

Rebuked for Selfishness

Key Verse: “Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.”
—Amos 6:12

Selected Scripture:
Amos 6:4-8, 11-14

selfishness, and coldness of heart, and are the focus of today's lesson from Amos' prophecy.

This was a time in the northern kingdom's history when many had become wealthy and settled into a life of ease and luxury. This self-gratification resulted in their indifference to the conditions of the poor. Such wealth brought perhaps a sense of position and satisfaction, but the words of Amos were, “Woe to them.” (Amos 6:1) The Law Covenant required every Israelite to see to the needs of their neighbors in every aspect of life. Once again, however, the imperfections and desires of the flesh blinded many to their obligation and promise to keep God's commandments. Their own actions condemned

THE PUNISHMENTS OF

God pronounced by the Prophet Amos were first against Israel's neighboring enemies, then Judah, and finally against the ten northern tribes of Israel. As cited in our previous lesson, the punishments against Judah were largely because they had abandoned their covenant relationship with God. The punishments against the ten northern tribes of Israel were additionally the results of their sins of greed,

them for they were “not grieved and sick at heart over the affliction and ruin of Joseph (Israel!)”—vs. 6, *Amplified Bible*

Our Key Verse shows the coldness of their hearts. They would not think of running their horses or plowing their oxen upon rocks because it would result in injured animals and personal loss. While they would never do anything so irrational regarding their personal wealth and possessions, when it came to applying God’s principles to their brethren, Amos says, according to the *New American Standard Bible* of the Key Verse, these same greedy persons “have turned justice into poison And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.”

Greed and selfishness are characteristics of the fallen flesh. For those possessing wealth it often produces indifference to the needs of the poor. For the poor it frequently produces resentment and anger toward the wealthy. For the world in general such an attitude is perhaps understandable. To the chosen Israelite, however, it was a breach of their covenant with God. Amos asks, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3) The greedy and selfish were clearly not “agreed” with God and were, therefore, worthy of the punishment meted out.

Just as God held natural Israel to a higher standard than that of the world, he similarly holds us, as spiritual Israelites, to an elevated level of expectation. God has reminded us that Israel’s experiences were a type, or example, to help us avoid making the same mistakes they made. (I Cor. 10:6) Paul reminds us that those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, not servants as were the Israelites. (Rom. 8:14) God punished Israel for their ultimate benefit. Likewise, he chastens us, as a father disciplines his own children, so we might grow in righteousness. (Heb. 12:5-8) He reassures us that in all these experiences he will never leave us or forsake us, and will not give us experiences that we cannot bear.—Heb. 13:5; I Cor. 10:13 ■