God Abhors Selfishness
Amos 6:4-8, 11-14
SS Lesson for 06/21/2015

Devotional Scripture: Phil 2:1-5

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Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches about why God Abhors Selfishness. The study’s aim is to show that if God was this displeased with the selfishness of Israel, He will be angry at neglect and corruption today. The study’s application is to make sure that we, as individuals and as a local congregation, are not putting ourselves in the place of judgment as Israel did.

(Key Verse of the Lesson)

Key Verse: Amos 6:12

Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall, And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Rather than heed the prophet’s warnings of judgment, the leaders of Samaria instead gave themselves to a decadent hedonism. They reclined on expensive beds whose wood was inlaid with ivory (cf. 3:15). At their opulent feasts they “lounged” on their couches. The Hebrew word for lounge (םָרַח) conveys a sprawled stupor of satiation and drunkenness, with arms and legs hanging over the side. They ate gourmet food, choice lambs and fattened calves, the tastiest and tenderest meat they could get. In their drunken revelry they imagined themselves strumming like David as they attempted to improvise music at their parties. Yet they were vastly different from David! Not content to drink wine from goblets, they consumed it by the bowful. Only the finest lotions would do for their skin. Their sole concern was for their own luxurious lifestyle. They did not grieve over the coming ruin of Joseph, the Northern Kingdom (cf. 5:6, 15). They had no concern for their nation’s impending doom. Therefore they, the first men of the first nation (v. 1), would be among the first to go into exile. Their festivities and drunken stupors would end. The sound of revelry would fade into bitter silence as they headed into captivity.

Israel’s sovereign Lord had sworn by Himself, binding the full force of His integrity to a solemn oath (cf. 4:2; 8:7), that He would utterly destroy the land. He abhorred their pride as they said their national fortunes resulted from their own strength (6:1, 13). Jacob, like Joseph, is a synonym for the Northern Kingdom. God detested the fortresses which were filled with the results of their oppression against the poor. Therefore, as a great suzerain Warrior, He would storm their city, and deliver up everyone and everything in it. So completely would God “deliver up” the city that even if 10 men should huddle in one house to escape the sword, they would die of pestilence. A relative who came to take the bodies to burn them would be so afraid of death that if he discovered a survivor hiding in the house he would quickly beg him not even to mention the Lord’s name in any way (not in lament or in anger for the slaughter or in praise for having survived). For in such a situation, to “mention the name” of Him who had so terribly destroyed the city might draw His attention to those whom He had overlooked, and cause Him to slay them also. After killing the inhabitants, the conquering Suzerain would then command His forces to smash... great and small houses into bits. The dwellings of both rich and poor would be totally demolished. All that would remain would be a field of debris. Two preposterous images expose the utter perversity of Israel’s leaders. That horses would run on the rocky crags, or that one would plow those perpendicular cliffs with oxen was unimaginable. Israel, however, had done the unimaginable! They had turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness. The judicial process, designed to preserve the nation’s health, had become a lethal “poison” within its body. The “fruit” of fairness and integrity, intended to refresh and delight, had become instead a corrupt bitter pulp. Israel’s leaders considered themselves immune to disaster, as the evidence of their might was obvious to them (vv. 1-3). Under Jeroboam II they had won an unbroken string of military victories (2 Kings 14:25). They had even recovered all their lands east of the Jordan. But Amos subtly and intentionally mispronounced the name of
one of the captured towns, **Lo Debar** (a town east of the Jordan River, mentioned in 2 Sam. 9:4; 17:27), so that it came out in Hebrew as “Lo Dabar,” which means “nothing.” And with biting sarcasm he stressed the name of another subdued city, **Karnaim**, whose literal meaning of “horns” symbolized the “strength” of a bull. Amos scoffed that they were rejoicing over what was really “nothing,” and were falsely imagining that they had seized “strength” by means of their own strength. Their air of invincibility would be shattered by their mighty Suzerain. God too would do the unimaginable—He would **stir up a nation against** His own vassal. He would raise a scourge against His own people Israel, and they would be “oppressed.” The word **oppress** deliberately evoked and promised again the bitter experiences of Egypt (Ex. 3:9) and the time of the Judges (Judges 2:18; 4:3; 6:9; 10:11-12; 1 Sam. 10:17-18); Israel would again descend into slavery. All the territory they so boastfully held, from the northern frontier of **Lebo Hamath** to the southern border of **the Arabah**, the valley extending from the Sea of Kinnereth to the Dead Sea (2 Kings 14:25), would be swallowed by the invading foe. Then Israel would know whose “strength” really determined the destiny of nations.

**Lesson Introduction and Background**

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

It was just “girl talk” in the youth group at the church. They were discussing things of importance to those in high school—classes, clothes, teachers, diets, sports, boys, and the latest dating couples. The daughter of the preacher interjected a new thought when she said, “I feel like doing something a little rebellious!” The room became reflectively quiet as the statement was processed by all present. Was she inviting suggestions of something that the girls could all do together, or was she speaking only for herself? Was it just an idle comment? After all, she was the preacher’s daughter, and she had just made a proposal that was different from the expectations that her friends had for her. The response by another girl demonstrated a maturity that many never reach. Her reply was almost Solomonic: “A little rebellion often leads to another that is even more rebellious.” At that point the conversations paused again, and then reverted to the usual things—classes, clothes, etc. The principle expressed characterizes the life that is ungodly. One falsehood leads to another. One sin may be followed by something progressively rebellious in the attempt to recreate the same level of excitement. Some people in the entertainment world behave in ways that are increasingly bizarre in order to hold their audiences and maintain coverage by the media. The slippery slope of being “a little rebellious” is nothing new, however. It was also a problem for Israel in the days of Amos.

Amos traveled from Judah to Israel to deliver his oracles from God during what has been called Israel’s “Indian Summer.” That expression is used to describe a weather phenomenon in the fall of the year—a period of pleasant warmth and sunshine after the first frost. When Amos preached, Israel was enjoying a period of peace that it had not experienced for many years. There was no oppressing nation at that time, and the nations of Israel and Judah were not at war with each other. This situation allowed Israel to expand its boundaries to such an extent that they approached what they had been in the days of Kings David and Solomon. Jonah had prophesied that this would happen (see 2 Kings 14:25); it is assumed his prophecy was made in the early days of King Jeroboam II, who reigned about 793-753 BC. The 790-739 BC reign of King Azariah (also called Uzziah) of Judah overlapped much of Jeroboam’s reign in the north. The descriptions for Judah’s parallel prosperity are given in 2 Chronicles 26:1-15. Outwardly, the reigns of these two kings were characterized by success in military expansion, economic recovery, and sustained peace. But spiritual apostasy had been the norm in the northern nation of Israel for decades, beginning with King Jeroboam I, who created rival centers of worship shortly after Solomon’s death in 930 BC (1 Kings 12:25-33). Jeroboam II is assessed as one who “did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit” (2 Kings 14:24). To the south, King Uzziah became proud in his accomplishments, and he acted corruptly by attempting to function as a priest. His penalty was to be stricken with leprosy for the rest of his life (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Then Amos came to Israel from Judah. His first “woe oracle” was the study for last week’s lesson. A second such oracle begins at Amos 6:1, addressed to the arrogant of Zion (Jerusalem, capital of Judah) and Samaria (capital of Israel). The leaders of these two nations were challenged to tour areas to the north and south; in so doing, they should conclude that their own nations were no better off that those they visited (6:2). But those leaders will continue in their blindness to coming
judgment (6:3a) as they oppress the vulnerable (6:3b). Peace, prosperity, and progress—those factors are the background when Amos came from Judah to preach in Israel. He was ready to ridicule the attempts of the wealthy to find happiness and fulfillment by excesses of sinful indulgences and mistreatment of the poor.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Selfishness Expressed Through Self-Indulgence (Amos 6:4-6)**

4 Who lie on beds of ivory, Stretch out on your couches, Eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall;  
5 Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;  
6 Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

**Self-Indulgent in pleasures (4)**

*Pleasures that lead to being choked and immature (Luke 8:14)*

14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

*Pleasures that can taken away at any moment (Luke 12:19-20)*

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

*Pleasures that are meaningless and vain (Eccl 2:10-11)*

10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

**Self-Indulgent in music (5)**

*Music that mocks (Job 30:9)*

9 "And now their sons mock me in song; I have become a byword among them.

*Music that rebukes (Eccl 7:5)*

5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.

*Music that is rejected by God (Amos 5:23)*

23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

**Self-Indulgent in possessions (6)**

*Possessions that can be squandered (Luke 15:11-15)*

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. 13 "Not long after that, the
younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

Possessions that lead to greed (Luke 12:13-16)

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Possessions that can never satisfy (Eccl 5:10-12)

10 Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. 11 As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?

Rebuke of Selfishness (Amos 6:7-8)

7 Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, And those who recline at banquets shall be removed. 8 The Lord God has sworn by Himself, The Lord God of hosts says: "I abhor the pride of Jacob, And hate his palaces; Therefore I will deliver up the city And all that is in it."

Selfishness leads to being captivated (7)

Captivated by deceptive philosophies (Col 2:8)

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Captivated by Satan (2 Tim 2:25-26)

25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Captivated by sin (Acts 8:23)

23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Selfishness leads to God's wrath (8)

God's wrath on those who reject Jesus (John 3:36)

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

God's wrath against all godlessness and wickedness (Rom 1:18)

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

God's wrath against unrepentant hearts (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.
God Abhors Selfishness

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Extent and Punishment of Selfishness (Amos 6:11-14)

11 For behold, the Lord gives a command: He will break the great house into bits, And the little house into pieces. 12 Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall, And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, 13 You who rejoice over Lo Debar, Who say, "Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves By our own strength?" 14 "But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," Says the Lord God of hosts; "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the Valley of the Arabah."

Breakup of home (11)

Sometimes our greatest enemies are within our own homes (Matt 10:36) 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

A home divided cannot stand (Matt 12:25) 25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.

Family can betray, only God never forsakes (Jer 12:6) 6 Your brothers, your own family — even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.

Putting one's confidence in anyone, including family, other than God is a mistake (Mic 7:4-6) 4 The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion. 5 Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. 6 For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies are the members of his own household.

False self-confidence (12-13)

False self-confidence causes blindness to one's own sin (Ps 36:1-3) 36 An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. 2 For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

False self-confidence places one in a hopeless state (Prov 26:12) 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

False self-confidence will always fail (Matt 26:33-36) 33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.
False self-confidence disregards God's Will (James 4:13-17)

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

Being oppressed (14)

Oppressed by God's anger and punishment (Ps 106:40-43)

40 Therefore the Lord was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance. 41 He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled over them. 42 Their enemies oppressed them and subjected them to their power.

Oppressed to humble us (Ps 107:39)

39 Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow;

Oppressed by an ungodly leadership (2 Chron 16:7-10)

7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." 10 Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.

Oppressed by our own people (Isa 59:12-14)

12 For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: 13 rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from David Guzik

A. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.
1. (1-2) Comparing Israel to her pagan neighbors.

Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria, notable persons in the chief nation, to whom the house of Israel comes! Go over to Calneh and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?

a. Woe to you who are at ease in Zion: In her pride and indulgence, all Israel sought was ease. This indulgent lust for comfort and luxury is a sin, and God will judge Israel for it.

i. The idea of rest isnt all bad. Jesus wants to give us rest (Matthew 11:28-29). There is a rest waiting for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9-11). There is rest for us in heaven (Revelation 4:9-11). Then there is another kind of rest, a sinful kind of rest - connected to indifference, laziness, and indulgence.
ii. Yet the prophet Amos speaks of a carnal ease, a fleshly security, it is not the confidence of a man who is pardoned, but the ease of a hardened wretch who has learned to despise the gibbet. It is not the assurance of one who is on the rock, but the ease of a senseless drunkard, whose house is tottering from its sandy foundations, and yet he riots at full speed; it is not the calm of soul at peace with God, but the ease of a madman, who, because he has hidden his sin from his own eyes, thinks he has concealed it from God. It is the ease and peace of one who has grown callous, hardened, brutalized, stupid, sullen, and careless, who has begun a sleep which God grant may soon be broken, or else it will surely bring him where he shall make his bed in hell. (Spurgeon)

iii. How did this sinful ease of God’s people show itself?

- Israel’s sinful ease was shown in presumption, because she trusted in the might of Mount Samaria
- Israel's sinful ease was shown in procrastination, because she put far off the day of doom
- Israel's sinful ease was shown in cruelty to men, because she caused the seat of violence to come near
- Israel's sinful ease was shown in love of self, through all the self-indulgence described in Amos 6:4-6
- Israel's sinful ease was shown in carelessness, in the willful, drunken ignorance of Amos 6:6

iv. Self-indulgence! Oh, this is the God of many! They live not for Christ - What do they for him?

- They live not for his Church - What care they for that? They live for self, and for self only. And mark there are such among the poor as well as among the rich, for all classes have this evil leaven. (Spurgeon)

v. King David had an ungodly ease when he stayed behind when it was time for kings to go out to war - and he slipped into sin with Bathsheba, eventually murdering her husband to cover up his immorality (2 Samuel 11).

b. Are you better than these kingdoms? God wants to rebuke the pride of Israel by making them compare themselves to some of their pagan neighbors. Perhaps they aren’t so great after all. Perhaps these cities already suffered the judgment of God, and God wanted Israel to know they would be next because they were no better.

2. (3-7) The high-standing in Israel will be brought low.

Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who cause the seat of violence to come near; who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, and those who recline at banquets shall be removed.

a. Woe to you who put far off the day of doom . . . who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments . . . who drink wine from bowls . . . but are not grieved: Amos prophesied during a time of economic prosperity in Israel, and the successful in Israel used that prosperity for pure self-indulgence. When God makes us prosperous, we have an absolute obligation to use what He gives us in a way that glorifies Him, not pampers our selves.

b. Therefore they shall now go captive as first of the captives: God warns the leading men of Israel that they will lead in the train of captives when the Assyrians conquer Israel.

B. The coming destruction of Israel.

1. (8-11) The city delivered to destruction.

The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of hosts says: I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his palaces; therefore I will deliver up the city and all that is in it. Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. And when a relative of the dead, with one who will burn the bodies, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, Are there any more with you? Then someone will say, None. And he will say, Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the...
LORD. For behold, the LORD gives a command: He will break the great house into bits, and the little house into pieces.

a. I abhor the pride of Jacob: As much as their sinful conduct, God hated the pride of Jacob. In their season of prosperity and success they lifted their hearts high in pride, and God will send a destroying army to bring them low.

   i. This principle is so important to the Lord that He repeats it three times: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34)

b. Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the LORD: When a relative of one of the dead comes to burn the corpses, should he find one person still alive, that person will not permit his mentioning the name of the Lord for fear that the Lord will turn his wrath on him. (McComiskey)

2. (12-14) The injustice and pride of Israel make it a target of judgment.

Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, you who rejoice over Lo Debar, who say, Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel, says the LORD God of hosts; And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah.

a. Do horses run on rocks? You can't expect a good result if you run a horse over rough rocks, because you will wreck the horse. In the same way, Israel can't expect a good result when they turn justice into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

   i. Here, Amos puts together two proverbs which were commonly used to signify that men do not, as a rule, continue to labor in vain, and spend their strength for nought. Wise men do not send their horses to run upon the rocks; and they do not send their oxen to plough where all their toil would be wasted: Shall horses run upon the rock? Will one plough rocks with oxen? The answer implied is, Certainly not, and it meant that, if a thing cannot be done, it is not worth doing if it can, it will be well for us not to attempt to do it. (Spurgeon)

b. I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel: Amos comes back to this constant theme - because of Israels great and deep sin, judgment is coming through a conquering nation.

   i. The Lord points to other cities which had been destroyed, - to Calneh, and Hamath, and Gath, which he had smitten because of the sin of the people who had lived there; and he says, Ye that dwell at Jerusalem, and ye that live at Samaria, do not imagine that ye will escape the consequences of your sin. I was able to reach the inhabitants of these proud cities, despite their strong fortifications and their powerful armies; and I can reach you also. So, when we look back upon the judgments of God upon guilty men, we may conclude that no sinner has any right to think that he shall escape. The proudest and mightiest have been brought down by God and so will men, will dare to resist the Most High, continue to be humble, even to the worlds end. (Spurgeon)

(Adapted from URL: http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/view.cgi?bk=29&ch=6)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The word selfish occurs only eight times in the New International Version. The concept is also present, however, in words such as greedy, ill-gotten, etc. Foundational to all these is the concept of covetousness, the concern of the Tenth Commandment as given in Exodus 20:17; the idea of selfishness is dominant when one covets what belongs to another. Someone proposed recently that selfishness is at the root of all sin. It means putting self ahead of God and all that he has commanded his people to do or not do. There is some validity to that observation, especially when it is combined with the affirmation in Colossians 3:5 that greed is idolatry. God hates selfishness, and selfishness can manifest itself in many ways. The world may use other terms to disguise it, but in the end it is still sin.
Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Affluence does not relieve us of the moral responsibility to help the afflicted (Amos 6:4-6)
2. The guilt of those who fail to do good is as great as that of those who do evil (vs. 7)
3. Our wealth and power have no bearing whatsoever on God's evaluation of us (vs. 8)
4. A nation's strength does not hide injustice from the eyes of God (vss. 11-12)
5. Relying on our own strength leads only to trouble (vs. 13)
6. What we suffer at the hands of others may be God's way of speaking to us (vs. 14)