

The Downfall of a Nation

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[0 : 0 0] Good, well let's turn to the book of Amos, and you'll find that on page 765 in our church Bible. And we're continuing with our studies in this prophet who lived around the year 760 BC.

He came from the land of Judah, but he was sent by the Lord northwards across the border into Israel, and his prophecy is directed towards the people of Israel. So chapter 3 is our reading for tonight.

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. You only have I known of all the families of the earth.

Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities. Do two walk together unless they've agreed to meet? Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out from his den if he's taken nothing? Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground when it has taken nothing?

[1 : 1 7] Is a trumpet blown in a city and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets.

The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt and say, Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressed in her midst.

They do not know how to do right, declares the Lord, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, an adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered.

Thus says the Lord, as the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.

Hear and testify against the house of Jacob, declares the Lord God, the God of hosts, that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground.

[2 : 4 7] I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end, declares the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord God, and may it be a blessing to us. Well, let's turn to Amos chapter 3, page 765.

And my title tonight is The Downfall of a Nation. When I come into Glasgow for work during the week, I generally come in by train.

I come in on the Kilmarnock line, and I pick up a train at a little village called Dunlop. Some of you may know Dunlop. It's a pretty place in Ayrshire, close to where we live. It has an attractive, rather squat, stone-built church at the bottom of the main street, which is quaint and crooked.

And near the railway station, there is a bowling green. Now, there's something delightful about a bowling green at this time of the year, as the spring comes on. The grass is just lovely.

[4 : 07] It's shooting up, but it's cut, crisscross, not simply up and down, but across ways as well. And there's a snug little pavilion at the back of the bowling green where somebody serves the tea.

Sometimes I see retired, generally retired men and women enjoying an inter-village bowls match. They look so smiling and relaxed. Their faces are as pink as a boiled ham, because generally they've been out in the sun for a bit too long.

But it's a happy kind of scene. There's a sense of peace and tranquility. And you feel that the traditions of rural life and national life seem to flow on gently from one century to the next.

It all seems so solid and enduring. It's much the same in the city. You come into Glasgow and you see these very solid buildings.

Imagine yourself walking up Bath Street, up the gentle hill there, up to the top and into Blytheswood Square. You know Blytheswood Square. It's a rather beautifully proportioned square, isn't it? You don't hear much about it, but it's lovely.

[5 : 10] The gardens are lovely and the buildings are lovely. You walk into Blytheswood Square and then go across that way and then look down West George Street. And again, you see beautiful stone-built terracing, which has survived gales and snow and bitter winters.

And think of the fine cultural traditions of the city. The art galleries, the theatres, the music making of all sorts, the universities and the schools, the football clubs.

There's a sense of enduring culture. Think of the whole British Isles. We haven't been invaded since William the Conqueror came in 1066. Napoleon had a go 200 years ago, but Nelson and Wellington pushed him back.

Hitler certainly threatened 70-odd years ago, but Churchill and the Allies stood firm. And because we have a mature democracy in this country and a relatively strong economy, we can easily assume that British life, with all its institutions, will simply carry on forever.

Surely there will always be a Bowling Green in Dunlop. Surely always a John Lewis at the top of Buchanan Street. But civilizations do collapse.

[6 : 25] The Soviet Empire disintegrated rapidly, 1989. Think of Syria, an ancient civilization which has been virtually reduced to rubble in the last three or four years.

Think of the thousands of desperate people who are crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa to Europe. Doesn't that testify to how dreadful conditions are in the countries that they're trying to escape from?

And we see civilizations rising and falling in the Bible as well. The tower and city of Babel were deserted in Genesis chapter 11.

Sodom and Gomorrah were wiped out in Genesis chapter 19. Israel was overrun by the Assyrians in 721 BC, just 40 years after Amos had been preaching there.

And it never recovered. Its people were taken far away into the Assyrian Empire and they never came back. Judah was conquered by the Babylonians about 140 years later.

[7 : 27] And in all these cases, the Bible makes it explicit that it was God who brought these nations to an end. It wasn't just the forces of politics and economics.

It was divine judgment. Israel and Judah had been treating God and his laws and his covenant with contempt. And though God was patient with them for centuries, and although he frequently warned them through prophets like Amos, his judgment fell upon these nations in the end.

And the nations of Israel and Judah were special nations. They had a special relationship to God. They were the beneficiaries of a covenant relationship such as no other nation enjoyed.

And if God was prepared to deal in judgment with Judah and Israel, no other nation should expect exemption or special treatment. I would be unwise to assume that there will still be a bowling green in Dunlop village in 200 years time.

If God was willing to bring judgment against his special nation because they had turned their backs on him, surely he would be willing to chastise another nation that treats him at best with lip service and in truth with considerable contempt.

[8 : 44] Now let me say this before we work our way through Amos chapter 3. When I began to prepare sermons on this Bible book a few weeks back, I suddenly felt that perhaps I had bitten off rather more than I wanted to chew.

A Bible book like this takes us to places that we don't often visit in our regular preaching. And we spend much of our time and quite rightly in what the Bible teaches about the church and the Christian life, what the gospel is, who the Lord God is, who Jesus is, what evangelism is, what godliness looks like.

But a book like this, Amos, takes us to the subject of nations and what God thinks of them. Amos forces us to think about politics and economics and social justice and national idolatries.

But the Lord God would not have included this book in the Bible if he had not wanted us to hear what he has to say about such things. The church doesn't live in a cocoon or a ghetto.

We live in the world and God has much to say to the world. His message to the world is a message of salvation and judgment. Salvation for those who have ears to hear and are willing to turn to the Savior in repentance and trust.

[10 : 02] But judgment, or the warning of judgment, to those who prefer to shut their ears and harden their hearts. The gospel is not a small message. It is not domesticated or tame.

The Lord God in the book of Amos is pictured as a roaring lion who is ready to pounce and destroy. And if the book of Amos can teach people like us how serious it is for a nation to turn its back on the true and only God, it will give us a heart for serious, determined, loving evangelism.

Most people in our country today simply do not believe in the judgment of God. They don't believe the epistle to the Hebrews when it says it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes the judgment.

Judgment seems to most people simply like an idle tale. But if Christian people will allow the message of Amos to sink into our hearts, it will strengthen our motivation to be determined, loving evangelists.

If the judgment of God is the great fact, capital F, the great fact that lies up ahead of the world, that lies up ahead of each individual, there is no greater or more pressing task than for the church to herald the good news that God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish, should not come to ruin in the judgment, but have eternal life.

[11 : 30] So friends, let's not be like snails retreating into our shells as we listen to what the Lord says to us through Amos. We do need to hear it.

The Lord has lovingly put this material into the Holy Bible so as to strengthen our hearts and deepen our convictions about his judgment and his salvation. And we shall never deeply value the salvation until we have learned to fear the judgment.

Well, let's turn to chapter 3. The whole of this chapter is about the judgment that the Lord is threatening to bring upon the nation of Israel. And I'd like to take it in three sections.

First of all, verses 1 and 2, privilege brings responsibility. Let me read those two verses again. Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt.

You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Now in these two verses, the Lord God is reminding the people of Israel of the special relationship that he has had with them for something like a thousand years.

[12 : 46] See how the Lord describes this special relationship. They are family, his family. You see that word used in verse 1 and in verse 2. And that word family is not a word that's often used in the Old Testament to describe Israel.

And it has a particular poignancy here. If they had turned their back on a strange God, an unknown God, there would have been no pain because there would have been no history, no relationship.

But he is their father and they are his family. He acknowledges in verse 2 that there are many different families on the earth, many nations and peoples.

But he says in verse 2, you only, of all the families of the earth, have I known. And that word known is a word of real intimacy, suggesting a bond of marriage as well as of fatherhood.

Israel is my family, indeed my sweetheart, my beloved. And not only is Israel the Lord's family, specially chosen out of all the families of the earth, but they are rescued family.

[13 : 51] He says in verse 1, you are the family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt. I rescued you from slavery, from a wretched and subhuman existence. If theological words are helpful here, God is speaking in verses 1 and 2 of Israel's adoption, salvation, and election.

Adopted uniquely as family, saved from the cruel pharaoh of Egypt, and then chosen or elected ever since Abraham's day more than a thousand years previously.

What amazing privileges were given to the people of Israel. But with privilege comes responsibility. You remember those words of Jesus, from those to whom much is given, much will be required.

these great privileges of adoption, election, and salvation were not given to Israel so that Israel should then say, hey ho, let's sit back, let's please ourselves and enjoy all this milk and honey.

No, God expected them to live a life of obedience to his commands, a life quite different from the life of the idolatrous nations around them. They were to be, in the phrase of Jesus, a light to the world.

[15 : 07] They were to be a beam of moral light shining into the darkness of paganism. And at the heart of their national life were to be the Ten Commandments.

Now think of this in modern terms. Any nation today that became serious about obeying the Ten Commandments would immediately be lifted out of all its problems, wouldn't it?

The Ten Commandments are the recipe for national joy. Think of it, we wouldn't need to lock our cars or our houses. We wouldn't need to remember all those internet passwords.

Marriages would be consistently lovely. There'd be no envy and no covetousness. The country would be run on personal trust. We could actually believe one another.

So if a man said, for example, I'll do it by Thursday, you would know that it would be done by Thursday. There would be truthfulness. And because God himself would be the great object of everybody's delight, following the first commandment, thou shalt have no other gods apart from me, there would be no addictions to drink or drugs or pornography.

[16:16] The stronger people would care for the weaker. And the economic life of the nation would be simply transformed. People would no longer be constantly charging too much for goods and services and ripping each other off.

Now that's how it should have been in Old Testament Israel. But as we saw from chapter two last week, the poor were being crushed. There was that horrible picture of their heads being ground into the dust by the rich.

Justice was being denied in the law courts. Corruption was rampant. There was cult prostitution, drunkenness, extortion. And when God raised up prophets to bring his message, the prophets were simply silenced.

In short, the people of Israel were driving a coach and horses through the Ten Commandments. But receiving the Ten Commandments and the whole body of law that comes with them, that was one of Israel's great, great privileges.

The Ten Commandments are one of the wonders of the world. They are the recipe for life, for a gloriously God-pleasing and happy life. But the Ten Commandments are not the only jewel in the Old Testament law.

[17:26] One of the greatest privileges brought by the Old Testament law were the blessings and curses that are spelt out by Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. And in these blessings and curses, God tells the Israelites in very clear words what are the consequences of A, obeying him, and B, disobeying him.

Let me give you a little flavor of this, some excerpts from Deuteronomy chapter 28. First of all, some of the words that refer to blessing. The Lord says, if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, you'll have plenty of healthy children, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds, and the young of your flock.

Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Then a few verses later, the Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hands.

You shall lend to many nations, but not borrow. I wonder if Mr. Cameron and Mr. Osborne have read that one. Let me read on. The Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, going after other gods to serve them.

[19:06] Now what Moses is saying, or what the Lord is saying through Moses to the people, is that there is a cast-iron connection between obedience to the Lord and economic prosperity.

Obey the Lord and you'll be blessed in the city and in the field. Now think of what people say about economics today in the media, and you hear something very different.

Our politicians and our economists speak of economics as if it's a science, as if it's all a question of tweaking this and tweaking that, and if we get the mixture just right, we'll be able to balance the books at the end.

So we've got to decide, for example, on the Bank of England's interest rate, up half a percent or down quarter of a percent. We must slap on a few more taxes, mansion tax, bedroom tax, increase the council tax, slap a couple of percentages on income tax, do this, do that, and everything will be okay.

Now our politicians have been talking in those sort of terms for a very long time, and yet the national debt seems to go up by multiple billions of pounds every year.

[20 : 17] Perhaps we need to return to the principles of Moses, the economist, because to Moses, economics is not a science. It's a branch of ethics.

It's about making moral choices. Moses says to the privileged people of Israel, if you obey the Lord, the Lord will bless you with prosperity. But he goes straight on in Deuteronomy 28 to the curses.

Let me give you a flavor of them. If you will not obey the voice of the Lord, your God, or be careful to do all his commandments, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

And Moses goes on there in great detail to rub home this message to the people of Israel that disobedience to the Lord will bring disaster at every level of human life.

[21 : 19] It will bring ultimately poverty, illness, hunger, despair, military defeat, and finally, exile. Now, friends, I'm not suddenly taking leave of my senses and embracing the prosperity gospel, which holds out a false promise of personal wealth and health, Rolex watches, luxury cars, and a six-pack to die for.

I don't know what that is, but anyway, I certainly don't know what it is. We know, don't we, from the New Testament that the life of following Christ will bring difficulty, dishonor, unpopularity, opposition, even in some cases, martyrdom.

No, what Moses is talking about here in Deuteronomy is the corporate welfare of the people of God. And we've seen this principle being worked out in recent centuries, especially in Western Europe and America, where whole nations have, for periods, felt the weight of the Bible in their national life.

Britain has been one of these nations. Now, there was never a time when the majority of British people have been converted, born-again Christians. Christians. But where there has been a general national recognition of the Ten Commandments and the ethical teaching of the New Testament, the nation has become stronger ethically and economically.

And it may be that in years to come, historians will look back at the economic turmoils of the early years of the 21st century and will see a direct connection between those turmoils and a departure from the gospel in the Western world.

[23 : 02] And the prophet Amos announces the way in which God will judge and punish the people of Israel. And it's obvious, as he announces this, that the curses of Deuteronomy chapter 28 are about to fall upon Israel.

Trouble of the worst kind is about to land on Israel's head. And Amos' words were no idle threat because it was only 40 years or so after his preaching that the Assyrian army invaded Israel and brought the nation to a complete end.

Samaria, the capital city, was sacked and the people were carried off into exile and they never came back. Privilege brings responsibility.

But where responsibility is abdicated, God has committed himself to bring the punishment that he had long ago promised. God makes no idle threats.

And the rest of chapter 3 from verse 3 onwards serves to open up everything that is involved in those fearful words of verse 2, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

[24 : 08] Privilege brings responsibility, but in this case it has been abdicated. Well now here's our second heading. Causes produce effects.

And we're looking now at verses 3 to 10. Now as soon as we get to verse 3 we realize that Amos has somehow gone into a different gear. He's using here a new style of speaking.

In fact, verses 3 to 8 sound like something out of the book of Proverbs. We have a series of intriguing questions. In fact, there are nine questions between verse 3 and verse 8.

And it may well be that we're seeing here a little window onto Amos' tricks of style, which he might have used in open air preaching. We can be pretty certain that Amos preached out in the open for two reasons.

First, the weather was usually decent and you could do it. And secondly, he wasn't welcome in the sanctuaries and the shrines where the people gathered for worship. Now I guess that if you're an open air preacher, something I've done hardly anything of, but if you're an open air preacher, I guess you've got to develop a few tricks of style so as to make people stop and listen to you.

[25 : 19] Imagine you're standing at the edge of the road and here comes Mrs. Higginbottom at a brisk pace heading for the market with her shopping basket in her hand and all she is thinking about as she heads for the market is the price of a lamb cutlet.

So if you're the preacher, you've got to arrest her attention. You want to intrigue her. So you shout out, for example, look at verse 3, you shout out, do two people walk together unless they've agreed to meet?

Answer me that. So Mrs. H stops and she looks up. Huh? What are you going on about your fruit and nut case? She might not say it, but she thinks it.

Oh, here's another one, madam. Does a lion roar in the forest? Roar! When he has no prey? She says to her friend, Hilda, come across here, listen to this man.

I think he's got a southern accent. Here's another, says the preacher. Does a young lion cry out from his den if he's taken nothing? No, says somebody, of course not.

[26 : 19] They're beginning to listen now. So Amos goes on. Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth when no trap has been set? Of course not. Does a snare spring up from the ground when it's taken nothing?

Of course not, Mr. Preacher. You see, they're getting the idea now that each of these questions demands the answer no. So Amos goes on. Is a trumpet blown in a city and the people are not afraid?

Of course not, Mr. Preacher. Whenever the trumpet sounds, all our knees start knocking. It means that the enemy are attacking us. Now Amos is on a roll. The people are with him by now.

They know that each question has only got one answer and the answer is no. So now he fires out the question for which all the others have been merely curtain raisers.

Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? Well, they know that the answer must be no. His vivid little curtain raisers have hooked his listeners in and he now delivers a sharp shaft of serious theology.

[27 : 22] If disaster comes to a city, don't kid yourselves that the cause is something impersonal like politics or economics or climate change. It's the Lord who does it. You Israelites, you've had all the privileges of the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, the adoption, the election, salvation.

But when disaster overtakes the cities of Israel, it is because the Lord is punishing you for deserting him. But Amos hasn't finished.

Verse 7. For the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets. The lion has roared. Who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy? Now those two final questions are framed on the same pattern as the questions of verses 3 to 6.

Where there's a cause, there will be an effect. I know, Amos is saying in verse 7, I know that God is planning disaster for the cities of Israel because I'm a prophet and the Lord reveals his secrets, his plans and purposes to his prophets.

[28 : 30] Causes produce effects. Therefore, verse 8, take warning. Here's the cause. The lion is roaring. Here's the effect. Be afraid.

Here's the cause. The Lord God has spoken. Here's the effect. The prophet must prophesy. I must tell you these things, you people of Israel. And Amos tells them because there is still a tiny window of opportunity for them to repent.

He's going to go on to say in chapter 5, seek the Lord and live. All hope is not gone. If they will but listen and turn back to the Lord who chose them and adopted them and saved them.

Now friends, you and I, of course, are not prophets like Amos. We're not channels of fresh revelation. But our message for our friends and contemporaries who are not Christians, who are at the moment ignoring the Lord God and living as though he were of no consequence, our message is, dear friends, you must repent and turn to the Lord while you have opportunity.

Don't ignore him. You can't afford to. He loves you and he has sent his son to die for you and to bear the penalty of your sins. Don't refuse him. It may be that there's somebody here tonight who's been ignoring God all through life and needs to hear this call to repent and turn to him because it's a call that runs right the way through the Bible.

[29 : 58] Friend, don't trifle with God. Don't deceive yourself into thinking that he is of no consequence. The lion has roared. Therefore, be afraid. It's better to meet the Lord as your savior than as your judge.

Then in verses 9 and 10, Amos says something really shocking. It's almost brutal. You'll see the word strongholds is used twice in verse 9 and once in verse 10 and it means fortresses, great strong houses which can be defended.

In Scottish terms, I guess, castles. And Amos sends an invitation to the leaders of, look at verse 9, of the Philistines and the Egyptians.

Ashdod was one of the leading cities of the Philistines. Now, the Philistines and the Egyptians were both bitter historical enemies of Israel. Egypt, of course, was the old enemy who had enslaved them for centuries and the Philistines more recently had been a thorn in the side of Israel in the days of Samson and Saul and David.

And in verse 9, Amos is inviting the strong men, the leaders of the Philistines and the Egyptians to come to Samaria, to Israel's capital, to gather on the mountains around Samaria so as to get a grandstand view and to look down at Samaria's tumults and anguish.

[31 : 24] Amos is inviting these heathen nations to sit in judgment upon the covenant people of God on the ground, presumably, that their behavior was less vile than the behavior of the people of Israel.

And Amos reminds us of what the people of Israel are doing. Oppression in verse 9 and storing up violence and robbery in verse 10, committing so much violence and robbery against the poor that the record of it is being stored up by the bucket load.

And to return to verses 7 and 8, the lion is roaring because of all this vile human behavior. God is speaking. There's the cause. Amos must prophesy.

There's the effect. The Lord is revealing his secret to Amos, the secret that he is about to punish Israel. And Amos is faithfully passing on this message.

The prophet's duty is to warn in the hope that not every hearer's heart is so calloused that repentance is impossible. We're now third and last from verses 11 to 15.

[32 : 35] Sin brings judgment. Verse 11, you'll see, starts with a resounding therefore. And almost always when you read in the prophets, therefore thus says the Lord, it's the phrase that announces an imminent judgment.

How then is God's judgment going to fall? Well, first, there is going to be an unstoppable military invasion. Look at verse 11.

An adversary, that proves to be the Assyrians, an adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you and your strongholds, your castles shall be plundered.

Just think of that happening to the land that we live in. Unbearable, unthinkable. The bowling greens, the art galleries, the centers of commerce. Defenses will be no defense.

Strongholds will give way to the invading army who cannot be stopped. And then, look at the pathos in verse 12. Thus says the Lord, here is God speaking from heaven, as the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.

[33 : 52] Now, a little bit of ancient Israelite law will help us to understand this. If a hired shepherd lost a sheep to a lion or some other predator, he was required by law to bring some part of the carcass to the owner to prove that he, the hired shepherd, had not stolen the animal.

a severed ear or part of a leg would prove to the owner that the hired man was not a thief. The pathetic remnant would tell its own sad story. And in the same way, all that was to be left of Samaria would be a bedstead or the carved leg of a chaise longue, one of those fancy couches where you lie and drink your Lapsang Sushong tea at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Also, there would be no place of refuge left in Israel. This is the message of verse 14. Bethel.

That was the town where Amos did some of his preaching. There was a shrine there, quite a famous shrine, and the Israelites were proud of it. It was one of their chief places of worship and it had altars.

Now, an Israelite altar, including the altar at the temple in Jerusalem, was a biggish table which had four big carved horns. You may have seen pictures of Israelite altars.

[35 : 11] A big horn coming up from each of the four corners of the table, like cow's horns. And the tradition in Israel was that a person who was being pursued by an aggressor, somebody who wanted to kill him, could flee to the shrine, rush in, and grab the horns of the altar.

That was a safe place. Nobody was allowed to harm you if you were holding onto the horns of the altar. But Amos is saying in verse 14 that the horns of the altar will be cut off at Bethel.

There'll be no place of refuge left, no place to hide. And then verse 15, the beautiful, elegant houses of the Israelites, the symbols of all their economic prosperity.

There'd been great prosperity under Jeroboam II. He was a shrewd operator. But, says Amos, all this will be struck down. Verse 15 suggests that some of the wealthy people had a winter house in the city and a lovely little summer retreat in the hills for when the weather got a bit too hot.

And some of these houses were inlaid with ivory. There was no conservation lobby in those days, so if you had the money, you could order a few hundred elephant tusks and have them skillfully carved to decorate your little hunting lodge.

[36 : 26] And the great houses, too, shall come to an end. declares the Lord. What does that mean to a society? I bet there were tears and anguish in Surrey last week when that great house was burned to the ground.

This verse 15 suggests that all the great houses in Israel were going to come down. Well, friends, it's a sad chapter, isn't it? But, the Lord God has put it into the Bible for our benefit.

So let me finish with two closing observations. First, the economy. The economy in Israel had been booming, and that's why there were the kind of houses described in verse 15.

But it was an economy built on corruption, oppression, robbery, and violence. And that's why God caused not only the economy to collapse, but the whole nation along with it.

Moses had taught the Israelites that they would be economically blessed if they obeyed the Lord, if they loved him and loved their neighbor and cared for the poor. But they built their economy on corruption, and that is why the Lord brought all the curses of Deuteronomy chapter 28 upon them.

[37 : 40] Now, wouldn't it be foolish for us to think that the same principles didn't in some way apply to us today? Here we are on the eve of this general election, and there's a great deal of talk about the economy.

Moses would say to us, love and obey the Lord your God, and you'll be blessed in the city and in the field. How could that possibly happen in Britain today?

It can only happen if people like us and churches like ours will go on steadily preaching the gospel. Then people will come to Christ, and then they will begin to link the economy with obedience and love for the Lord.

They will learn to see that the economy is a matter of ethics and not science. And then secondly, let's take careful note that although Israel was about to suffer a catastrophic reversal of fortune, it wasn't the end of God's covenant with his people.

You might think from just looking at chapter 3 that God was washing his hands of Israel finally, but that is not the case. Just look over a page or two to chapter 9 if you will.

[38 : 50] Amos chapter 9 and verse 8. I'll read just that one verse. Chapter 9 verse 8. Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, that's Israel, and I will destroy it from the surface of the ground, except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares the Lord.

not utterly destroy. People sometimes ask the question, is God's covenant conditional? Might it be brought to an end?

Might it simply be finally withdrawn? The Bible's answer is, no, it is not conditional. Listen to a verse like this from Isaiah chapter 54.

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

The covenant is unconditional. It goes on. But, the enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant is conditional. Conditional on the obedience of God's people.

[40 : 05] This is what Deuteronomy 28 is all about. If, there's the condition, if you obey me, I will bless you. But if you disobey me, you will be cursed. So, although the judgments against Israel prophesied by Amos all took place, and although Israel was sent away into exile, God's covenant was not withdrawn.

And, it's just the same for us today. If you or I truly belong to the Lord God, it means that we are his forever under the terms of the new covenant.

We've been saved by the blood of Christ. We've been sealed. God has put his stamp of sealing upon us by the spirit of God, sealed for eternal life. If we're disobedient to him, we shall not enjoy the blessings, the blessings of peace and joy and the love of his people, the delight of the Bible and the adventure of Christian service.

disobedience is never worth it. Sin is bitter in the end. So, friends, let's love the Lord with all our hearts and serve him and not be like the people of Israel to whom Amos had to say these severe and dreadful things.

There is a better way. It's the way of loving the Lord, delighting in him and obeying him. The vivid warnings of the prophets are here in our Bibles to remind us of the folly of turning away from the Lord who loves us.

[41 : 34] Let's thank God that Amos was willing to tell us the truth. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray to the Lord.

our dear Heavenly Father, we've thought of the work and the ministry of two very courageous prophets today, Micaiah, the son of Imla this morning and now Amos.

We thank you so much for raising up these men who were so concerned for you and your glory and truth and who so cared for the future of the people of Israel that they were prepared to say these things even though it made them very, very unpopular.

We thank you for raising up these prophets to speak to us today as well and to show us just how wonderful your salvation is against the backdrop of the severity of your judgment.

So please, dear Father, write these things in our hearts, we pray. Fill us afresh with love for you and delight in you. May our delight in the Lord Jesus fill our hearts and minds more and more and help us as a congregation to commend him to the world.

[42 : 56] And in your mercy, dear Father, look out on this nation, stir up Christian people to share the gospel, to proclaim the gospel boldly and may many more we do pray in your mercy come to Christ so that our nation may be transformed and we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.