6). God also caused His people to experience drought, a prolonged period of abnormally low rainfall which led to a shortage of water (Amos 4:7). God did so to chastise His covenant people to see if they would be willing to repent. But they had not done so. Here in Amos 8, the LORD threatened to plague His covenant people with famine and drought again. This time, however, it would not be a *famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD*.

The Suzerain God raised up prophets (like Amos, Isaiah, Hosea etc.) to minister to His covenant people. The prophets repeatedly asked the people to turn away from their wicked ways and to turn to God in faith and obedience in order to avoid God’s judgment. The prophets’ message were like a “demand letter” sent to enforce a contract: “Pay the past due payment or we will foreclose according to the provisions of the contract.” In this case, the agreement in mind is God’s covenant with Israel. Israel agreed to comply with God’s covenant law (Exodus 19:8). The essence of the covenant was to follow God’s ways and love others as they loved themselves (Leviticus 19:18). Israel had broken the agreement, and now God was warning them that the remedy provision was about to be invoked, which required Israel to be conquered and exiled (Deuteronomy 30:17-18).

But the Israelites refused to hear the warnings of the prophets. They continued to live their lives as to show no respect for their covenant partner, Yahweh. Rather than treating one another in a just manner, particularly the poor, they were exploiting one another, similar to the surrounding nations. Therefore, the LORD would refrain from sending His prophets to speak on His behalf, causing the people to suffer greatly, not from physical nourishment, but from spiritual distress.

It seems that God determined that if they would not listen, God would stop speaking. God’s people would be deprived of spiritual food to nourish their souls. As a result, they would not have the opportunity to grow in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Peter 3:18).

Such a deprivation would cause Israel to *stagger from sea to sea*. In the Bible, the phrase “from sea to sea” usually describes the distance between the Mediterranean in the west to the Dead Sea or Jordan River (Psalm 72:8; Zechariah 9:10). This might be the same as saying “from coast to

coast” in America. This could mean that the people of God would search for His truth everywhere, from the west to the south *and from the north even to the east*. They would *go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they would not find it*. God’s word would be nowhere. It could also indicate that all of Israel will *stagger* in living life because of the lack of God’s word in their midst.

Moreover, *in that day the beautiful virgins and the young men would faint from thirst*. The inference is that these young people would lose their vitality due to fainting *from thirst* for God’s word. They would lack vitality due to a lack of spiritual wisdom. Young men and women are the backbone of a society. They represent the future of every nation since they are full of strength, energy, and vitality, and are usually ready to renew and maintain key roles played by the elders as the latter ones disappear. Yet, Amos told his audience that, while in the prime of their lives, *the beautiful virgin and the young men would faint*.

Amos concluded by describing the way in which the wicked Israelites swore, which indicated their core problem. They were rejecting God’s covenant, which required them to live justly, treat the poor fairly, and love their neighbor as they loved themselves. Instead they were exploiting others, behaving like the surrounding nations. Amos noted that instead of swearing by the name of the LORD their God, the Israelites swore *by the guilt of Samaria*, saying, ‘*As your god lives, O Dan,*’ and, ‘*As the way of Beersheba lives.*’ Israel did not honor God’s covenant law because they did not honor God. The first and greatest command is to love God, and follow His ways (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). If that is missed, one would never get to the second command, which is to love one’s neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18).

In biblical times, swearing had to do with someone taking an oath before a deity to declare his intentions to do something or to refrain from doing it (Genesis 14:22; 21:23). It is possible that *the guilt of Samaria* refers to pagan deities worshiped in Samaria (probably at the Bethel sanctuary). Hosea alluded to an idol made there, telling his audience that “a craftsman made it, so it is not God” (Hosea 8:6). Thus, instead of swearing by God’s covenant name of Yahweh (Deuteronomy 6:13), the Israelites swore in the name of foreign deities and said, *As your god lives, O Dan, and as the way of Beersheba lives*. The oath by the god of Dan likely refers to the worship of the molten calf which Jeroboam I established in the territory of *Dan* (1 Kings 12:28–30). [See side bar section titled "Related Articles" to read an article on the archeological site of the golden calves of Dan]

The territory of *Dan* was originally located in the south by the Philistine coast, but the tribe of *Dan* moved north to the region of the city called *Dan*, north of the Sea of Galilee and contiguous to *Bashan* which is the modern day Golan Heights (Judges 18:27-29). *Dan* is now the northernmost part of Israel, near the border with Lebanon.

The oath by the life of *the way of Beersheba* likely refers to the religious site located in the city of *Beersheba* where Israel worshiped, even though it was in the far south of the land in the territory of Judah. The phrase “Dan to Beersheba” is sometimes used to designate the entirety of Israel, from the northern border to the southern border (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10). This might indicate that all of Israel had fallen into worshipping idols, and therefore lived lives of exploitation rather than in service to one another.

The Suzerain God had been patient with His covenant people. He sent prophets to announce judgment on them to see if they would repent from their sins. He had given them a “demand letter” telling them to begin once again to keep the requirements of the covenant they had made with Him. But the Israelites rejected the prophetic messages and continued to live in their sins against God and one another. Therefore, God promised to judge them in accordance with the terms of the covenant they had agreed to (Exodus 19:8; Deuteronomy 30:17-18). In these final verses of Amos, God’s judgment would come in the form of a spiritual famine, which would cause those who swore to pagan deities to *fall and not rise again*.

In 722 BC, Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, or Samaria, and deported its people. The few that remained in Samaria intermarried with foreign peoples, and became the “Samaritans” of the New Testament. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom did not return to inhabit the land until the modern state of Israel was formed in 1948. So Samaria fell, and never rose again.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>11</sup> “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God,  
“When I will send a famine on the land,  
Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water,  
But rather for hearing the words of the Lord.**

**<sup>12</sup> “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 will not find *it*.**

**<sup>13</sup> “In that day the beautiful virgins  
And the young men will faint from thirst.**

**<sup>14</sup> “*As for* those who swear by the guilt of Samaria,  
Who say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’  
And, ‘As the way of Beersheba lives,’  
They will fall and not rise again.”**