

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2021

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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 8, 2021

SCRIPTURE

Amos 8:1-14

1 This is what the Lord GOD showed me a basket of summer fruit. 2 He said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. 3 The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," says the Lord GOD; "the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!" 4 Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, 5 saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, 6 buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." 7 The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. 8 Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? 9 On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. 10 I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day. 11 The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. 12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it. 13 In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. 14 Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, "As your god lives, O Dan," and, "As the way of Beer-sheba lives" they shall fall, and never rise again.

DEVOTIONAL

Jon Mathieu '21

Bodies—flung everywhere.

This is the prophet's imagery of anger and judgment. It would be natural, and perhaps necessary, for us to question this imagery. To feel uncomfortable with a prophetic word of punishment that takes shape as physical violence.

But Advent invites us to pause and ask all our questions. We not only look back to prophets like Amos, but we look ahead (from their vantage point) to the promised one, Jesus. So let's ask some questions.

Why is God so angry in this discourse? In a word: oppression. Needy and poor people are being trampled by the rich. What little they have is being taken away from them by the merchants' corrupt and greedy business practices. We are invited to examine our own practices toward those who are barely able to survive.

At whom is God angry? Specifically the corrupt and oppressive ruling class within "my people Israel." This is not an us-versus-them moment where some other nation or religion is being vilified. We are invited to consider how our families, our churches, our governments are treating the most vulnerable.

How will God answer this grave injustice? It turns out not to be violence against bodies so much as spiritual devastation. Religious festivals will turn to mourning. Shaved heads and sackcloth will mark a time of famine—but it will be the absence of God's revelation, not a famine of food or water. We are invited to acknowledge the pain of God's absence in our own lives.

And yet Advent points us to something, or someone, beyond the famine. It will not be violence that topples injustice or lifts up the poor. As Mary would sing centuries later, God will scatter the proud and bring down the mighty from their thrones through a baby's humble birth.

PRAYER

God, we must repent. Help us to see the ways we oppress people and peoples. If we must shave our heads or put on sackcloth, teach us the humility and give us the strength. And yet we look for the same hope as the most poor and vulnerable among us—that you are near to us and will lift us up.

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