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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Amos 7:10-17 1:1-2

31. THE BOOK OF AMOS

Try and picture this scene. It is about 25 years before the fall of Israel to Assyria. We are visiting the city of Bethel where King Jeroboam the Second has his private chapel or church and Amaziah is his priest. The nation of Israel is enjoying peace and prosperity, in fact it is living in luxury. The impressive service us about to begin and Amaziah is in charge. Suddenly we hear a commotion outside the church, “*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion,*” cries a voice. “*God will send judgment on this wicked nation.*” We rush outside and there we find a rustic hill preacher from Tekoa, named Amos. He is not a prophet in the professional sense, for his father was not a prophet, neither did he attend the prophetic schools. (7:10-17) But he is God’s man with God’s message and he is warning that judgment is coming to Israel. He uses the word “*captivity,*” several times in his book. (5:5, 27, 6:7 7:9, 17) Now who is this shepherd farmer and what message is he bringing to Israel ? Well, let’s think for a moment about,

THE MAN:

His Name: means “*burden,*” or “*burden bearer,*” and he is not to be confused with Amoz, the father of Isaiah.

(Is 1:1) Being a mid- 8th century prophet Amos was a contemporary of Jonah (2 Kings 14:25) Hosea (Hos 1:1) and Isaiah (Is 1:1) He hailed from Tekoa, which lay twelve miles south of Jerusalem, six miles south of Bethlehem, overlooking the Dead Sea. Amos therefore belonged to Judah the southern kingdom of the divided nation. The name Tekoa is interesting. It’s thought to mean “*the pitching of tents.*” Amos may not have had any permanent dwelling for the shepherds and their families would have lived in a small cluster of tents. Amos was what we might call “*a rough diamond,*” plain and straightforward in his life and speech.

His Job: was interesting. He was a herdsman and also looked after sycamore trees. Dressing sycamore figs meant slitting the fruit to encourage the ripening. This may all point to Amos being a general farm labourer a “*jack of all trades.*” Now sycamore figs tended to be the food of the poor moreover is work as a shepherd would have put Amos in the social basement as some rabbis rated a shepherd no better than a heathen. *So can you see this man ?* He had not a great job, he had no religious training, he was not an obvious candidate for preaching but under God’s hand and by God’s grace he was exactly the right man for the job. I mean can you imagine the impression his appearance would make at Bethel or Samaria ? Imagine the reaction of a Scottish highlander standing on the steps of St. Paul’s Cathedral announcing the judgment of God to England ? Can you picture the reaction ? Yet here is Amos a country preacher, a cowboy with the burden of the Lord upon him wending his way north past Jerusalem, on out of Judah across the border

into the sister kingdom of Israel and on north to Bethel to preach God's judgment. You see, he was sure of,

His Calling: I mean look at (7:14-15) Here was a man with A Divine Call: “ *the Lord took me,* ” A Divine Charge: “ *Prophecy,* ” A Divine Commission: “ *Unto my people Israel.* ” Amos had not been trained in any of the schools of the prophets. He had no academic or theological training, but then God is sovereign in His choice of servants. He is not tied to any bishop's hands. He is not bound to any set of officials. He is not restricted in His workings to any recognized ministerial order. You know, a man with God's call has a note of authority about him. “ *Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord.* ” (7:16) My when Amos marched north around 760 B.C. and when he delivered his messages from God, and then wrote them down, he became the first of the writing prophets. So much for the man, what about,

THE AGE:

In which he served. The opening verse tells us that he prophesied “ *in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash king of Israel two years before the earthquake.* ” (1:1) It was during the reign of Jeroboam the Second that the territory of Israel was enlarged. The prophecy given by Jonah the prophet came to fruition. (2 Kings 14:25) Still again, these were days when there was no significant world empire. Neither Egypt, Syria, Assyria or Babylon was a power of such magnitude as to pose an out and out threat to the region. And so it was,

A Time of Prosperity:

The height of fashion was to have a second home what they called a “ *summerhouse,* ” to which you could go in the heat of the summer, usually up in the hills. Freedom of commerce built an ever increasing wealthy upper class. The people rested on beds of ivory, dined on fine wines and choice calves, and were enjoying a high standard of luxury. These good conditions were not so good for in such times people forget God and worship pleasure. As someone has said, “ *prosperity is good campaigning weather for the devil.* ”

A Time of Peace:

Assyria was the big boy of the day but Jonah's visit to Nineveh had effectively postponed their threat to Israel for some time.

A Time of Poverty:

Amos spoke often of the poor and needy (2:6) The calloused heart of the rich made it,

A Time of Persecution:

The rich sold the poor like cattle (2:6) and cheated them in court (5:12-13) This was the sin that angered Amos the most, the apathy (2:7; 6:6) and antagonism (4:1; 6:3) of the wealthy who called themselves the people of God. Though Amos doesn't mention it much, it was

A Time of Perversion:

Morally: there was illicit sex as a father and son went in to the same woman (2:7) There was the excessive use of alcohol (6:6) Israel needed to learn that a civilization built on dirt cannot stand. Yet,

Religiously: these cruel, calloused people “ *were in church every Sunday.* ” My the land “ **oozed,** ” with religion. This is what infuriated Amos. It is always sickening to see injustice or immorality join hands with Christianity and make it appear they are friends. If sin is a welcome guest in your house, you will never be welcomed in God’s house in heaven (Rev. 22:14-15) These people went to church but didn’t carry church with them back into the world.

A Time of Probation:

(9:1-4) The end was coming for the Northern Kingdom and Amos knew it. The Judgment of God was about to fall and Amos preached it (7:8-9;8:9-14;) Indeed forty years after he preached, in 722 B.C., the Assyrians marched on Israel and removed the Ten Tribes to Assyria. The Man, the Age, but what about,

THE TRUTH:

Amos preached. Well we get a hint of that in (7:11) “ *For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall be led away captive out of their own land.* ” That was the burden of the prophet’s message. God was

going to judge the nation and the king and sent them into exile. Why ? Because there was an absence of true worship (4:4-5 5:4-6) and a lack of justice. (5:10-13 6:12) Now its interesting to notice that in this book Amos looks in different directions.

(1) AMOS LOOKS OUTWARD Ch’s 1-2

Amos delivers God’s message in an interesting way. Comparing this account with a map of ancient Israel you find that Amos goes round the boundaries of Israel in various directions delivering a message concerning all the neighboring nations. Destruction of all these surrounding nations sounded good to Israel and she rejoiced in it not realizing that she was the real target of God’s anger and wrath. Now this section concerns eight songs what are called “ *The Doom Songs.* ” Notice here that,

(a) Judgment is Pronounced upon the Gentiles:

Amos starts by condemning Israel’s neighbours. Now there is a pattern here in each of these pronouncements. Notice,

The Authority: Do you see it every time ? “ *Thus saith the Lord,* ” (1:3, 9, 11,) I mean you would think that they could hear a lion roar or the thunder roll and know that danger was at hand. God was speaking thundering from Jerusalem for judgment always begins at the house of God. (1:2) He had sent drought to the land so that even fruitful Carmel was withering but it didn’t bring the

people to their knees. So God called a common farmer to preach to His people and warn them. (1:2) The phrase “ *Thus saith the Lord,*” or its equivalent appears thirty nine times in the book of Amos.

The Announcement: “ *For three transgressions and for four,*” (1:3) is a Jewish idiom that means “ *an indefinite number that has finally come to the end.*” The measure of the sin of the people was full, literally it had overreached itself. The sin of these people had reached breaking point. They had gone beyond the limit of God’s patience.

The Accusation: Do you see the word “ *because,*” each time ? (1:3, 6, 9) Amos begins with Syria (1:3-5) and accuses them of awful cruelty in war. Next he moves down the west coast to the ancient land of Philistia or what is called Gaza. Again, he reminds Israel that God has judged this land. Why ? Because the people have participated in the slave trade. Then he moves back up the coast to Tyre, on the northwest side of Israel. There he says that God judged Tyre because the people broke their agreements. He continues on to the land of Edom, “ *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite,*” God declared. (Deut 23:7) But the Edomites ever hated the Hebrews. Edom is accused of not showing pity to Israel but maintaining an unforgiving spirit, something that multitudes of believers know all about. Amos then moves up the east side of Israel to the land of Ammon, what is known today as Jordan. And Ammon is judged for bitter cruelty and selfish greed. (1:13-15) As he travels south he pronounces God’s judgment on Moab for cruelty to Edom

(2:1-13) Next he comes to the southern kingdom of Judah. There he declares that because Judah has despised God’s law, judgment has fallen on the nation. Finally, he turns to the heart of the ten northern tribes of Israel and declares that God is going to judge them because of the corruption and injustice that was in their hearts. *Now before we turn to God’s messages to Judah and Israel maybe we should pause and reflect on these judgments on Gentile nations.* Though they were not under law of Moses these nations were responsible to God for what they did and responsibility brings accountability. My God sees what the nations do and He judges them accordingly.

God moved against the inhumane cruelty of these greedy, warlike people. And that same God is alive today. We look out at man’s inhumanity to man. We see child abuse. We see one nation invading another nation. We see rape and murder and exploitation on every hand. And we wonder, “ *Is there a God ? Does He care? Why doesn’t He do something ?*” My world news from day to day may give the impression that evil leaders are getting away with terrible crimes but God is still on the throne and will punish evil doers in His good time. (Acts 17:24-28) (a)

(b) Judgment is Pronounced on the Jews:

“ *I don’t know why you preach about the sins of Christians,*” a church member said to the pastor. “ *After all, the sins of Christians are different from the sins of unsaved people.*” “ *Yes,*” replied the pastor “ *they are worse.*” Now can you imagine that as Amos was

delivering this blistering message of judgment against all the surrounding neighbors of Israel and even against Judah (2:14-5) that the people of Israel were shouting Amen. They were delighted to hear that their enemies were going to get it. But now this mighty man of valor, this God - called prophet, this fire and brimstone preacher, this prophet of Thunder, turns on his heels and points his finger right in the face of Israel and gives them a message.

It reminds me of the story of an old country Christian who like myself was a bit overweight. And this old boy would sit Sunday after Sunday smiling and nodding as the pastor preached about swearing, drinking, smoking and cursing. But one Sunday the pastor preached against the sin of gluttony, and this boy was incensed. After the service he stomped up to the preacher and said, “ *You have ceased to be a preaching and you have started to be a meddling.* ” Church people love it when we preach to somebody else when we last out at sinners. It is when we “ *quit preaching and go to meddling,* ” that we get in trouble. Will Amos gets into meddling for notice the charges he brought against Israel. There was,

INJUSTICE: (2:6-7)

The poor could not get fair justice in the courts because of the greed of corrupt judges who were always ready to accept a bribe. “ *They sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes.* ” (2:6) James Montgomery Boice warns “ *There is no seeking after God that is not at the same time a seeking after justice. Anything else is hypocrisy.* ”

IMMORALITY: (2:7-8)

A father and a son were visiting the same prostitute. These may have been cult prostitutes who were part of the heathen idolatrous worship. (3:14) You see at the temple at Bethel the worshippers had sex with male and female prostitutes believing that this would persuade the Lord to bless their crops. I tell you no wonder judgment was coming.

INTOXICATION: (2:8)

While lying upon the clothes illegally taken from the poor the rich drank wine that they purchased by fines illegally imposed upon the poor and they did this “ *in the house of their god.* ” (2:8) Not only that but look at (2:12) “ *But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink and commanded the prophets saying prophesy not.* ” Do you see what was happening ? Deliberate attempts were made to seduce these believers from their allegiance to the Lord. It's a sad day when you get Christians encouraging other believers to drink.

INGRATITUDE: (2:9-12)

The Lord had led His people out of Egypt (2:10) cared for them in the wilderness (2:10) and destroyed other nations so the Jews could claim their inheritance in Canaan. (2:9-10) God had poured out His blessings upon Israel but how did Israel react to these benefits ? They corrupted the land, they rejected the message of the prophets, and they forced the Nazirites to break their holy

vows. Bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ingratitude, drunkenness, and rejecting God's revelation. No wonder Amos cries, "*I am pressed under this burden of sin.*" (2:13) There is no alternative, judgment is coming and no-one will be able to escape. (2:14-16) (1)

(2) AMOS LOOKS INWARD: Ch's 3-6

Having announced judgment to the nations, Amos now looks within the hearts of the people and explains why this judgment is coming. Now please remember that Israel was enjoying a time of peace, prosperity, and "*religious revival.*" People were attending religious services and bringing generous offerings. But the true servants of God do not look at the outward appearance, they look at the heart. In these chapters, (Ch 3-6) Amos delivers three sermons, each one prefaced by, this phrase "*Hear this word,*" (3:1 4:1 5:1) The first message declares Israel's guilt in the present, the second message stresses Israel's sin in the past and the third message emphasizes Israel's punishment in the future. Notice then that Amos deals with,

(a) THE PRESENT: (Ch 3-15)

"*How can our God send judgment upon us ?*" the people were asking. "*Are we not His chosen people ?*" But that was the very reason for the judgment. Where there is privilege, there must also be responsibility. Increased privileges means increased responsibility. Israel had been supremely favoured and therefore was supremely responsible. Do you see what the Lord says in (3:2) ?

Here they were rejoicing in their privileges thinking that God would say, "*You only have I known therefore I will prosper you.*" But no God says, "*I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" (3:2) Sure, Israel were an "*elect nation,*" God had chosen them, called them and blessed them but that involved responsibility. They were responsible to love God and obey Him. If they didn't God was responsible to chasten them and restore them to Himself. My the doctrine of election is not an excuse for sin, its an incentive to holiness.

We should be so humbled by His grace and so amazed by His love (1 Jn 3:1-2) that our hearts would want to do nothing else but worship and serve Him. You see, privilege always brings with it responsibility. "*For unto whomsoever much is given of him shall much be required.*" (Lk 12:48) Amos describes the relationship between God and His people as two walking together. "*Can two walk together except they be agreed ?*" (3:3) Incidentally, you cannot "*walk together,*" with someone in romance unless they are saved,. You cannot "*walk together,*" with someone in business unless they are saved. You cannot "*walk together,*" with someone in evangelism unless they are saved. You see, Amos is using an argument from cause and effect. If two people are walking together, they must have made an appointment (3:3) If a lion roars, he has prey (3:4) If a bird is in the trap, somebody set the trap (3:5) If the trumpet sounds, calamity is near (3:6) If the prophet is preaching, then God must have sent him (3:7) And God sent Amos to declare judgment on Israel. The Assyrians are coming to destroy the nation (3:9-15) and the lovely services at

Bethel will not hold them back. And the luxurious homes of the wealthy will all be destroyed. (a)

(b) THE PAST: (4:1-13)

Do you see what he says in (4:1) Do you know who Amos was talking to ? He was speaking to the “ *upper class*,” women of Samaria ? These “ *society women*,” lounged about all day drinking wine and telling their husbands what to do. Now Amos did not use this image because these women were overweight and looked like cows, but because by their sins they were fattening themselves up for the coming slaughter. You see, they were marked by **Luxurious Living**: the word “ *luxury*,” comes from a Latin word that means “ *excessive*.” It originally referred to plants that grow abundantly but then it came to refer to people who have an abundance of money, time and comfort which they use for themselves as they live in aimless pleasure. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his own journal, “ *Our expense is almost all for conformity. It is for cake that we all run in debt.*” Now it is not a sin to be rich and to have the comforts of life. It is not a problem to own things, the problem comes when things own us. The wealthy in Israel had everything that money could buy, but they did not have the things that money can’t buy, the things of the Lord that make life worthwhile. There was not only luxurious living but there was **Worthless Worship**: do you see (4:4-5) ? Do you see what Amos is doing ? He was making fun of their worship because it was not from the heart but strictly for show. They were indulging in what Gareth Crossley calls “ *a perverted religion formed of a mishmash of pagan*

ceremonies and a corrupted form of Jehovah worship.” My the Lord hates worship that is merely a performance but not a living experience. A.W. Tozer was right to say,

For the true Christian the one supreme test for present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious must be the place our Lord occupies in it.

In the current trend toward “ *user friendly*,” services our constant concern should be “ *what would glorify the Lord ?*” Entertainment is no substitute for worship, tickling people’s ears is no substitute for touching God’s heart, and amusing ourselves is no substitute for delighting Him. My the people of Israel “ *loved*,” going to religious meetings but they didn’t love the God they claimed to worship. I wonder like the Jews in Amos day are we only going to Bethel and sinning ? Isn’t it interesting that God had sent warnings to the nation but they would not listen. I mean five times in (Ch 4) God says, “ *Yet have ye not returned unto me saith the Lord.*” Do you see what God sent ?

- 1. Famine: A Food Shortage: (4:6)**
- 2. Drought: A Water Shortage: (4:7-8)**
- 3. Ravaged Crops: (4:9)**
- 4. Sickness: (4:10a)**
- 5. Defeat in war: (4:10b)**
- 6. Catastrophe: (4:11)**
- 7. Ultimate Judgment: (4:12-13)**

Through these disciplines the Lord had tried to speak to His people and bring them to repentance but they would not return to Him. What more could God do ? He would come Himself and deal with them. “ *Prepare to meet thy God O Israel.* ” For the Lord of Hosts would come with the Assyrian army and take the people away like cattle being led to the slaughter. So Amos deals with (a) (b)

(c) *THE PROSPECT: (5:1-6:14)*

Do you see how (Ch 5) begins ? A lamentation was a funeral dirge over the death of the nation of Israel. Can you see here the prophet weeping ? Amos weeps as he contemplates the judgments coming on His people. The scope of that judgment is indicated in (5:3) which suggests that 90% of the people will die. This is why Amos time and again uses the word “ *seek.* ” Do you see it ? (5:4, 6, 8, 14) Amos was saying “ *Don’t seek religious services; seek the Lord.* ” There were some in the nation who were saying, “ *The day of the Lord will come and then God will deliver us.* ” (5:18-20) They did not realize that the Day of the Lord would be a time of judgment for them as well as for their enemies. They are like Christians today who “ *long for,* ” the return of Christ, yet may not be prepared to meet the Lord. Now in (5:24) we have the key verse of the book. “ *But let justice run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.* ” Was this not the concern of the Lord in the day of Amos ? That His people be righteous in their character, and just in their conduct. My Amos longed to see the nation obeying God and executing His justice in the land. But in (Ch 6) Amos continues to weep over the sins of the

people. There was *Indifference:* (6:1-2) there was *Indulgence:* (6:3-7) there was *Insolence:* (6:8-14) Do you see the word “ *therefore,* ” in (6:7) ? That introduces God’s response to Israel sins and brings us to the final section of the book where,

(3) AMOS LOOKS FORWARD Ch’s 7-9

For in the closing part of his book, Amos beholds five visions, and from these visions he discovers what God will do to the nation.

(a) *The Vision of the Grasshoppers:*

In (7:1-3) The locusts are about to destroy the crop, but Amos intercedes and the Lord stops them.

(b) *The Vision of Fire:*

In (7:4-6) The two visions seemed to depict the same general disaster, the coming of the Assyrian army into Israel. But Amos intercedes and judgment is restrained. Next was the,

(c) *The Vision of the Plumb-line:*

In (7:7-17) This was an instrument used to test whether a wall was straight and true. Buildings that are seriously “ *out of plumb,* ” are unsafe and should be demolished. God is measuring Israel and she does not conform to His Word, therefore judgment is coming. My can you imagine the stir that Amos created through such

preaching ? Indeed the “ *state priest*, ” Amaziah could take no more, and he interrupted, “ *You are not patriotic. Take your soapbox and go back to the hills to preach.* ” But Amos was not afraid. Boldly he cried, “ *Amaziah, you will pay for your compromise and sins, because your wife will become a harlot and your family will die by the sword.* ” Is Amos not the kind of prophet preacher we need in our nation to day ?

A pastor who preached the Word faithfully every Sunday was not liked by the affluent in his congregation. They came to him and asked him to resign. He said. “ *I will respond to your request next Sunday.* ” At the close of the morning service that Sunday the pastor said, “ *My answer to the request that I resign is found in the words of a song “ I shall not be moved.”* ” Do you recall Charles Wesley’s lines ?

**Shall I, to sooth the unholy throng
Soften Thy truth or smooth my tongue
To gain earth’s gilded toys or flee
The cross endured, my Lord, by Thee ?**

(d) The Vision of the Basket of Summer Fruit:

In (8:1-14) You see, this fruit that was dead ripe would ruin quickly in hot lands. What was the vision saying but that judgment was imminent ? Finally, there was,

(e) The Vision of the Lord:

In (9:1-10) Why is God at the altar ? Because judgment begins at the house of the Lord (1 Pet 4:17) Do you see what God plans to do ? Look at (9:8-9) The good seed the believing remnant will be saved, but the chaff will be burned up.

Isn’t it interesting how this book closes ? I mean both Joel and Amos picture a glorious millennial future when Israel at last will be restored to the land. (9:1-15) Now (9:11-12) are quoted in (Acts 15:14-18) at the first church conference. Today God is calling out of the nations a people for His name, the church, but when the church is completed, then He will return and restore the tabernacle (house) of David and establish the Jewish kingdom. The land will become fruitful again, and the people will be blessed forever.

**O the King is coming,
The King is coming!
I just heard the trumpets sounding,
And now His face I see;
O the King is coming,
The King is coming!
Praise God, He’s coming for me**

If you believe that, you will not be “ **at ease in Zion.** ”

