[9] 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.”

[10] “They do not know how to do right,” declares the LORD,

“those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.”  
[11] 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.”

At this point in Amos we come to a kind of court case against Israel. Amos is told to proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod and the lands of Egypt. The strongholds were royal fortifications, and so it is assumed that the leaders of these people groups are called forth. Ashdod, as we may remember, was in Philistia. As we remember the history of Egypt, and those of the Philistines, we remember how they were cultures who often were oppressors.  
 Yet what are these leaders to do? They are assemble on the mountains of Samaria. Samaria was the capital of Israel and was situated on a hill surrounded by other hills and mountains. The leaders of the Philistines and Egypt are to come and see the “great tumults” or “great terror” within the capital city. This tumult is if seen by the oppression of the rich upon the poor.  
 The LORD calls them out on this, to the point of saying that they, “do not know how to do right.” To not do right implies what is just, honorable, decent, proper. Samaria has gone so far away from the Mosaic Law that they are more akin to the pagans. In fact, it goes further that the storehouses which would normally hold wealth are actually filled with violence and robbery. In other words, violence against individuals and their property as well.  
 Thus what we see is that the LORD calls these foreign nations to behold something that they themselves would find appalling. Usually the Philistines and the Egyptians were brutal, but more-so to their enemies. Instead, the Israelites were abhorrent even to their own people.

Ultimately we find that because of this, because even they are behaving worse than even these pagan nations, the LORD informs that covenantal punishments will result from their disobedience, and it might be added that these were all promised in the Law, as Deuteronomy 28 has at first blessings for obedience, but then concludes with many curses which will come for disobedience. They will be surrounded by enemies, their fortifications will be of no use against them as they will be broken down and their strongholds supposedly holding their riches will be plundered.

[12] 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.  
 There is a slight shift in focus for verse 12. Whereas in the previous verses we saw those who would trust in fortifications, hiding behind their walls, now we see those who would trust in their wealth.  
 We see too how vivid the imagery is. The LORD informs the rich that just as a shepherd is able to only recollect scraps of a lamb from a lion, so shall it be for the people of Israel. The wealth of those individuals will be scattered so greatly that mere pieces of their wealth will be seen. We can almost feel what some scholars notice is scorn in this for the wealthy.  
 Likewise, there is some evidence of a remnant which will remain. But that remnant will be miniscule at best.

[13] “Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,”

declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts,

[14] “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.

[15] 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.  
 Verse 11 begins a new focus of the covenantal court proceedings. We find specifically that there are those who are to hear and testify against the house of Jacob. Calling the nation the “house of Jacob” is meant to remind the people of that their covenant lasts far beyond themselves, and goes as far back as the patriarchs.  
 We also notice that the LORD is mentioned twice, once as the “LORD God” and the second as, “God of hosts.” This likely is likely done for emphasis, and so that all those who are present, whether the reader or the hearers of the oracle, know that it is from God that this message originates.  
 What is it that the LORD pronounces? Judgment for the sins of Israel. It is not necessarily any sin, but a number of transgressions which they have committed against God. In fact, we have seen many in the chapter preceding this oracle.  
 However, there is a particular focus as well, and that is that when the judgment comes God will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar will be cut off. The fact that there are altars at Bethel at all is a serious atrocity. The people of God were to have a centralized location in Jerusalem for sacrifice, yet after the civil war the northern nation of Israel erected other altars to sacrifice. This breaking of the Mosaic covenant will result in nothing but complete destruction for these altars, and the cult itself. The horns of the altar were seen as a place of safety, but even they will be unable to protect anyone from the coming judgment.  
 Yet, it is not enough that the altars will be destroyed, but those who worship at the altars will experience judgment as well. We see this when God will strike the houses. We notice the term house is used 4 times in verse 15. Once for a winter house, once for a summer house, houses of ivory, and the great houses.  
 Ultimately, the vast majority of the people of Israel were poor, able only to have one house. Those who are rich and have dealt harshly with the poor have multiple houses. Thus, these houses were monuments of the corruption and will be destroyed by God.

[1] “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,

who are on the mountain of Samaria,

who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,

who say to your husbands, ‘Bring, that we may drink!’

[2] The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness

that, behold, the days are coming upon you,

when they shall take you away with hooks,

even the last of you with fishhooks.

[3] And you shall go out through the breaches,

each one straight ahead;

and you shall be cast out into Harmon,”  
 declares the LORD.

The focus now shifts one last time in this section, and the target of condemnation are the women of Samaria. We notice, Amos calls them, “cows of Bashan.” Bashan was known as a place for pasturage, and thus for its cattle.  
 Yet what is it that causes Amos to speak to these women in this way? The reason is that they are those who oppress the poor, and crush the needy. These haughty women are guilty of taking advantage of those who are lower than them in society.  
 Yet they also say to their husbands, or masters, “Bring, that we may drink!” Not only do they take advantage of those on the lower social standing, but also dare to go against those who are meant to be higher than them in society. They are the ones who are to be servants, and yet they force their husbands to serve them instead. In our own time we would say such women are rich, spoiled, and domineering in their families.  
 Because of this, God swears by His holiness. In other words God is swearing a high oath against these women, swearing by His own attribute of holiness that there will come days of judgment against them. Thus, God will do what He says.  
 The judgment is interesting. They are going to be led away by hooks. While Amos does not prophecy who will be doing the leading, ultimately Assyria conquered Israel and Samaria, and they were known to lead their enemies with hooks through their noses and mouths. These women, then, who are cows now will be taken away even as fish.  
 The judgment upon Samaria will be so great that these women will be taken through the breaches of the wall, each one straight ahead. This statement about straight ahead is reminiscent of Joshua, when the crumbling walls of Jericho allowed the men to rush, “straight ahead” into the city.  
 The ultimate conclusion is that their bodies will be cast out completely. In this we recognize two things. They are that some will experience judgment through exile, but others will be killed, and though scholars are unsure what the Harmon is, their bodies will be cast into it, and therefore out of Samaria.  
  
Main Point: These verses are meant to show the judgment which is going to occur on Samaria. In particular we see the judgment against those who would feel safe in their city, and the rich. Unfortunately, the judgment which they will find will bring destruction to their cities, and neither will they find hope for salvation from their wealth which will be greatly dispersed.  
  
Application Points:  
1. Responsibility: Within Amos we have seen a lot of…judgment. This should be of no surprise to the majority of us who have read some, if not all, of the prophets. As we consider them, they were messengers from God to call the people back to Him, to warn of impending judgment for their sins, and to remind the people that they were members of a covenant with God.  
 Judgment happens, when that covenant is broken. We see this specifically in the Law, when the people are warned of the judgments to occur for covenant breakers. As such, the people have a responsibility to remain faithful to the covenant.  
 Unfortunately, the people failed to remain faithful to their covenantal responsibility, and as such they will experience judgment for this. We have seen a few ways they have failed already, though this week in particular we see it in their failure to worship at a centralized location, specifically in Jerusalem, as well as their social injustice.  
 Now, many of us may have a problem reading all of this thus far for a few reasons. The first is, we know that the Scriptures still speak to us today, but what is it that we are to learn about these judgments? How are these oracles of judgment related to us, or what can we learn from them?  
 The second is with God’s judgment. We can always have a hard time understanding the judgments of God. We do enjoy hearing about the love of God, but w do not often like hearing of wrath, and when we read of the destruction which will occur on the people of Samaria it can be a hard pill to swallow.  
 So, let’s go over these two things. Let’s start with the second which concerns God’s judgment. Often we do not think of God’s judgment the same way that the prophets warned about. We do not often think of armies coming over our walls, or warfare.  
 Likewise, we may even have little notion that God is involved with these kinds of affairs. We may not often think of God judging nations through wars anymore, or we may think that God is not an active Sovereign the way that He was when the prophets spoke.  
 Yet that is not the case. In the New Testament we see that God is sovereign over nations especially when it comes to rulers. We see two examples in particular from John and Romans. In John, when Jesus is talking with Pilate, we read, “[11] Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” (John 19:11 ESV) In this we see Pilate does not have any authority unless it had been given by God.  
 This same idea is found in Romans 13:1 which says, “[1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” (Romans 13:1 ESV)  
 As we see, leaders themselves are placed by God’s own providence on the people, and the leaders, regardless of where they are governing, have a responsibility because of that. So whether one is a king, or a president, if you are in a position of power you have a responsibility with that power to seek justice and righteousness.  
 Thus, if God is in control of those who are highest in society, then logically He is sovereign over all of the society. As such, being Sovereign over all of a society He has a right to judge any society which does not seek righteousness or justice.  
 We must, then, be careful not to assume such judgments do not take place today. They still do. God still judges the nations and He will continue to judge the nations as long as there are nations.  
 Now this might put some at ease, but let me help further because even if we acknowledge that God is sovereign and continues to judge nations, it can still be hard on us to accept that He actually does it. So what will help us better understand the judgments of God?  
 The first thought comes from I Corinthians 13, toward the end of the chapter Paul says, “[11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:11-12 ESV)  
 As we remember, the whole chapter is about the love, specifically identifying the love of God, and the love which we are to seek in our own lives. This statement, however, helps us acknowledge something that Paul himself saw, and that while we are here we still see things not fully. Even when it comes to the love of God, we only grasp small amounts, not understanding it in full.  
 The same is true of the judgments of God. We can only speculate when it comes to God’s judgments, and seek Him when it comes to them. There will come a time when we understand things in full, we’re not there yet, but that does not mean we lose our faith or hope because we recognize there will come a time when such knowledge is realized.  
 Now there are two more passages that I think will help us when it comes to the judgment of God and they are found in Revelation. We have actually looked at one passage before, but let’s consider it again.  
 First we read from (Revelation 18:21-24 ESV)

[21] Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,

and will be found no more;

[22] and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,

will be heard in you no more,

and a craftsman of any craft

will be found in you no more,

and the sound of the mill

will be heard in you no more,

[23] and the light of a lamp

will shine in you no more,

and the voice of bridegroom and bride

will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,

and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

[24] And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,

and of all who have been slain on earth.”

In this passage we see the city known as Babylon destroyed. It is no more. The Judgment of God has been cast against Babylon and because of it the wrath of God was poured out. Now I know that there are many who believe that the reaction most would have to such devastation is sorrow. However, the very next thing we read in Revelation is the opposite of sorrow.

[1] After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

[2] for his judgments are true and just;

for he has judged the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth with her immorality,

and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

[3] Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

[4] And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” [5] And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

small and great.”

(Revelation 19:1-5 ESV)

What do we see instead of sorrow over the destruction of the city? We see rejoicing. Why do we see rejoicing? Because the saints no longer are looking through a mirror dimly. Instead, they see the justice of God on display and they can do nothing but praise His mighty name for His justice.  
 This will be the case for those who are condemned at the judgment. There are many sinners who say, “Ah, but when your God judges me to hell, you’ll feel badly for me!” But do you know what we’ll do at such a judgment? DO you know what all creation will do? All of us will rise on our feet at that time, and applaud. Not because we are against people, not because we hate people, but because we will at that time finally see the justice of God on display so greatly, and we will better understand Him in His righteousness so much, that we will rejoice knowing that our good God has made the right judgment.  
 So that should set our mind at ease, in some ways, when it comes to judgment. Though we may have a hard understanding of how God could judge these peoples, we have hope knowing that God’s judgments are always good and right, and that in time we will understand those judgments clearly.  
 Alrighty, that long thought leads us to the other point that we set aside earlier. The question remains, what can we learn from these judgments? What can the Church learn from the judgments against ancient Israel, and the capital city of Samaria in particular? Well, there are a few things.  
 The first is, when the people were called into covenant they were meant to show two things, how wise the people were, but also and more importantly, the wisdom of God. We see this in Deuteronomy 4:6-8 which says, “[6] Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ [7] For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? [8] And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:6-8 ESV)

That is no different from us in our congregations. We too are to show the wisdom of God by how we live, how we manage the Church, and how we live in covenantal relationship not only with our God, but with each other as a family of faith.   
 In this way, we as Christians can learn from the mistakes of the past and be better than they were. We cannot fall into the same traps as the ancient peoples. In their case, they failed to maintain and uphold the Law. In our case, we need to learn from the Law in order how we are to relate to one another and to God.  
 So when the Law discusses idolatry, that means we are to refrain from idolatry. When the Law talks about sexual immorality, we are to refrain from sexual immorality. When the Law talks about taking care of the poor amongst you, then, guess what, we are to take care of the poor amongst ourselves. If we apply the same practices in our congregations as what the Law states, then our congregations will show the wisdom of God.  
 Now, obviously, there will be some differences. For example, we certainly do not sacrifice anymore. That system is no more, as God Himself has sacrificed His only Son Jesus Christ. No sacrifice is required for our failures and our sins, Christ is completely sufficient.  
 However, that does not mean that we can’t learn from the Law, and seek to honor it by having it inform us of how we can relate to one another. Simply put, the Law is always going to be the Law, it is still holy, just, -righteous, and as Paul says in Romans, good and perfect. Consider too what Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-20, “[17] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”  
 So far, believe it or not, not all has been accomplished. Until death itself is defeated we still remain in a world where not everything is accomplished. There are many things that have been accomplished, and the most important until the return of our King is the death and resurrection of Jesus, without which all else would have no meaning. Still, because not all has been accomplished that means that we are to understand the Law in light of Christ.  
 This is where we can then learn from the ancient Israelites and Judeans. They forsook the Law and followed a different way. Christ and His apostles remind us to turn toward the Law and understand it in light of what Christ has done. If we want to learn something from these ancient peoples, then, it is to not be like them, but to be like Christ, who is the fulfillment of all the Law.  
 Likewise, and especially, we can look at these oracles and prophecies against these peoples and remember the warnings. First, they are warned not to rely on their strongholds. Next they are warned not to rely on their wealth. We should remember the same. We could build up mighty strongholds and we can accumulate great wealth, but if we sacrifice love, grace, and mercy in the process, then our mighty fortresses will crumble, and our wealth will be dispersed.  
 This is especially true if we neglect those who are in need amongst us. Our fellow brothers and sisters especially when they are in need. They should be our focus individually and corporately. This does not mean that we neglect our neighbors or treat them as less than human. Of course we love them as we are called to, but our brothers and sisters are especially our concern and it is right that they are so.  
 Once we seek social justice amongst each other in love, the world will see the wisdom of God, and our wisdom which is merely a reflection of His wisdom. In this way we can begin to change the world, focusing inward, and yet being a vocal outward to the society around us, urging the society to see the wisdom in following God as a society. This is our responsibility to the nations, and to each other.  
 The ancients were charged with not knowing how to do right. Let us not fall under the same fallacies! Instead, let us seek the wisdom of God and live by that wisdom. To know what is right and to live by it. In Amos we saw how that meant with social justice, but it also dealt with families as Amos condemned the women.  
 I won’t condemn women today, but I will say, there is a warning for wives within these verses. Do not be like the wives then, but be like the wives you are called to be in the Scripture. It is interesting to consider the New Testament when it talks about husbands and wives. What I mean is, wives are called to respect and honor their husbands, husbands are called to honor their wives.  
 Did you know that there is no “if” clause to this? Did you know that it is not conditional to obey these things? In our society do you know what I often see? Conditions. Marriages fall apart because conditions are quite met. For example, the wife will say to others or herself, “I am not going to respect or honor my husband because he doesn’t love me!” The husband will say, “I am not going to love my wife because she does not honor or respect me.”  
 Yet, such conditions are not found within the Scriptures. Consider what it says in Ephesians, “[22] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, [30] because we are members of his body. [31] “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. [33] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

(Ephesians 5:22-33 ESV)

Notice, it does not say if they fail in their responsibility that gives you an out. Instead, we are called to these relationships and live out these relationships regardless of what the other person does. How do we know this? Because Paul relates it all not to the relationship itself, but to Christ. As such, Christ is the foundation, the reason, why husbands love their wives, and wives submit and respect your husbands. In this way we honor Christ.  
 When we love our wives regardless, and when wives respect your husbands, we do exactly the opposite of the ancients whom were prophesied against. Instead, we show the wisdom of God to those around us, show how marriage is supposed to be, and how it can glorify God and last because it is founded on God Himself. In this, we have another responsibility to each other, and to society at large, to show what it means to have a healthy marriage in Christ.  
 So, as we continue through Amos, remember that there is responsibility on all fronts. We are to recognize the responsibility of the peoples in the ancient past, and to remember our own responsibility to take heed and warning of what it is that they are being judged for. It will not do for us to ignore the prophets who spoke to the dangers of those societies and then live the same way they did. It will not do for us to not take the warning seriously, for if our own societies, whether in the Church or the culture surrounding the Church, look as these ancient societies looked and acted, then the only result will be judgment.  
 Instead of not taking attention, then, let’s be attentive, listening to the prophets, and learn from them, and find the better way. God has given us the prophets to warn not only the ancient nations, but every nation, of what the cost is in not seeking righteousness as a society. So let’s be speakers of righteousness in our congregations, and also in our societies, being prophetic to speak of the justice which God calls all people to pursue, showing the wisdom of God in all of life.  
  
2. The Gospel: Justice should always encourage us to consider the Gospel. For the Gospel is wrapped around all of the attributes of God, but especially His righteousness, His justice, and His love. For our God has shown us great love through Jesus Christ, and has shown us His great righteousness by which we find our salvation. So though we are deserving of judgment, He has given us salvation from our sins, and by this we praise Him for all of who He is, and all He has done through His Son Jesus Christ. For through Him we have not only life, but also wisdom is given showing us how not only to live, but how to live rightly.  
 The Gospel begins with our origins, God created the entire cosmos by the power of His word. Last of all He created humanity to be His image bearers. In being His image bearers we share similar attributes with God. Because God is a God of love, reason, knows, can be known, has personhood, and shows chesed, we can as well. Likewise it is from this we understand that there is both dignity and sanctity to all human life.  
 Yet, like God we are able to choose. We could have chosen to follow God in obedience and life, or disobedience in sin and death. Humanity chose the latter and has continued to do this ever since. Because of this our relationships with God, ourselves, each other, and the world are broken. It is also because of this we continue to accrue a greater and greater moral guilt against us each day, not a feeling of guilt, but true guilt before God.  
 Despite all of this sorrow, and all of the darkness that comes from human freedom, God did not give up on humanity. Instead, we find that He had a scheme, a plan, all along to save us from our darkness. This scheme, this plan, involved sending His Light, and His Word, into our darkness, and that was His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus lived, died, and rose again in time space history and flesh. It is because of His life, death, and resurrection we find propitiation from our sins. We find both justification, being made right with God, and sanctification, being made new by God, by His victory on the cross. We are given His Spirit which guides our steps, all because of what Christ has done this is possible.  
 As we saw earlier all that is required of us is obedience in two things. The first is repentance. We are to turn away from our sin and turn toward God. Our lifestyles are to change, falling in step with the Scriptures, with Christ Himself, and the Spirit who indwells us, and all of this for His glory.  
 The second is faith in Christ. We recognize our complete dependence upon Christ for our salvation, recognizing that apart from Christ our great deeds are as filthy rags. We recognize that we could never do enough good to attain righteousness. Christ, however, is strong enough to save us and to bring us into righteousness, and justify us before our God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, for the glory of God alone.  
 If one is disobedient in these things then there is only death. None can stand before God with their own deeds in hand, because his own deeds will only show his guilt. Therefore the disobedient will find themselves before a judge guilty of all their sins, and because of this they will face the wrath of God.  
 For those who are obedient, however, there is life. Their relationships with God, themselves, each other, and the world begin to be redeemed. They can experience victory over sin in this life, not perfectly, but no longer is sin the absolute rule in their lives. Ultimately, they will find that they are coheirs of an eternal kingdom, where they will experience the love of God forevermore.  
 Again, give thanks. For this Gospel, for our great God, and for the prophets who give us warnings to follow after God. Let us be a righteous people, desiring the justice of God in our congregations, as well as in the societies and cultures in which we live. In this way, when we follow after God, we will display the wisdom of our great God who guides us. Seek these things, learn from the past, and press forward in the grace, peace, mercy, righteousness, and love our great God, seeking to live in His wisdom in all things.