

Amos 8 ⁴ *Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land,*⁵ *saying, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?”—skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales,⁶ buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.*
⁷ *The Lord has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: “I will never forget anything they have done.”⁸ “Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt.*
⁹ *“In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.¹⁰ I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.”¹¹ “The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.¹² People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.*
¹³ *“In that day” the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.¹⁴ Those who swear by the sin of Samaria—who say, ‘As surely as your god lives, Dan,’ or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’— they will fall, never to rise again.”*

Amos 9 ¹¹ *“In that day” I will restore David’s fallen shelter— I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins— and will rebuild it as it used to be,¹² so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the Lord, who will do these things.*
¹³ *“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills,¹⁴ and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. “They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.¹⁵ I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the Lord your God*

Luke 23 ³⁸ *There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.*
³⁹ *One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”*
⁴⁰ *But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”*
⁴² *Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*
⁴³ *Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*
⁴⁴ *It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

31st July 2016

Future after judgement

Amos 8:4-14, 9:11-15; Luke 23:38-46

We live in uncertain times. On the one hand we have enjoyed an almost unprecedented period of peace and prosperity but on the other hand we don't know what the future holds for our nation, especially since Brexit. There is not just economic uncertainty but we have also been living through an unprecedented moral and sexual revolution. Gay marriage is now legal, 50% of the children born this year will be born outside marriage, and 50% of all children born this year will not have their father or even a father figure living with them by the time they reach 16 ! Most young adults, let alone children have grown up with virtually no understanding of the basic Christian truths, or awareness of what Christmas or Easter are actually all about

As we look at the wider world with one unpredictable maverick in Donald Trump quite likely to become president of the USA and Putin in charge of Russia and the possibility of rogue states like North Korea developing inter-continental nuclear weapons, we might well worry: Where is it all going to end?

Amos was preaching in the nation of Israel in the 8th century BC and even though it was nearly 3000 years ago the context was not entirely dissimilar from our own. They too had enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. The northern kingdom of Israel had separated from the federation with Judah in the south [although about 150 years earlier], and their historical orthodox Jewish religion had totally degenerated. Many had deserted to worship more local pagan gods and even those who continued to claim to worship the **Lord** were often paying little more than lip-service, with their faith having no impact whatsoever on the way they led their lives, conducted their business or treated the weakest in their society.

No wonder God sends Amos to tell them that basically **He has had enough!** *‘Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?”’*

Then he says a terrible time of judgement is coming upon Israel, when the land will tremble and there will be much weeping and mourning, implying widespread devastation, loss and death. Indeed, v.10c. *I will make it like the mourning of an only son - viz. the Somme - What is the one thing that*

is worse than losing a son in battle? Surely, when that son is your only child, the only one on which all your future hopes are pinned.

Not only this but there will be a terrible spiritual famine: I've already mentioned how most children have grown up with virtually no understanding of the basic Christian truths, or awareness of what Christmas or Easter are actually all about. Sadly, even in our churches, often church-goers have little knowledge of the Bible. Amos speaks about *"the lovely young women and the strong young men fainting from thirst"*. The sexual revolution, the new worldview that has taken over in the west has thrown out any consideration of God's word in the Bible. The result is a whole generation of *"lovely young women"* ending up as single mums, or feeling forced into a sexual relationship before they were ready for it and then being dumped; or feeling deeply compromised and shamed by an explicit photo that a former boyfriend has persuaded them to text and now is being broadcast for all to see.

And our *"strong young men"* are being drawn into the all too readily available porn websites and finding themselves being both addicted and feeling terribly polluted and ashamed; or flitting from one unfulfilling relationship to another and unable to grow up into mature responsible adults as they are convinced that the commitment of marriage must be avoided at all costs. Above all this, they are living in a world without purpose or meaning beyond pleasure or money - which do not begin to touch that deep soul thirst which is part of all our DNA

Amos warns that judgement will come and he was proved to be absolutely right. In 730 BC, just a few decades after Amos preached this message, Israel was invaded and occupied by the dreaded Assyrian empire, with all the attendant rape, pillage and slaughter. And all the leaders of Israel were either summarily executed or hauled off in chains into exile.

If such a judgement came upon Israel all those years ago, what hope is there for our nation? Well, even for the northern kingdom of Israel, Amos offered hope despite having prophesied that *"they would fall never to rise again"*. In the 2nd half of our OT reading, the final part of Amos' prophecy, God says in *Amos 9 vv.11-15* *"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent... I will bring back my exiled people, Israel, they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them...I will plant Israel in her own land, never again to be uprooted"*

So what does all this have to say to us in the UK in the 21st century? Are we too facing such a terrible judgement? Well, we would be fools not to take the warnings of Amos seriously and not to seek to do all we can to turn our nation away from its present course. This is why it is so important

that we both pray for our nation and bear faithful witness to our Christian faith.

But beyond all this there is hope. You see, in one sense, in fact in the most important sense, that terrible judgement has *already* fallen.

When did this happen? WW1 or WW2? The great depression? No, I am talking about another judgement far worse than any of those. God said through Amos *"In that day [of judgement] I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight"* When did that happen?

We were told in our gospel reading: *Luke 23 v.44*. *"About noon, darkness came over the whole land until about 3pm, for the sun stopped shining"*. Mark tells us that at this time Jesus cried out in a loud voice *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* - a cry of utter desolation.

What was going on here? Jesus, the beloved only-begotten son of God was cut off from his heavenly Father, why? - Because he was taking upon his own shoulders the judgement of God that you and I deserve.

He went through it all for your sake so that you don't have to. Luke tells us that when it was all over, Jesus was able to surrender his spirit into his heavenly Father's hands and the the huge 30 foot tall curtain in the temple, a curtain about 1 foot thick which separated everybody off from the presence of God in the Holy of holies, was torn in two from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. The judgement of Jesus on the cross, his separation from God, has made it possible for you and I to enter the presence of God. The terrible, dreaded judgement has already fallen - onto the shoulders of Jesus. So now it is possible to live in the future promised by Amos at the end of his prophecy -that future which promises God's blessing, a new life, a new community, a new home, where we will *"never be uprooted"*.

But make no mistake: there is only one place where that future beyond judgement can be found. It is in what Amos calls *"David's fallen tent"* and what we now know is the tent of **the Son** of David, Jesus, who fell under God's judgement for our sake.

When a forest fire is raging, there is only one safe place to be: it is to stand where the fire has already consumed the earth. The only safe place for us from the fire of God's judgement is to stand where that judgement has already fallen, in the arms of Jesus. *Quote from "Before the throne":*
Because the sinless Saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free,
for God the Just is satisfied - to look on him and pardon me...

One with the King I cannot die, my soul is purchased by his blood;
my life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ my Saviour and my God.

So let us meditate, especially as we take communion, on the extraordinary grace of the Son of God who was willing to endure so much to rescue us.