

COMMENTARY ON THE PROPHETIC BOOK OF AMOS

Chapter 1

We continue in a section of the Hebrew Scriptures called the “Minor Prophets.” They are so called because of their size, the name in no way reflecting on the importance of their messages. This prophet, Amos (the name meaning “burden”), was not a trained theologian, nor was he in the line of a prophetic family. He just had a burden for the people of God and was called by God to preach to them. His name is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, outside his own writing here. A different Amos is mentioned once in the genealogy in Luke 3:25. He ministered about the middle of the eighth century B.C., around 760 -750. The ministry of Amos came during the reigns of two long-enduring kings in Judah (Uzziah, 51 years) and Israel (the 40 year king, Jeroboam II). Such were times of security, stability, and prosperity - times when men often become spiritually lax and infatuated with creature comforts. Amos was a successful and respected businessman in Judah, but God had other tasks for the shepherd and fig-grower than agricultural pursuits. He was to go north from Judah into the kingdom of Israel and carry God’s message of judgment for their sins. Many had become rich at the expense of others and at the cost of forsaking righteousness. No wealth thus gained escapes the watchful eye of God, Who will have justice. We will see in this opening chapter some diatribes against ill-gotten wealth.

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, EVEN FOR NATIONS

THE ROARING LION YAHWEH

- 1) The prophet begins by identifying himself to his readers, giving scant information, perhaps because there was not much to say. Amos was a self-effacing, unassuming man of God, who came, not from historic Jerusalem, but from little known (and rarely mentioned) Tekoa, a small village that is twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He dates his prophecy for us by naming the two kings contemporary with him, and by mentioning that his vision came two years before a notable earthquake - thus the Holy Spirit puts his ministry on the calendar for us.
- 2) Imagine walking through the jungle at sundown. The shadows deepen, and every little noise seems to be louder than usual. Suddenly a lion roars ferociously, seeming to be quite near and moving nearer. Every fiber of your being stiffens, and you are nearly paralyzed with fear. The same effect would flow from a loud clap of thunder, threatening a severe storm. Amos uses imagery that clearly depicts the fear that strikes the hearts of those to whom God roars that His judgment is coming. Amos made his living from pastures and orchards. When he speaks of dried up grass and withered forests, he describes a frightful and sad scene for Israel.

REPAYMENT FOR DAMASCUS - (SYRIA)

- 3) Eight times Amos will declare that “*Thus says the Lord*” some word of judgment against the neighbors of Israel (the first six) and Israel herself (the final two). First, the prophet brings threats against the northeastern neighbor, Syrian Damascus. The Syrians had not just once offended Yahweh, but repeatedly had they mistreated His eastern-most people in the land of Gilead. This was, of course, the possession on the east of the Jordan River, given by God to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The agricultural bent of the prophet is seen in the mention of threshing instruments as metaphors for the devastation wrought on Gilead by the Syrians.
- 4), 5) This pair of verses describes God’s plan of retribution upon Syria for her wrong. Terms like “fire,” “break,” “cut off,” and “go into exile” set forth Yahweh’s plan of action against Syria. Her leaders, Hazael and Ben Hadad, will know God’s wrath. Her cities, Damascus, Aven, and Beth Eden, will suffer as Gilead has suffered at Syrian hands. Many Syrians will go into exile, even as

there are Syrian refugees because of her civil war in the twenty-first century. No nation can touch the *“apple of God’s eye”* (Israel) with impunity. *“I will curse those who curse you,”* He said to Abraham. *Note, on the day of this writing (12/8/2024) the despotic Assad regime’s 50-year stranglehold on the people of Syria has ended. Rebel forces have taken control of several cities, the latest one being Damascus, the capital. Bashar al’ Assad has fled for asylum to Russia. It will be interesting to see what unfolds in the Middle East as a result of this.

RETRIBUTION FOR GAZA - (PHILISTIA)

6), 7), 8) Yahweh’s next target for judgment is the southwestern perennial adversary of Israel, Gaza (even in this twenty-first century trouble has come from that land, though from a completely different people than the ancient Philistines). The crime of the Philistines mentioned here is the kidnaping and selling of some Israelites to the Edomites (descendants of Esau). Joel (chapter 3) had referenced this vile activity, in which defenseless communities were raided for purposes of slave trade. Four of the five main cities of Philistia are mentioned here: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron, as being objects of God’s judgment. Only Gath is left unspoken of; some suggest Gath had already been destroyed by Hazael of Syria. The expressions *“send a fire,” “devour,” “cut off,” “turn my hand against”* all speak of the means of devastation. The judgment will be so great that the Philistines will become extinct - *“the remnant of the Philistines shall perish.”* Once again, adversity to Israel brings adversity from Israel’s God, Yahweh.

RAZING OF TYRE

9), 10) Now the oracles of judgment swing up to the northwest, to Tyre (Phoenicia), situated in modern Lebanon. Tyre brought upon herself the enmity of God in a similar way as did Philistia - they raided defenseless Israelite villages and took captive their people, selling them to Edom as slaves. For their wicked acts, those of Tyre will see their protective walls burned with fire and their strongholds devoured by others. Their sin’s vileness was increased because it breached a *“covenant of brotherhood”* that they had made with Israel. Solomon wrote, *“It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay”* (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

RUIN OF EDM

11), 12) Amos’ fourth declaration of judgment is upon Edom, the cousins of Israel who lived to their southeast. The Edomites descended from Jacob’s older brother, Esau, thus the reference to *“brother”* in verse 11. While it seemed that Esau forgave his younger brother personally, the animus between their offspring continued for generations, and God would judge Edom for their cruelty in pursuit with a sword, casting off pity, angry tearing to pieces, and wrath never let go. As relatives of the Israelites, their hostility is seen as particularly egregious. Teman was named for a grandson of Esau by Eliphaz and is of uncertain location. Bozrah is about 22 miles south of the Dead Sea, 15 miles below the border of Moab with Edom. These main cities of Edom will suffer destruction because of their hostility toward Israel.

RIDDANCE OF THE AMMONITES

13), 14), 15) The Ammonites were also cousins of the Israelites, and as such should have respected them. Their first father was Ammon, incestuous son of Lot by his daughter. Lot, of course, was the nephew of Abraham. These folks lived adjacent to Gilead, the possession of 2 ½ tribes on the east of the Jordan River. The Ammonites were so very cruel to the Gileadites, even ripping open women who were pregnant. Their goal was to encroach into Israel’s possession, enlarging their borders. One of her major cities, Rabbah, lay 25 miles NE from the Dead Sea. In military defeat, fire would consume the city’s walls, and the leaders would flee into exile. It does not

pay to practice antisemitism, to come after God's people in cruel hostility. (Cont'd in Ch 2)

Chapter 2

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT FOR THE MOABITES

1), 2), 3) The final international diatribe is against another relative of Israel, the Moabites. They descended, as did the Ammonites, from an incestuously conceived son of Lot by his other daughter. These peoples resided between the Ammonites on their north and the Edomites on their south. Their crime here was not so much against Israel, as it was against decency and honor. They unearthed the bones of an Edomite king and desecrated them by burning them until they were as fine a powder as lime. It seems that the weapon used by Yahweh to repay Moab for their wrong was the army of Assyria under Tiglath Pileser. In just reprisal, the Moabite king and his sons were burned with fire. Yahweh knows how to "balance the books" and set things aright.

*This bold prophet cries out against the southern kingdom, Judah, of the divided nation, and against Israel, the more wicked northern kingdom. God promises judgment on them because of their **Idolatry** - they followed other gods - their **Injustice** - they mistreated the poor - and their **Immorality** - they were sexually promiscuous. God had advantaged them by removing the Amorites who had dwelled before them in the land, by redeeming the fledgling nation of Israel out of the slavery of Egypt, and by sending them the prophets to cry out against their sins. Yet they responded to God by trying to silence the prophets which He sent! God had sent the very separated Nazirites to bless them, but the people had corrupted them by persuading them to drink wine. They had much for which to answer; God would call them to account!*

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, EVEN FOR GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE! **JUDGMENT FOR JUDAH - THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM**

4) Six times now Amos has declared judgments from God against peoples who surrounded the Holy Land. They were spoken against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Our text now skips to the woes upon Judah and Israel - the prophet's own kinsman! Judah would feel the wrath of God for three, no, for four sins. God had called Abraham out of idolatrous Babylon and given his descendants the law. They had forsaken the law and returned to the false gods. His hand must now be hard upon them.

5) Yahweh would later use Babylon to chasten Jerusalem with fire. See clear statements from Jeremiah that describe this (Jeremiah 17:27, 21:10, 37:8-10). Hosea also sets forth this judgment in his prophecy (8:14). If God will judge the nations, and He will, He must certainly judge His own people who have such privilege and accompanying responsibility. It must have broken His heart to bring these evil men to lay siege to and burn His holy city.

JUSTICE FOR ISRAEL - THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

THE STORM OF REPRISAL (6-12)

6) The formula, "*Thus says the LORD,*" introduces each of the judgments spoken by Amos. Here it leads us to the doorstep of Israel - the northern kingdom. Recall that since Solomon's death and the reign of Rehoboam, his unwise son, the 12 tribes had been divided into two separate kingdoms - north and south. The law called for good treatment of the poor. Israelites had sold their own people into slavery for trivial debts! Such villainy would not stand under the scrutiny of the eyes of heaven!

7) The poor were denied justice in a system so corrupted by money that it seemed as if they were literally walked on by the rich who trampled them in the dust. Not only was greed plaguing Israel,

but it was accompanied by lust, as well. Men had illicit affairs, and if that weren't bad enough, sometimes the same girl (concubine or prostitute) was sexually used by a father and his son! The law forbade this (Leviticus 20:11), and it defamed God's holy name!

8) Israelites were required by the law to return to a poor man any garment taken as security for a debt, since the man needed it to cover himself for sleeping. So here were the rich at altars of worship, lying down for the night on the poor man's cloak! How could such a man even sleep?! Idolatry accompanied their greedy immorality, in that they raised to false gods cups of wine taken as fines from the poor, whom they found many ways to cheat.

9) Israel's sin is now set in contrast to God's gracious acts toward them in their long and storied history. The blackness of her sins is heightened by the brightness of God's grace. When she came as a fledgling nation to re-occupy her land grant from God, great foes stood in her way. The greatest of them, the Amorites, God destroyed root and fruit - completely! God reduced these giants to small size and discomfited them before His people, Israel.

10) God's favorite favor to recall to His people was the miracle of the exodus, followed by the provisions made for them through 40 years of wilderness wanderings. One would think they would sing the BBN theme song, "To God be the glory, great things He hath done!" But rather than worshiping their Benefactor, they chased after other so-called gods and violated His law at every turn. Israel had sinned grievously, and she would suffer for her sins soon - in 40 years judgment would come upon them. Oh, that she had repented and rather let God forgive and bless than judge!

11), 12) How benevolent God had been to the descendants of Abraham! He redeemed them from Egypt's slavery, and He protected and provided for them in the wilderness. He led them into the land of promise, driving out before them the squatters who had parked in and on the land while they were in bondage in Egypt. The great leaders Moses and Joshua had seen God's power do mighty things all along the wilderness journey and throughout the conquest of the land. Judges had followed, and then a monarchy that led the people, sometimes well, sometimes not so well. The southern kingdom had a few good kings; sadly, the northern kingdom had all wicked kings. From the people themselves had arisen prophets and Nazirites (like Samson in *Judges*). The people of Israel knew this to be true. Yet they corrupted the holy influence of the Nazirites by leading them to drink wine, a thing forbidden in their Nazirite vow. And they treated the prophets no better, those men who were spokesmen for God - they essentially shut them up and would not listen to God's messages through them!

THE SENTENCE UPON THE REBELS (13-16)

13) Yahweh is wearied and burdened with Israel's sins - feeling weighted down beneath them. He will therefore press them down as a heavily-loaded wagon presses the ground over which it travels. If they continue to weigh their God down with their sin, He will weigh them down with retribution. The writer to the Hebrews said later, "*every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward*" (Hebrews 2:2). If the surrounding nations with so little light of truth will be judged, surely those who knew the truth must be judged even more severely!

14), 15), 16) Seven things that made for military advantage against their enemies would not help Israel stand in the day of their judgment. The swift (1) will not be able to flee. The strong (2) will lose their strength. The mighty (3) cannot preserve himself. The bowman (4) cannot stand. The one who is fleet of foot (5) will not escape. The cavalry rider (6) shall not save himself. The very bravest (7) will flee naked in that day. Yahweh will not be mocked, and sin against light will be severely dealt with.

Chapter 3

The place of blessing and privilege is a place of great opportunity and responsibility. The nations around Israel will suffer judgment for their wrongs, as well they should. But if Israel listened to Amos speak oracles of judgment against the nations with pride of position, they are in for a rude awakening! Jesus would say in the days of His flesh, "...unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48). He is only restating this ancient principle that makes Israel so much more deserving of judgment than her neighbors were. This declaration began in Amos 2:4, and it continues here.

MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE COMING JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

GREAT PRIVILEGE BRINGS GREAT ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1), 2) One thinks of God's word being spoken to the benefit of His people, and it is, when His people reverence and obey. But listen to Amos, *"This word is spoken against you!"* Their position as the family of God's people, as the ones He redeemed and rescued out of slavery's bondage in Egypt, made their sins the more odious to God. It pains God to speak and act against His people, but His holiness and justice require that their sins also are judged. If this were a speech and not writing, a sustained high tone would carry **"YOU ONLY I KNEW."** God by election placed Israel in a special relation to Himself. Their relationship is certainly unique. This placed a high obligation upon Jacob's descendants - one requiring love and obedience. It carried also a special degree of punishment for their sins. Great privilege = great opportunity. There follows from that a great responsibility and accountability. God's love is a tough love.
- 3) In a series of several questions, Yahweh challenges Israel to clear thinking about actions and their consequences. The first one is about two parties who have agreed to walk together, but one party had violated the agreement. At Sinai, Yahweh gave them guidelines for being His peculiar treasure above all people. Their response was to say, *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do"* (look at Exodus 19:5-8 for that exchange). They said they would obey, but they had not stuck with it, chasing after Baal and other false gods along the way.
- 4) The lion only roars when he has captured his prey, and the young lion in the den has no cause to cry out if meat did not come in for a meal. Is the lion representative of the prophet, and is Israel the prey? Will the prophet roar unless judgment is coming? He will roar, and judgment will come!
- 5) The net that captures the fowl was placed there by the fowler. When you see the capture take place, you know the process is complete. O, Israel, could you not see the signs I gave you to help you turn from your sin? Were not drought, famine, oppression and such sufficient signs for you to heed the cries of my prophets? Could you not see the trap stick and avoid being caught?
- 6) Joel 2:1 spoke of a trumpet being blown as an alarm to the people of God. Numbers 10:5 spoke of the trumpet being used for the purpose of alerting the people of coming danger. The prophets were the trumpeters, and the Word of God through them was the sound of alarm, but the people had not heeded the warnings, and now judgment would surely come!
- 7) On the plains of Mamre (Genesis 18), Yahweh had posed, *"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?"* He was speaking of the imminent destruction of Sodom. And God had a pattern of telling His prophets what is coming, so they can preach warning to the people, and in that early case, pray for the people. How wonderful that we have the warnings of the Word to shape our behavior; let us not err as did Israel and miss the blessings of obedience.
- 8) Amos returns to the image of verse 4 and declares that the *"Lion has roared."* Then he asks the rhetorical question, *"Who will not fear?"* The clear indication is that they should fear! And for Amos himself, *"The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?"* That particular name combination says that God is in charge, and Israel is in covenant relationship with Him; they ought, therefore, to obey Him! As God's spokesman, the prophet must declare what *"thus saith the LORD!"*
- 9), 10) Two near neighbors, also perennial adversaries, Philistia (represented by Ashdod) and

Egypt, are called upon to witness what is going on in Samaria. This looking in on would be easy in the figure, because Samaria is surrounded by higher mountains from whose tops you could easily look into the streets of Samaria. Had Israel done her job and been a light to the nations, these two could have testified to coming to God through Israel's witness. Sadly, what they would witness was oppression and tumults in her streets. The Israelites simply did not know how to do right! This could have been corrected through study of and obedience to God's Word as given by the prophets. Ashdod and Egypt would see this failure of Israel to live up to their covenant requirements, a thing they had promised faithfully to do.

A GREAT FOE WILL BRING GREAT DESTRUCTION

11), 12) The prophet goes on to say that devastation is coming to Samaria. While some might lounge in leisure, imagining that their God will not allow their defeat and destruction, the truth is that a powerful adversary, here unnamed, will indeed defeat their defenses and destroy their strongholds. We know from history that the adversary was to be Assyria. The rescue they expect from Yahweh before it happens, will actually be after the fact. And it will be only partial, like a shepherd recovering bits and pieces of a sheep after a lion has torn it asunder and consumed most of it. God will show His faithfulness in recovery, but it will only be for a remnant of Israel.

13), 14), 15) In the best of days and under more favorable circumstances, Yahweh had been Israel's Defender against foreign aggression. Things had changed; Israel was living in apostasy. Now God would send an aggressor nation against the people whom He had chosen, loved, nurtured, and even protected. Is there a hint of the ancient history in the use of the ancient name "Jacob?" The phrases "*I will punish*" and "*I will strike*" convey that even though the aggressor nation is the tool, the weapon, Yahweh is the one bringing the punishment, the judgment. Verse 14 makes it clear that one of the great transgressions of Israel is false worship. And God will make waste of the altars to Baal, cutting off their horns. The materialism of Israel was also cause for God's rod coming upon them. There will be no more of "winter homes" and "summer homes." He will bring an end to the great houses and the ones embellished with ivory. While the rich had been getting richer, the poor were suffering at their gate, unnoticed and without receiving help!

Chapter 4

As stated above, two of Israel's (the northern kingdom) egregious faults were the worship of false gods and wealth gotten by wrong means and used in wrong ways. Amos expands on that here in a second message to the people. This dual wrongs remind us that religious failure is not the only problem God sees, but social issues perturb Him as well. Our religion must make us into better neighbors, workers, friends, family members. James would tell us several centuries hence, (James 1:27) "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Walking with God is about more than showing up for services; it includes showing up at a place of need with some help for the needy! We are blessed to see this daily at our homeless shelter.

AMOS HITS HARD UPON THE ISRAELITES **THE INDICTMENT OF THE WEALTHY**

1), 2), 3) Ill-getting of gain had bred a social class (especially of women) to whom he refers in verse one as "cows of Bashan." Their wealth came at the expense of the oppression of the less fortunate. Their economic practices were literally "crushing" the poor, leaving them hopeless and helpless. These and others lived inside walled cities with a false sense of security, based upon fleshly strength. Boy was their bubble going to be burst! In less than a quarter of a century God

would send the Assyrian hordes against this sinful northern kingdom. What they would do to Israel was almost unspeakable in its devastation. As comfortable as fish in the sea, these disobedient ones would be snatched from their land like fish from the water! Those who were not slain by the invading army were taken back to Nineveh, Assyria's capitol, in walking lines, kept together (and kept from escaping) by cords having fish-hooks at short intervals. These hooks would be thrust through the cheeks, noses, or jaws of the captives like hooks through the mouths of so many fish on a stringer! For those who have and reject God's light, disobedience has a terrible price. In Deuteronomy 28, God had warned of such a judgment for Israel should they choose to disobey Him. And He would keep His promise.

THE INSULT OF FALSE WORSHIP

4), 5) Amos employs irony here; he has spoken harsh judgment for Israel's sin. Now he implies they will go on in their sin in spite of the knowledge of its consequences. As the priests would call on people to come to the true God's proper worship, with tongue in cheek, he bids them go to their high places and practice their idol-worship. Though they had religious form - morning sacrifices and tithes - their inward reality was one of sin. In Jesus' day He found much of the same with the "whitewashed graves" as He called them. The bold prophet charges them to go on in their unlawful (leavened) offerings. After all, it was only for show, for a display, and they did not worship God from their hearts. This generation loved the notice of man for their "service to God." They were men-pleasers as we find in every generation. It is not men that they nor we need to be concerned with - it is God! Amos next indicates God's sovereignty - He is the God Who is in charge. We must not only do the things He requires of us, but we must also do them in His prescribed way (and in His prescribed place - meaning Jerusalem's Temple). He is Sovereign!!!

THE INEVITABILITY OF JUDGMENT

6) This is a summary preview of the detailed argument of Yahweh in the following verses, the fact that He had applied many of the consequences promised in the Mosaic covenant for disobedience, and Israel had not learned the lesson nor turned back to Him in repentance. He sums it up as having given them "*cleanness of teeth*" and "*lack of bread*." Over an unspecified period of time, God had sent judgments again and again, but Israel did not "*return to Me*," as He said. In the life of a nation, this could have even been over multiple generations.

7), 8) The first consequence of sin mentioned that brought about the lack of food is drought. The harvest would begin in late April or early May, and the "latter rains" of the winter were critical for the crops to mature and bear well. God withheld those from certain localities while bringing them upon others. Not only did the crops fail to be their best, but water for daily use and drinking was in short supply. This was all intended to show Israel that God meant business when He made them His covenant people, and that they had not kept up their end of the agreement, thus the suffering.

9) The cursings for disobedience were set forth in Deuteronomy 28, and here they are described as having been placed upon the disobedient nation. The blasting (blight) and mildew promised in Deuteronomy 28:22 had come, and the devouring locust warning in Deuteronomy 28:38 and 42 was fulfilled. Certainly, Yahweh took no pleasure in the suffering of His chosen people, but they needed to learn that "actions have consequences." Sadly, God repeated, "*yet you did not return to Me*."

10) A second look at Deuteronomy 28:22 reveals God warning that failure to walk with Him would bring disease and the sword. This verse describes those very two devastating consequences of Israel's perpetual spiritual adultery, cheating on her Husband, Yahweh, with false gods like Baal. The deaths of men and horses were so many that burial was impossible, so the twin sister of war, disease, came upon the people (see 2 Kings 13). With all this devastation, they did not recognize

their sin and their need to turn to God. So, He repeated, “*yet you did not return to Me.*”

11) Deuteronomy 29:23 ff. had spoken of this very type of judgment upon the people for their forsaking of the covenant (verse 25) to which they had agreed. To be compared in judgment to Sodom and Gomorrah must have shaken some souls out of their godless path, but there is no evidence of large-scale repentance. The destruction was so severe that those who survived were spoken of as being “*plucked out of the burning.*” For one final time, Yahweh utters through the prophet those mournful words, “*yet you did not return to Me.*”

12), 13) Among the better known words from Amos are “*prepare to meet your God.*” God says this because He has promised to bring upon them all the things of which He warned them in the Law for their gross disobedience. He loves and is faithful to His people, and He is faithful to His Word. He is **Creator**, He is **Caretaker**, and He **Conveys** His mind to His people through His prophets and His Word. That mighty, loving, caring God calls Israel into account. And dear Reader, He will likewise call us into account. Our only defense is that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. The accounting of believers at the Bema will deal with how we lived for and served Him once we were saved. Let us be sure we know Him, and let us walk in the Spirit before Him.

Chapter 5

By the time Amos was called by God to prophesy, Israel had been divided into two kingdoms - North and South - for nearly 200 years. No person alive remembered when what were now Israel and Judah had been one nation together under the great leadership of King David and his son, King Solomon. Though Amos hailed from Judah, the Southern Kingdom, God called him to a ministry in the Northern Kingdom, Israel. In this regard, he may be unique among the prophets. Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel - in the eighth century BC. Each of these kings reigned at least 40 years, which gave a certain stability to their kingdoms, resulting in some measure of prosperity. How sad it is that when people prosper, they so often forget God! Equally telling is it that they tend to deny justice to the “have-nots” more than at times of less prosperity. Injustice to the poor and needy was a plague on the house of Israel. Chapter two enumerated some of the besetting sins of Israel. There was rampant idolatry, which is almost always accompanied by immorality. Jeroboam I had set up places of idol worship at Dan and Bethel; these were designed to keep the Israelites from going on pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Moses’ Law prescribed that all adult males make three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem - Sukkot, Pesach, and Pentecost. It appears from 4:4 that Amos was ministering at Bethel, the southernmost of those idolatrous religious centers. God had sent hardships of drought, pestilence, and such to show Israel His displeasure, but they had not responded with repentance. Then came that famous saying of the prophet Amos, “Prepare to meet your God” (4:12). The prophet Amos essentially said, “If you do not repent of your sins and turn to the Lord in righteousness, the houses you build will be dwelled in by others, and the vineyards you plant shall yield wine for strangers to drink.” The words of God could not have been clearer to Israel.

SEEK YAHWEH AND LIVE THE FUNERAL DIRGE FOR ISRAEL

1) The chapter opens with a familiar command, “Sh’ma dvar” (“*Hear the word*”). How blessed are the people to whom God speaks His Word! How much more blessed are those who hear and heed it. The nation will be judged for its sins, yet individuals may live by faith proved by obedience to God’s Word.

2) First, Amos gives a lament over the sad plight of the people of Israel. Once chaste and faithful to

her divine Husband, her adulteries have condemned her to fall. That fall, though future, is as certain to happen as if already done. And none can help her up but the One Who caused her to go down. This northern kingdom, separated from its brother to the south, shall never be restored. When the twin exiles end, only one nation shall exist, not two.

3) The funeral dirge continues here. Under the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, Israel had grown in wealth, prestige, and population. Now that population will be decimated. Is Amos using hyperbole when he suggests that 90% of those who go out (to battle?) shall be slain? We know from 2 Kings 17:6-24 that the Assyrians deported many people, replacing them with immigrants from five different places. The Israelites who remained in the land mixed with these imported people to produce the people known as "Samaritans."

THE FINAL CALL TO ISRAEL

4), 5), 6), 7) Here is Yahweh's offer, "*seek Me and live (4)*" and "*seek the LORD and live (6)*." Then and now, true life is only found in the Lord. Spiritual adultery in the form of idolatry, coupled with social injustice within the nation had led to this unavoidable precipice, over which the nation shall be driven and suffer. The Psalmist (36:9) had spoken of Yahweh as the "*fountain of life*." Israel had rather slaked her thirst at other streams, with water that brought death. The named cities, Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheva, had each become centers of false worship at one time or another. That worship and those places shall fall; Israel must rather seek Yahweh. If they do not, He will break out upon the in judgment like fire. Their sins included failure to execute justice and casting righteousness down to the earth. Righteousness should rather have been exalted, justice enforced. But Israel had failed miserably, and she would pay dearly.

8),9) And just Who is this God that says He will judge the unfaithfulness of His people? He is the One who placed the stars in the sky, with some so ordered as to present us with constellations like Pleiades and Orion. It is He Who ordered the rotation of the earth on its axis, giving us night and day every 24 hours. His creative wisdom included the evaporation of sea waters into clouds that then drop life-giving rain on the earth. "*Yahweh is His name*." Those who imagine themselves protected by their supposed strength will feel destruction fly upon them. Any who flee to some man-made fortress for safety will also find that destruction comes upon them. Yahweh's wrath is inescapable, except by running to Him in faith and obedience.

A CALL FOR CLEANSING

GOD RECOGNIZES THEIR WICKEDNESS

10) The moral decadence of the prophet's day had led people to respond poorly to those who tried to do right. In our own day, political correctness produces the same result. A judge who uses reason and law instead of "PC" is evil spoken of and not long for the bench. The truth is not fashionable, but lying is widely accepted.

11) When rich people use unjust means to further enrich themselves by impoverishing the poor, God is not unaware of their wrong. The ancient curse of Deuteronomy 28:30 will fall on those who do such. Their mansions they will not occupy, and their grapes will remain unharvested by them. God will indeed balance all books one day.

12) God knows what is going on. He sees the number and severity of their sins. Amos lists three here: 1) righteous men, who should live quietly, are intimidated, 2) wealthy men get better treatment in the courts because of bribes, 3) a poor man enters into court without a chance, since he has no money to bribe corrupt officials.

13) When evil men are in control, good men will often find it most prudent to "live and let live." Seeking charges against wrongdoing can put one on the wrong side of the power machine, so good men just keep quiet. Amos seems to say this with shame. If good men don't speak, how can

things ever be changed?! Yet so many are silent.

14) Clearly God is interested in more than what goes on in the religious circles. The politics and economics of the day show the true spiritual condition of a people. Amos cries out to them to seek good, not evil. He offers hope in two consequences - 1) they might live if they do, and 2) doing right invites the Lord's blessed presence.

15) "*Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good,*" wrote Paul (Romans 12:9). The Psalmist wrote, "*Depart from evil, and do good*" (34:14). Similar words ring throughout the halls of Scripture. Here a specific is placed with this general command. It is this, "establish justice in the courts." Israel can expect mercy from God if they do right.

GOD REPROVES THEIR WISHES

16), 17) The prophet invokes the three basic names of God - Adonai (the One in charge), Yahweh (the self-existent One), and Elohim (the strong One). His judgment on the sins of His people will result in weeping and wailing in the city and in the field. God's presence should be a cause for joy, but when He walks among His people, those persisting in their sin will have cause rather for tears of deep grief. One is reminded of how differently men will react when Jesus comes again. The righteous will rejoice, but the unrepentant will mourn and wail.

18), 19), 20) It appears that many among the Israelites were wishing for "yom Yahweh," "the day of the LORD." Those who did so are now taken down a notch. The prophet pronounces a curse upon them - "*Woe unto those...*" This day when God's righteousness will be manifested, when those who follow Him will be vindicated, when right will triumph over wrong and the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, this day has been promised by God through the prophets. Twenty-six times the phrase is used in the Hebrew Scriptures, all of them in the prophetic books. Amos poses a strange question - "*why do you long for it?*" It is clearly because you don't understand its character. "Yom Yahweh" is not only a day of blessing for the righteous; it is also a day of judgment on the wicked. Amos had made it clear that Israel was wicked, not righteous! Before the light of Messiah's reign in deliverance from enemies and unequalled prosperity and glory will come the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). For Israel to enter the day of the LORD in their current sinful state would be exchanging bad for worse. The prophet then uses some "down-home" illustrations to express what we might call today "jumping out of the frying pan into the fire." Entering the day of the Lord unrepentant would be like the encounter with a bear of the man fleeing from a lion - that would certainly be from bad to worse! It would further be like the man who entered his house for safety, only to be bitten by a poisonous snake! For the righteous, Yahweh's day will be glory and joy, but for the wicked, like Israel of Amos' day, it will be a time of judgment, pictured here as such an overpowering darkness that no light can penetrate it. Surely that is not a thing to be longed for. What is needed is repentance, a turning to God from sin, to serve the living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

GOD REJECTS THEIR WORSHIP

21), 22), 23) The lips of the prophet Amos move, but the voice is the voice of God. He rejects their hypocritical feasts and their vain gatherings. In very strong terms He declares His hatred and despite for "religion" that considers not the Word and the will of God. The application to the twenty-first century church begs to be made! When church leaders advocate for the acceptance in the church of that which God abhors and judges, we are so much like the Israelites of Amos' day. How must God feel toward the many who will assemble today, but whose meetings will be without clear Biblical teaching? How many people gather in a show of religion whose lives since last Sunday have not reflected the transformation of the grace of God? Whose pews and chairs are filled with singers who through the week sing a different song, one that dishonors the God they claim to

worship and serve! Assemblies and feasts rejected, He turns now to offerings brought with the hands but not with the heart. He will not, He cannot accept them. Though the best grain and livestock be brought, God will not regard them. Some might ask, "But isn't poor religion, empty religion better than no religion at all?" The Biblical answer, the answer that Amos would give is a resounding **"NO!"** It is worse by far, polluting God's nostrils with stench." Often the Psalmists (and others) had bidden Israel to praise her God in song. Such had become a part of their worship life, even as it is of ours. God says to the wicked among His people, "Sing to me no more. I will not listen to the music you play, either. Without heartfelt contrition and repentance, such audible offerings are just so much noise." May God make our praise acceptable. The prayer of Psalm 19:14 is, *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."*

24) Finally, the prophet issues a call while stating a fact. The fact is this - "God's justice and righteousness will endure, failing not." The call is, "Let these waters fill and clean your streams. Let righteousness and justice govern your hearts and lives." And the call rings clear to us today. Empty professing of a relationship with God, which is like a feeble, nearly dry stream, must be replaced with torrents of reality in faith. Such a reality will make men right with God, and it will make them behave rightly toward other men. Send those rivers to us today, Lord!

GOD RECALLS THE WILDERNESS WAYWARDNESS

25) Israel's twisting of the worship God desired and required was no new thing. All the way back to their wilderness journey after the Exodus, they were misguided in their hearts. Recall the golden calf they persuaded Aaron to fabricate even while they were waiting for Moses to bring the tablets of the law down from Mount Sinai.

26) Israel was quite methodical in their false worship. There was a **shrine**, a location dedicated to a deity, a **pedestal**, an elevated perch for the idol to sit on and be easily seen, and a **star**, a symbol of worship of heavenly bodies. Stephen made reference to worship of heavenly bodies in his great sermon in Acts 7 (particularly verse 43).

27) 2 Kings 17 is the sad record of the fulfillment of this prophecy by Amos. In less than 40 years (721 BC) Israel is to be defeated by the Assyrian armies under King Shalmaneser. The exile was ostensibly because Hoshea looked to Egypt for help against Assyria; the real reason was the sin of Israel, for which God punished them.

Chapter 6

A little about the geopolitical scene in the days of Amos is in order here. There was relative peace for a good while as Israel was governed by Jeroboam II, and Judah's king was Uzziah (also called "Azariah"). Each of these men reigned a significant length of time (Jeroboam 40 years and Uzziah over 50 years!), and their long reigns led to relative prosperity and peace, even peace between the two nations themselves. Things looked good politically, with each nation expanding their borders and enjoying good times economically. But all is not necessarily good that looks good outwardly - there was spiritual declension in both kingdoms. As our chapter opens, the prophet Amos challenges the leaders of both kingdoms ("Zion" and "Samaria") to visit some of their national neighbors and compare themselves with them. If they weren't so spiritually dull, they would recognize that they were very similar to their godless neighbors.

JUDGMENT FOR THE SELF-SECURE SAD DELUSION OF ISRAEL

1) The prophet Amos has been called by God to cry out against both Southern and Northern

Kingdoms, Judah and Israel. The word "Woe" means a judgment is coming if repentance doesn't come first. How much like our current national character was that of these pre-captivity kingdoms. Zion in the South and Samaria in the North were complacent with their security and prosperity. Sin didn't matter, and it doesn't seem to today. We see no clear enemy on the horizon, so we let our military erode. The economy seems sound, and so we excuse the wrongs of those we credit with our material successes. The frown of God was upon them, and I fear it is on us, too.

2), 3) Some lessons can be learned from geography and history, and Amos tells Israel to visit (in their observations) Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. The last of the three was defeated by Hazael of Syria, and again by Uzziah of Judah. The first two were towns in northern Syria that had been conquered by Shalmaneser of Assyria. These places were at least as well fortified and prepared for defense as were the cities of Israel, but they fell. Israel, you may think the day of disaster is far away, but you are wrong. What is really happening is that the seat of violence is near you. Your destruction is nearer than you might think.

SPIRITUAL DECLINE OF ISRAEL

4), 5), 6) There were in the north (Israel) and the south (Judah) similar complacent attitudes. Each kingdom felt that as "God's people" they were insulated from danger, safe from enemies. Yet the real enemy was within - spiritual dullness and coldness. In their prosperity the Israelites and the Judeans had become indulgent, unwatchful, careless, and lazy. Beds bedecked with ivory, usually reserved for thrones of the royal, were widespread. The types of food normally had only at great feasts became everyday fare, even veal from the young animals, a real delicacy. The ESV of verse 5 reads, *"who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music..."* This is not to malign David, but he was a shepherd, and as such he had lots of down time while watching the sheep. Amos' hearers were themselves idle when they should have been active. They were busy with entertainment instead of being gainfully employed to meet their own needs and the needs of others. Their drinking of wine would not be sufficed by cups or glasses; they used bowls instead. And they were anointing their bodies with oil, while giving no thought to spiritual needs. The *"ruin of Joseph"* seems to have been sinful corruption, and they did not grieve over it at all. Their priorities were all out of divine order.

SUITABLE DEFEAT OF ISRAEL

7) Actions have consequences; we cannot sow to the wind and expect to reap a gentle breeze. We will rather reap a whirlwind of destruction. The northern kingdom, Israel, will indeed be taken into exile by the Assyrians under the leadership of Shalmaneser, around 722-721 B.C. The southern kingdom would also be exiled from its home and carried away into Babylon just over 130 years later, the capital city of Jerusalem finally falling in 586 B.C.

8) When you see in English "The Lord GOD," as here, it is Adonai Yahweh - the God Who is in charge and is also Israel's self-existent covenant God. Another double-name follows, "LORD God," which translates Yahweh Elohe, the self-existent Strong One. This God swears by Himself, declaring that He hates the arrogance of His people (cf Proverbs 6:16, 17). The sin of pride does not become the people of God. They will pay with destruction and exile from their homeland.

9), 10) Shalmaneser will besiege Israel, particularly her capital, Samaria, for three years. Some who escape death in the war will likely die of starvation in the aftermath. A hypothetical situation is drawn: ten men die in one house; someone comes to remove the corpses and asks if anyone else is alive in the house. Someone there to help care for the bodies answers. As the conversation ensues, they agree not to call upon the Lord's name. This is fair, since they had not been honoring His name, and thus they had suffered this great tragedy of defeat and death and destruction. Why hypocritically call on Him now, when we would not do it when we should have?!

SORE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL

11) It is not enough for the ruthless Assyrian invaders to kill many and deport others to Assyria - they also will destroy the homes of their vanquished Israelite foes. Fields of debris will be seen where once stood the city of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. The great houses of the rich will not escape destruction, and the small huts of the poor won't be deemed too insignificant to leave behind. Today we would call this a "scorched earth policy."

12) The two interrogative examples given here by Amos are matters of absurdity. Horses do not run where mountain goats climb, nor can you plow a rocky mountain crag, or even a field full of rocks! Equally absurd is the moral failure of Israel - taking God's justice and poisoning it with greed, and taking God's sweet righteousness and replacing it with the bitterness of wormwood. If repentance does not come, the only choice is God's judgment.

13) The sinful arrogance of the Israelites is indicative of their expression of independence from God. Two insignificant places east of the Jordan had recently been taken by Israel. As always, the battle and the victories had been the Lord's, but Israel had in her pride pretended as if she had done this on her own. Do we today also act as if God doesn't exist? Do we live our lives as "practical atheists" while professing "religious faith" in God?

14) The Sovereign and Omnipotent God of heaven had raised up Israel to be a light to the nations; she had selfishly failed, and now God raised up Assyria as a superpower to chasten her for her sin. Israel's defeat and destruction would be complete, from Hamath (in the north) to the Arabah (the south) - like saying "from Maine to California." Actions have consequences; Israel's sin brought judgment, as sin always has and always will.

Chapter 7

Amos lived and prophesied during the monarchies of Uzziah in Judah (792-740 B.C.) And Jeroboam II in Israel (793-753 B.C.). These long reigns in the divided kingdoms had brought stability and prosperity. There was a great deal of social injustice, against which Amos railed. Amos opens with pronouncements of judgment against some of the neighbors of Israel and Judah, demonstrating that He is God of the Gentiles as well as God of the Jews. There is no geographical limit to His sovereignty! He cries out against Syria in the northeast and Gaza in the southwest. He speaks of punishment for Tyre on the northwest and Edom on the southeast. His final declarations against Gentile nations covers the eastern neighbors of Ammon and Moab. Most of what led to these pronouncements was the way the nations treated God's people, Israel. God had promised Abraham that those who mistreated the Jew would pay for it. It was not, however, for the Jew to sin and avoid judgment. Next Amos spoke out against the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Judah would be judged for rejecting the law of God, and Israel's judgment would come because of social injustice and immorality.

JUDGMENTS THAT WERE NOT TO BE THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS

1) Once again, we are looking at the curses from Deuteronomy 28, this time from verse 38, "You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it." In a vision, Amos was allowed to see what would happen in such a case, and it was devastating. God could use locusts to punish Israel for violating the covenant with Him.

2) The devastation was immense, and there would be nothing for the people to eat! Starvation would be a miserable end for them. At the end of the vision Amos plead with the Lord for forgiveness for the people. They could not survive the locust plague, and like Moses of old, Amos

interceded for the people. God bless this big-hearted, compassionate prophet. Give us men like him in the church of the Lord Jesus today!

3) *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,"* James said (5:16). Theodore Laetsch wrote, "One man's prayer saved the nation." God's heart can be affected by prayer, and we must be a people of prayer! The punishment planned was withdrawn, but the nation was not out of the woods - just experiencing a lessening and a postponing of the inevitable. Exodus 32:14 comes to mind, *"So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."* Let us be persistent in our intercession for others.

THE PERIL OF FIRE

4) In a second vision Amos saw the land being devoured by fire. It was a judgment called forth by the sovereign LORD. Great was Yahweh's controversy with Israel to plan such a fearful destruction for the land! Deuteronomy 28:23-24 had predicted, warned of drought that would turn the earth to a dust-dry powder. In such an environment, a single spark could start a conflagration. Fire would eat up every combustible thing in sight.

5), 6) Again Amos intercedes for the people, crying out, *"O, Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!"* The ears of God hear his cry, and the heart of God is touched, moved to relenting of that which he had planned. We remember Jeremiah's (33:3) word from God, *"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."* *"This also shall not be," said the Lord GOD.* Punishment will come to Israel, but it will not be the fire from Amos' vision.

THE PLUMB LINE

7), 8) Two judgments had been seen by the prophet (7:1-6) as coming on Israel. He prayed for God to relent, and in each case Israel was spared. Now comes another vision, and Amos describes it. In the vision Amos observes the Lord standing by a stone wall, and He is holding a plumbline in His hand. For some who may not know, a plumbline is a piece of string with a weight attached. The weight holds the line straight, and gravity holds it perpendicular to the ground. It was used to determine the straightness of a wall. Yahweh is the builder, come later to inspect His wall. He had built it plumb, but now it was off-plumb. Why? Because the foundation had weakened - Israel had abandoned the foundation of truth and righteousness in favor of one of security and prosperity. They had become at ease, complacent. He had spared them from previous judgments, but would delay their punishment no longer. The day of wrath had come, and Israel would smart for her sins. Maybe she would return to God. Again, how like our day is this! We have abandoned the foundation on which we were built, and surely God will not delay our judgment much longer. Some are praying for God to send whatever it takes to bring us back to Him as a people. It is a frightening thing to think what it might take to restore our nation.

9) God specifically promises destruction here. Sin always has an awful price. Centers of idolatrous worship. "the high places," would be brought low. "Isaac" and "Israel" were both synonyms for the Northern Kingdom. Remember that Jeroboam I had built two centers of worship for golden calves at Dan and Bethel. Many other altars of false worship had sprung up, and this did not match up to God's plumb line of the law - *"No other Gods before Me."* God also promised to bring the sword against the house of Jeroboam for their part in this offense of idolatry.

Yahweh spoke through Amos of what He had done for His people, how He had brought them out of Egypt and destroyed the Amorites before them in the land when they arrived 40 years later. After going into great detail about the sins of His people, the Lord calls upon them to repent and turn to Him. "Seek Me and live," He says repeatedly. "Seek good and not evil, that you may live... hate

evil... love good... establish justice.” In the early verses of our chapter, Amos saw visions of judgment, but he prayed for Israel and God relented - twice! But the third vision of a plumb line showed that Israel was so crooked that God could not relent again, and she would be judged!

DON'T MESS WITH GOD'S PROPHET **AN IMPUDENT, INSULTING PRIEST**

10) These two men, Amaziah the priest and Jeroboam the king, are not God's true servants. In a better time and place, such officers would represent the Lord. The priest would speak to God on behalf of the people, and the king would rule the people justly on behalf of God. The words of the prophecy of Amos were a threat to the respective positions of these two men. So the priest, Amaziah, reports to the king, Jeroboam, that Amos is leading a conspiracy against the king - “the hope and peace of the land will be undermined by his preaching!”

11) In verse 8 Amos said, “*And the LORD said to me...*” Instead of quoting Amos accurately, Amaziah made out that these were the words of Amos, and that Amos predicted that Jeroboam would die. Amos did say on behalf of God that God's sword would come against the house of Jeroboam (verse 9), but they were God's words, not Amos'! And he did clearly say in 6:7 that Israel would go into exile, but he prefaced it in the larger paragraph by saying several times in chapter five things like “thus says the Lord” (5:3, 16) and “says the Lord” (5:27).

12), 13) The wicked priest, Amaziah, tried to banish Amos from the northern kingdom, especially from Bethel. Calling him a “Seer,” the older term for “prophet” (1 Samuel 9:9), used to reflect the fact that God gave them visions, and they could “see.” So, with a series of three imperative verbs, Amaziah ordered Amos to go to Judah and prophesy there, as though he (Amaziah) had authority over him in this place, Bethel. 1 Kings 12 related that when the kingdom divided, the first Jeroboam (son of Nebat) made Bethel a center of worship with a golden calf. This was to prevent the Israelites in the northern kingdom from returning to Jerusalem for worship. As a priest there, Amaziah acted as though he could command concerning spiritual activity, including Amos prophesying. He implied that Amos prophesied for gain with the words “*eat bread there*” (13). Prophets had certainly done that, as we see in Micah 3:5, 11, but Amos was no hireling - he was called by God to do His work! What will the man of God do in the face of this confrontation? Will he stand his ground, or will he leave?

A GOD-INSPIRED, GOD-INSTRUCTED PROPHET

14) What was Amos saying here? That he wasn't part of a dynasty of prophets, with the office inherited from a parent? Was he saying that he had no training and credentials like those men called “the sons of the prophets,” whom Elisha had repeatedly encountered in the course of his ministry? Whatever the case there, Amos let it be known that he had earned his living with livestock and orchards! Perhaps this was to offset Amaziah's implied charge that he prophesied for money. It's a great offense to God's preachers to imply their motivation is greed.

15) It is as if Amos said to Amaziah, “I hear your words, including your commands to leave and return to Judah, but I get my orders from elsewhere! Yahweh snatched me from the flock, and He gave me my orders!” With two imperatives of his own, Amos declared that Yahweh said to him, “Go (imperative) and prophesy (imperative) to my people Israel!” The message was God's, and the geography of the command was His - Israel, not Judah!

16) Nose to nose with the false priest, Amos said, “**You say** I must stop prophesying here at Bethel, that I should not **drop my words** in this place.” This is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures where this phrase, “*house of Isaac*” is used. It is always elsewhere “house of Jacob” (21 times) or more often “house of Israel” (150 times).

17) Now Amos lowers the boom on this wicked priest, this lackey of the king. First, Amos

addresses Amaziah's family's future. How it must have stung to hear that his wife would become a prostitute in Bethel! Even more painful was the news that his children would be slain by the sword! With none to inherit his property, it would be divided to others. Last, the Israelites would go into captivity, and Amaziah would be with them, dying in Assyria!

Chapter 8

Join me in a little background review: Amos was not trained in the schools of the prophets, nor was he an understudy to some great man like Elijah (as was Elisha). He was a "herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (7:14). From this rural background, God called Amos to cry out against Judah and Israel for their sins. Each kingdom, Judah in the south and Israel in the north, had prospered under the long reigns of their kings, Uzziah and Jeroboam II, respectively. In their prosperity and security, they had become spiritually dull and arrogant. They had forgotten to acknowledge God. From as long ago as the days of Moses, God had promised that if the people turned away from Him, He would judge them with defeat, destruction, and with being sent away into captivity. The time for God to keep His promise had come.

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

THE ILLUSTRATION OF READINESS FOR JUDGMENT

1) In the West, we tend to teach (I certainly do) with outlines and bullet points to explain things. The Eastern mind is more inclined to telling stories or painting word pictures to accomplish the same end. Images are of known things to teach the unknown things - notice the parables and pictures in Christ's teachings. Here Amos is shown a basket of ripe summer fruit. God will compare the northern kingdom Israel to that fruit for the purpose of teaching.

2) Another Hebraic pedagogy method is asking questions - once again, look at the teaching ministry of Jesus and notice how often He asks His hearers questions. So, God asks Amos what he sees? The simple reply is that he sees a basket of ripe fruit. Now comes the sad but inevitable announcement that Israel is ripe for God's judgment because of her unrepented-of sins! God has actually spared them from the coming judgment for some time, but He will spare them no longer. The day of mercy has expired, and the Lord could hold back no longer.

3) Surely the prophet is saddened to see Israel's future as God reveals it to him; *"In that day,"* O what a sad time was upon them. It is easy for us to see in generalities the exiling of the people into the Assyrian captivity, their replacement in the land with Assyrians who mingled with the remaining Israelites and produce the Samaritan mongrels. But Amos might have seen individual suffering and death - families torn apart, babies ripped from their mothers' wombs. Long lines of captives would be fastened to ropes with hooks in their jaws. He heard the ceasing of the sounds of worship, and he saw bodies lying dead - and then the awful silence, the quietness of death! They were scenes like that of the destruction of Jerusalem that led Jesus to mourn and weep on the Mount of Olives. May God bless us with the ability to see the ill effects of sin with the eyes of our hearts that we might better live for Him.

THE INDICTMENT OF THE REBELLIOUS JEWS

4), 5), 6) With godly boldness, and no doubt with a broken heart, Amos cries out now against the sins that are leading to this awful judgment that God sends by the hands of the Assyrians. He uses two phrases to speak of their sad mistreatment of the less fortunate, the people who should be the objects of pity compassion, and care. He refers to the Israelites as those who in their greedy quest for riches *"trample needy and do away with the poor."* This treatment of those in difficult circumstances of life flies in the face of God's design that the "haves" must help to care for the "have-nots." So often Bible writers cried out against such failure to obey God: (Proverbs 30:14, Job

20:19; Psalm 14:4; Amos 2:7). Additionally, they could not wait for religious festivals, including the Shabbat, to end so they could return to their money-grubbing ways! And when they did business, they cheated those with whom they dealt! The law of God through Moses forbade such evil practices (Leviticus 19:35–36). In Deuteronomy 15:7–11, God had commanded open-handed, even-handed treatment of the poor. Israel had miserably failed in this, even allowing a poor person to be sold into slavery over the price of a pair of sandals! How God's heart must have ached (then and NOW) over the greedy practices of His people, whether Jews then or Christian believers now!

THE INEVITABILITY OF REAPING IN JUSTICE

7) The phrase, *"the Pride of Jacob,"* seems to be a title God had given Himself, similar to a phrase, *"the Glory of Israel,"* found in 1 Samuel 15:29. That God would not forget the wicked deeds of Israel does not conflict with statements like *"their sins and iniquities I will remember no more."* When we repent and turn to God in faith, our sins are buried in the sea of His forgetfulness. But when we hold onto them, so does the memory of God.

8) When the Assyrian hordes come against Israel, it will seem as if the ground moves because of the approach! The sense will be that the land rises and falls like the waters of the lower Nile in its co-operation with the tidal flow. The devastation caused by the invasion will be so horrendous that the citizens of Israel will grieve and mourn.

9), 10) Light being turned into darkness as a sign of grief and mourning is seen repeatedly in Scripture - here are a few such passages: Job 5:14; Isaiah 59:9–10; Jeremiah 13:16; 15:9; Ezekiel 32:7; Amos 5:8; Micah 3:6; Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44–45. Those last three references were to God pulling the shade over the light of the sun when He dealt with Jesus about our sins. Judgment coming upon Israel is characterized as a reversal of fortunes - light into darkness, feasting into mourning, singing into weeping, and the traditional wearing of rough clothes and shaving the head to indicate brokenness. The mourning of Israel will not be just like any grief, but it will be like the mourning over a loss that would end a family line - the loss of an only son. God does not delight in the judgment of His people, but it is a necessary part of His absolutely just character and dealings.

THE IMPACT OF REFUSING TRUTH

11), 12) A man approached the door of a shelter years ago, and he had been there and caused trouble on several previous occasions. Finally, the porter asked, "Why do you insist on going where you are no longer welcome." Now perhaps kinder words may have been spoken, but the principle is not altogether lacking in truth. And since Israel has for so long rejected the words of God through His prophets, and in view of the fact that His chastenings have been disregarded, Yahweh says something similar. He says, "Since you don't want my Words, I will withdraw them from you." There will be a famine, not of food and drink, but of revelation from God. In the absence of truth from heaven, men may develop a thirst and hunger for it, but they will search in vain to find it. From sea to sea, and from north to east, they may search, but God's Word will not be found by them. They said "No" too often, and now God says "No" to their quest for His Word.

13), 14) The strongest among the people will not survive - the young men and young women. This dearth of truth from heaven will leave them weak and famished as hunger and thirst will weaken the physical body. The sin of Samaria, the false worship of Dan, and the cult of Beersheva have failed to satisfy the deep longings of the soul. Now the absence of true religion, the silence of heaven, will render them faint and falling, to rise as a people no more.

Chapter 9

The fifth and final vision of Amos is disturbing in its opening, but comforting in its conclusion. Amos lives in a time when the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob lived mostly (if not exclusively) in the Land of Promise. In this vision he sees them scattered among the nations, a thing heretofore not experienced, but promised by Yahweh if they do not uphold the covenant to which they agreed at Sinai. Check this out in Deuteronomy 4:27, 28:37, 65, 30:1. That scattering will be punitive and thorough, but Israel will maintain its identity, even in the diaspora. This is a thing unique to Israel, that she was never assimilated, even though spread throughout the world. God also has a restoration plan for her, as seen in the final third of the final chapter. To those who say that God is finished with Israel, I direct you to the words of the prophet: Jeremiah 31:35–36 “Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever.”

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES, CONTINUED

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD

1) Jeroboam I had made calves for worship at Dan and at Bethel, as has been noted, in an attempt to prevent the people from returning to the Temple at Jerusalem and possibly undermining the unity of his new kingdom in the north. In his vision at some place of false worship stood the prophet Amos to observe what would happen. Adonai was present, but not to be worshiped. He was there to judge, and judge He did! He ordered someone (presumably an angel) to begin demolition of the place of idol worship. Many would die in this collapse, and those who escaped would be slain with the sword. God was not playing games with these rebels

2), 3), 4) A parallel is seen here with Psalm 139:8-10; there is no escape from God. That is a good thing for the one who believes and obeys - that God is ever with him, wherever and whenever he goes. But for the rebel it is not so good - he may think of fleeing from God's judging wrath, but such is futile thinking. Yahweh sees in heaven's heights and into the depths of Sheol. If one ascended Carmel or swam to the depths of the Mediterranean, there God will search them out and chasten them. Neither would there be safety and protection in the huddled masses of captives led away by an enemy into exile; even there will reach the sword of the Lord. And in that case the sword will not be wielded against the enemy, but against the Israelite rebels themselves!

5), 6) Notice the different spellings of the names of deity here - Lord GOD of hosts. The first word translates “Adonai,” the name meaning God is in charge. The second, GOD, is Yahweh, the self-existent covenant God of Israel. Finally, the expression “of hosts,” is Sabaoth. Recall Luther's hymn line, “Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle.” This is especially Israel's God, but not theirs exclusively. He is Sovereign over the universe. He can melt the earth and make its inhabitants mourn. The earth can be made to pulsate, moving up and down like the waves of the stormy sea. The heavens are His home - atmospheric heaven where the birds fly, stellar heaven, home of the sun, moon, and stars, and the third heaven, the abode of God. Yet He is not confined there; the earth is His, as well, at least three times called His “footstool.” His creation wisdom ordained for the great seas to yield water through evaporation into clouds. The clouds then distribute the waters over the land of earth. Yahweh is His name! And He is sovereign!

RETRIBUTION FOR THE SINFUL PEOPLE

7) Yahweh tells Israel that He has shuffled nations on the map to do His will. Specifically mentioned are Egypt, Philistia, and Syria. Were any peoples more the thorns in Israel's sides than these? And God had placed them from other locations to the borders of Israel on the south, the west, and the north. Again and again He would use them as chastening rods for the backsides of

His people.

8), 9), 10) Israel, chosen and beloved by God, privileged with light such as no other nation had, the sovereign Lord would judge for their wrongs, and judge severely. They would not, however, face extinction from among the nations. He will shake them as in a sieve, but the kernels would not be lost. A remnant is always in existence, as Paul set forth in these passages: Romans 9:27 *And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a **remnant** of them will be saved,* 11:5 *So too at the present time there is a **remnant**, chosen by grace.* A besetting sin of Amos' day was so like one that the prophet Jeremiah encountered in Judah some time later. They would say, *"Disaster will not overtake us or meet us."* Yet God's prophets clearly predicted the fall of both kingdoms if the people persisted in their sinful ways.

RESTORATION OF A REMNANT

*Don't forget that Joel's **yom Yahweh**, the "day of the LORD," is a time of God manifesting His presence and power for the world of men to see and experience. Part of that is Tribulational judgment ("time of Jacob's trouble" - Jeremiah 30:7), and part of it is blessing. The Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth will be a season of unprecedented prosperity and peace. Two contributing factors to that blessing will be the absence of Satan and the presence of Christ.*

11) The scattering, shaking, and sifting of Israel will accomplish God's divine design, and they will be ready for restoration. The expression "In that day" is found over 115 times in Scripture. It was an especial favorite of the prophets (Isaiah 43, Jeremiah 5, Ezekiel 7, Minor Prophets 39), and Amos used it 5 times, this one being the last. God has a plan, and it has a schedule, and in "that day" He will accomplish His will for Israel and the Gentile world. The fallen tabernacle of David will be rebuilt and repaired. And when Israel returns to glory, so will the Gentile world prosper. Listen to Paul in Romans 11:12, *"Now if their (Israel's) trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!"* Watch out world, the best is yet to come!

12) Israel's elevation will not be a diminishing of other nations; rather, the Gentile world will be blessed even more when Israel is the head of the nations. Even today, just look at what Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob have given the world! So many advances in technology and medicine that came from the Jews bless the world on a daily basis. See Steven L. Pease's *The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement* for a sampling of Jewish contributions to the world. Israel was designed from the beginning to be a channel of God's benefits to mankind - *"In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3). And Simeon spoke of the greatest Son of Abraham that He would be, *"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of Thy people, Israel"* (Luke 2:32).

13), 14), 15) The story of the wandering Jew has been one of mixed joy and sadness, poverty and plenty, honor and shame. Scattered among the nations of the earth for centuries, nay, for millennia, they have kept their Jewish identity. In most cases they have risen from the ashes to lead the world's progress into a more prosperous future. They have done this against all odds, and with very little help from the nations whom they have blessed by their presence. At every turn the monstrous specter of antisemitism has raised its ugly head in attempts to deceive the world and demean the Jew. And yet they move forward, impelled by a spirit placed in them from heaven, I think. And one day, yes, *"in that day,"* they who have been *"an astonishment, a proverb and a byword among all nations"* (Deuteronomy 28:37) will have their rightful place among the nations of the world. Jesus will sit on David's throne of earth's governance, and prosperity will be the order of the day. There will be agricultural blessing such as the world has never known. Hunger will be abolished by plenty. Israel will be restored, and her ancient cities shall be rebuilt and inhabited by

the Jews. Vineyards and gardens will produce wine and food in abundance. And the crowning glory (other than coming to faith in Jesus, their Messiah) will be their re-establishing in the Land of Promise, never to be uprooted again.