

46. Defining the Nature of Covenant Curses (Amos; Obadiah)

As an early written prophecy against God's people Israel, that of Amos against Israel's Northern Kingdom predicts many covenant curses pertaining to the Sinai Covenant that overtook them in his day. Just as their transgressions that provoked the onset of covenant curses are generic to any wicked generation, however, so they foreshadow the wickedness of God's end-time people. If we fail to apply these prophecies to ourselves for our own profit and learning, therefore—by simply relegating them to Amos' day and moving on—then the point of their preservation in our day is lost and we aren't taking God's warning. Conversely, when we see similar kinds of misfortunes occurring in our day but without perceiving them as covenant curses, then it can truly be said we are living in a trancelike state of self-deception and are no better than the Israel of Amos' day.

While the setting of Amos' prophecies is indigenous to his day, as we read about the kinds of evils existing then and the consequences they brought about, we are best served by transposing them into their modern-day equivalents. Ancient names can serve as codenames as all things have their end-time parallels. We begin with God's people's growing spiritually negligent and despising those who speak the truth. One result is that God removes his truth from them:

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!” (Amos 6:1); “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly” (Amos 5:10); “They have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after which their fathers have walked” (Amos 2:4); “The days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it” (Amos 8:11–12).

In the midst of wealth and self-sufficiency, they neglect the poor: “Ye that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that extended themselves shall be removed” (Amos 6:4–7); “Ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right” (Amos 5:11–12).

The Lord inflicts his people with scarcity, drought, and pestilence to persuade them to remember him: “I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with

blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned to me” (Amos 4:6–9).

The Lord brings upon his people his Day of Judgment—a time of darkness and mourning: “The Day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the Day of the Lord be darkness, and not light, even very dark, and no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18–20); “I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day” (Amos 8:9–10); “The songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence” (Amos 8:3).

Enemies too powerful to withstand invade the land, leaving the population vastly diminished: “An adversary shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled” (Amos 3:11); “The flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked” (Amos 2:14–16); “The city that went out by a thousand shall leave an hundred, and that which went forth by an hundred shall leave ten” (Amos 5:3); “Your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me” (Amos 4:10).

No one will escape God’s punishment of the wicked: “I will slay the last of them with the sword: He that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good” (Amos 9:1–4).

At the very time the wicked are destroyed, however, God restores his people and reestablishes Davidic kingship in Israel: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God” (Amos 9:11–15).