

Amos 8:7-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/amos/amos-8/amos-87-10/>

Amos now warns the Israelite merchants and businessmen of God's impending judgment, which will result in widespread lamentation. Israel's joyous festivals and songs will be replaced by mourning, and there will be sorrow, grief, and pain as when a family mourns for an only son.

Having described Israel's lack of concern for the poor (vv. 4-6), Amos warned them of God's impending judgment. This forthcoming punishment is introduced by an oath from *the LORD*, which constitutes the third instance of God swearing in the book of Amos. In 4:2, God swore "by His holiness" to bring curses on the women of Samaria (Israel) who oppressed the poor and crushed the needy. In Amos 6:8, He swore by Himself to express how He loathed (detested) the arrogance of Jacob (Israel).

In this chapter, however, the LORD did not swear by Himself or by His attributes. Rather, He swore *by the pride of Jacob*. The noun *Jacob* represents the northern kingdom of Israel. Jacob was the original name of Israel (Genesis 32:28). This oath structure is ironic because the LORD did not swear by His own authority and power, but rather by the very sinful act of *pride* or arrogance that He said He detested earlier in Amos 6:8. Israel had forsaken the covenant commands of God, and replaced them with their own, while calling on God to continue to bless them. They were breaking their agreement with God and depending on their manipulation of Him through appeasement. It was *pride* and arrogance on their part. The sinful actions of Jacob caused God to swear to bring judgment on them.

The Suzerain (or Ruler God) swore by the *pride* of the Israelites that He would *never forget any of their deeds*. As a just and impartial judge, and as promised in the covenant between Israel and God, the LORD had promised to bless Israel for their righteous actions and condemn them for their wrongdoings. Therefore, the Israelites were going to be judged for their sinful actions.

The LORD then explained His course of action against Israel in a rhetorical question, a question that is asked to make a point rather than to get an answer. He said, *Because of this will not the land quake and everyone who dwells in it mourn?* The implied answer is "yes." The land of Israel would *quake*, and its inhabitants would *mourn* at the LORD's destructive attack. This prediction reminds the readers of the reference to the earthquake in the first verse of the book (Amos 1:1), suggesting that it was also a sign of God's wrath.

Then the LORD compared His judgment on Israel's land as the Nile River in Egypt, saying, *Indeed, all of it will rise up like the Nile, and it will be tossed about and subside like the Nile of Egypt*. From August to October, there is a flooding cycle that flows annually from the Nile River in Egypt. This annual flood was the foundation of agricultural wealth in Egypt because the covering of the land by the waters served to renew, enrich, and water the soil. God's judgment would flood over Israel just like the Nile River flooded the land in Egypt during its time of inundation.

In continuing to describe His judgment, the LORD introduced the phrase “*it will be in that day*” to remind the Israelites of the time when He would intervene in the affairs of men to judge their wickedness. *That day* refers to the day of judgement. He then confirmed His sole authority as the only true God with the phrase, *declares the LORD*. That is, because the message had a divine origin, it would surely come to pass.

Having confirmed the authority of His message, the LORD proceeded to tell His people that He would use a solar eclipse to change the day-night cycle: *I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight*. Such an imagery would signal the death and devastation to come. The eclipse would be regarded as a portent of calamity or the anger of the true and living God because it would reverse the normal order of God’s creation.

God made it clear when He declared that He would *turn* Israel’s *festivals into mourning* and all their *songs into lamentation*. Religious festivals that were normally regarded as joyful occasions (Isaiah 30:29) would be replaced by *mourning* and *lamentation*, pain, sorrow, and grief.

These occasions of *mourning* would be accompanied by the traditional ritual of putting on *sackcloth* ^{3/4}a rough garment made of goats’ hair or camels’ hair (Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31). As the LORD said, *I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins*. The *mourning* would be universal throughout Israel, as *everyone’s loins* would be covered with sackcloth. *Loins* refers to the area between the ribs and upper thighs, the area where clothing covers the genitals.

Besides *sackcloth*, there would be *baldness on every head*. Every Israelite would be touched by grief and sorrow. The term *baldness* refers to the shaving of the forehead to remove the hair in the front of the head. The shaving of the forehead was a common ancient Near Eastern pagan practice for those who mourned the death of a friend or a family member. The general belief was that the shadows of the deceased watched those who mourned to make sure they lamented enough for him/her (Deuteronomy 14:1). Although prohibited by the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 14:1), *baldness*, as a sign of mourning, was predicted by God’s prophets in their pronouncement of judgment, showing that this pagan mourning had become widespread in Israel (Isaiah 15:2; 22:12; Jeremiah 47:5; Ezekiel 7:18).

The day of God’s judgment would bring so much sorrow that it would *make it like a time of mourning for an only son*. *Mourning* over an only son is devastating and was regarded as the most tragic incident that can happen to a family structure. According to the book of Jeremiah, this type of *mourning* is “a most bitter mourning,” (Jeremiah 6:26; cf. Zechariah 12:10) perhaps because it ends every hope for the family’s future; they have no heir to carry on their name. This is how Israel would mourn on the day of God’s judgment: *the end of it would be like a bitter day*.

Biblical Text

**⁷ The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob,
“Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds.**

**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.
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.
¹⁰ “Then I will turn your festivals into mourning
And all your songs into lamentation;
And I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins
And baldness on every head.
And I will make it like *a time of mourning* for an only son,
And the end of it will be like a bitter day.