

Books of The Bible

A Survey of Amos

Introduction

When our Lord was here He made two teachings on the severity of Judgment, when blessing is rejected or His goodness set at naught.

- a) “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell” (Lk. 10:13, 14, 15).
- b) “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Lk. 12:48).
 - i) This is the underlying message of Amos. The opportunities to repent given by God. When the privileges given to an individual or a nation are rejected, then there will be brought greater condemnation and judgment. In reading Revelation twenty and the message of the Great White Throne concerning which the unsaved will stand, twice it is repeated, “according to their works” (Rev. 20:12, 13). Israel had been given great blessings; they had known the God of Sinai; they had God’s laws and restrictions; they knew His warnings of approaching judgments; but in blatancy they had rejected them. Amos reminds them that even in the wilderness they were a nation of idolaters. What a lesson for today. Whither saved or unsaved, the pledges of divine judgment are not idle threats but assurances of divine consequences.

One of the observant lessons from life is that material enrichment does not always lead to spiritual enrichment. Indeed one finds that oftentimes it is the lovely blessings of life that can lead to departure from the Lord. When Amos prophesied to Israel it was a time of prosperity. Sadly, the material blessing of prosperity awakened within them the desire for more and a flaunting of their enrichment. Their military was victorious in warfare, everything was magnificent apparently. In the spiritual realm their faith in God and dependence on Him decreased and social evils started to manifest themselves. Spirituality was measured by that which was acceptable to society rather than by obedience and judging all by the Word of God. Instead of being humble before God, due to His blessings they gloried in their religious heritage and the working of God’s miracles among them in centuries long past.

- a) God warned Israel of such a happening in Deut. 11:4-6.

The Man Amos

Amos had no disillusion about himself, acknowledging that he was not the son of a prophet (ch. 7:14) but was one of the herdsmen of Tekoa (ch. 1:1). He adds that he was “a gatherer of sycamore fruit” (ch. 7:14). Since he speaks about being a herdsman and then flocks, it would seem he was also a shepherd and possibly a preparer or cultivator of sycamore figs.

As for his spiritual “training,” he was not a professional prophet (nabi) but was a “lay man” of the poorer class of people. His credentials for prophesying to the people was, God took him from following the flock. The non-resistible call of God intimated by the expression, “The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophecy?” (ch. 4:8). His work for God was not a chosen profession, it was under deep conviction.

When Written and The Political Situation

He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam (ch. 1:1) and when Amaziah was priest of Bethel (ch. 7:10). He was contemporary with Jonah (2 Kgs. 14:25).

This was a time when there had been a succession of kings in Israel who sinned as Jeroboam had done (1 Kgs. 14:25; 15:30; 16:26). There were groves, not groves of trees but places set aside for the worship of pagan deities. God sought to bring the nation back to Himself but they would not listen and repent. At last the patience of God was exhausted, they did not want to hear the voice of the prophets Amos or Jonah. The consequence was

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judgment, which was called the “Day of the Lord” (ch. 5:18, 20). On this point we discover that the “Day of the Lord” is not just future, it is times when God vented His fury on an unrepentant people. The expression “Day of the Lord”, as with a number of biblical expressions, had an immediate and future fulfillment and the future fulfillment is always greater either in judgment or blessing than the immediate.

- a) For an illustration of immediate fulfillment a consideration can be given to Isaiah when he said, “A young woman shall have a son” (Isa. 7:14) and the immediate context makes it plain it was Isaiah’s wife. But that was not the full fulfillment, for the same passage is taken in the New Testament and applied to Mary and the word then becomes “virgin” (Matt. 1:23). It was a deeper fulfillment in blessing.
- b) Another which indicated the future to be worse than the immediate, was the “Day of the Lord”. The judgment of God in the days of Babylon was severe but not as dreadful as the days under the man of sin.

Style of Writing

- 1) Amos is a gatherer and one can readily observe the repetitions of various expressions. For instance, he very quickly begins with the expression, “For three transgressions . . . and for four” (ch. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6) and they are spoken against Damascus (ch. 1:3); Gaza (ch. 1:6); Tyrus (ch. 1:9); Edom (ch. 1:11); Ammon (ch. 1:13); Moab (ch. 2:1); Judah (ch. 2:4); and Israel (ch. 2:6).
- 2) Notice that in each judgment there is mention of “fire” (ch. 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5). There is no “fire” mentioned regarding Israel but the condemnation of them takes up most of the rest of the book.
- 3) A point easily overlooked is the repetition of the word “therefore”, and the similarity of the clauses “to hear”, (ch. 3:1, 13; 4:1; 5:1, 23; 7:16; 8:4). However, observe the difference in them for the Lord refuses to “hear” (ch. 5:23), whereas in the other references Israel is called to “hear the witness of God.”
- 4) “Not returned” (ch. 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11).
- 5) “Punishment” (ch. 1:13; 2:1, 4, 6).
- 6) “I will” found in 42 verses indicating the major truth of the sovereignty of God. The first reference is ch. 1:3 and the last is ch. 9:15. It is found in every chapter, the most being in chapter one.

God

His Names and descriptive terms

- a) There are a number of descriptive names and terms for God in Amos. He is called “LORD” (ch. 1:2) “The God of Hosts” a title only found in Amos (ch. 3:13; 4:13; 5:14, 16, 27; 6:8, 14).
- b) Of particular note are the expressions, “The LORD, The God of Hosts, is His name” (ch. 4:13); “The LORD is His name” (ch. 5:8; 9:6); “Lord GOD” (ch. 8:1).

Aspects of God:

- a) His fidelity: God's threats are not empty threats, but are promises of coming judgment.
- b) His power over creation: The God Amos worshipped was not a little parochial God but was over all the nations, moving and using them according to His will. He was the One who controlled the planets. God is the God of Creation. Humanity, in his foolishness, speaks of mother nature. It is God who controls:
 - i) The weather (Amos 4:7; Rev. 6:12-13).
 - ii) The political events on earth (Rev. 6:2, 4, 6, 8, 11-16) (This is just the ones in this chapter).
 - iii) The rise of disease and pestilence (Rev. 16:3, 4, 8, 9:1-21).

In the opening remarks of Amos God deals with the nations around Jerusalem, Damascus (ch. 1:2-3); Gaza (ch. 1:6); Tyrus (ch. 1:9) and continues with the nations until He begins to deal with Israel (ch. 2:6). That which is being shown is that God is not limited to one nation, but He sees and recompenses each nation according to its own rebelliousness against God, or reverence for God and help to His people (Psa. 33:12; Matt. 25:40, 45). Gilbert and Sullivan wrote in one of their musicals, “The punishment must fit the crime”. Whither they knew it or not, this is righteous judgment and is the character of God. Rebellion and sin will be punished, but it will be in balance to what man did.

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In Amos several expressions are repeated showing the longsuffering of God as He repeatedly says, “For three transgressions . . . and for four” (ch. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 2:1, 4, 6), thus showing that God’s patience will come to an end. His enduring with man’s insolence against Him cannot continue without recompense. Justice must be done. Let no nation think they can do as they want. Governments refuse to learn that God is much bigger than they and all the nations together are utterly insignificant. “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15). Let the governments of the world deny God, live as if God does not exist, and mock as if His ability to recompense is empty boasting. To God, all the nations are less than a few grains of sand, nothing to be concerned about. He is still the God to whom the nations are answerable.

What were the characteristics of the days of Amos and how are they manifested today?

In reading the book, God immediately begins to tell the sins and brutality committed:

- a) “Because they have threshed Gilead” (ch. 1:3), that was savagery. Is pulling a live infant apart not savagery?
- b) “Carried away captive” (ch. 1:6), lack of sympathy and compassion. Is today’s world not dominated by lack of natural affection?
- c) “Cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever” (ch. 1:11). Today so many videos and children’s play games are marked by fierceness of anger, a frozen anger.
- d) Sexual perversity (ch. 2:7).
- e) Idolatry: We live in a world of God rejectors and idolatry, for whither it is sports, entertainment, money, prestige or position, these are the gods of today’s world.
- f) Despising of God’s laws. Surely when the ten commandments are not wanted or removed from government places and a cross is despised and wanted removed, these are insolent reminders of man’s despising of God’s laws and the reminders of man’s sins.

Is it any wonder God says, “enough”?

God’s Warnings To Humanity Through Creation

Reading Amos, God is not a hateful being ready to flay man at the slightest fault, but giving multiple opportunities to repent, man despises every opportunity. God repeatedly says, “Yet, have ye not returned unto me” (ch. 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11) and when all enduring mercy has had enough of mockery, justice must be carried out God says, “Prepare to meet thy God” (ch. 4:12).

God has warned man of man’s own impotence. Man cannot control the earth when it shakes; the hurricanes which lash the coasts of earth; the tornados which devastate the things of man, the volcanoes which erupt throwing pollution into the air and destroying pastures; or the famines. In all these things God is seeking to remind man that no matter how brilliant he thinks he is, he is ineffective in preventing or curtailing them. If man rejects these as the voice of the Almighty and speaks blasphemously that they are all mother nature, then things will get worse. Surely the increase of earthquakes etc., are God’s voice.

Key Verses:

“Your young men have I slain . . . yet ye have not returned unto me . . . I have overthrown some of you . . . ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have not returned unto me . . . Therefore thus will I do unto thee . . . prepare to meet thy God” (ch. 4:10-12).

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Notes:

- 1) Israel had a false sense of security. They thought that because they were the chosen people and fulfilled the ceremonial laws of the scriptures they were special. Amos saw this as futile for under God they had failed to be what He expected of a chosen people and their sacrifices were an abomination to Him. They were not the righteous people God envisaged and consequently they were told to, "Seek the Lord" (ch. 5:6, 14)
- 2) Judgement will fall on those who are warned often (Prov. 29:1). The nation of Israel has sinned, and national sin means national punishment.
- 3) The earthquake (ch. 1:1) must have been very severe for several hundred years later Zechariah spoke of it as something well known (Zech. 14:5). Possibly an indication of this happening is found in Amos 8:8 and 9:5.

The Broad Layout of The Book

Amos is very easily seen in the development of its message:

- a) There is brought to the attention of eight nations the impending judgment of God and why it will come (ch. 1:3-2:5) and then on Israel for the balance of the book.
- b) Amos then begins three major messages beginning with the words, "Hear this word" (ch. 3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The messages are each in two sections separated by the word, "therefore". Thus, the messages are why judgment must fall and its irrevocability (ch. 3:1-6:14)
- c) The last part of the book contains five visions (ch. 7:1-9:10): The vision of the grasshoppers (ch. 7:1-3); Fire (ch. 7:4-6); Plumbline (ch. 7:7-17); Summer fruit (ch. 8:1-14); The Lord standing on the altar (ch. 9:10-14).

Practical Lessons

1. God hates hypocrisy. Oh that God would preserve us from thinking that because we belong to a certain group we are better Christians, that in remembrance meetings and prayer times we would be preserved from functioning outwardly and not in truth and spirit (Jn. 4:24). Worship void of spirit and truth, no matter how outwardly done, is nothing but repugnant. In Romans 3 Paul was inspired by the Spirit to make this very point, that not everyone who is a Jew outwardly is one inwardly (Rom. 2:28-29).
2. God remembers the damage done to His people as is evident from the judgements on the nations (ch. 1:3-2:3).
3. The word "Woe" is used ninety nine times in the scriptures. Sometimes it is used as "grief" (1 Sam. 4:7-8; Prov. 23:29); but most times it indicates a judgment for sin (Isa. 5:8, 11, 18, 22). However, to the best of my knowledge, Amos 6:1 is the only time God pronounces it to His people. The reason He pronounces it is given, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!". Two major wickednesses are mentioned and the order is, "they are at ease in Zion". What a serious condemnation and a sin that can easily beset us in this age. The Lord said, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers" (Lk. 10:2; Matt. 9:38); "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33); "Go ye into all the world" (Mk. 16:15). Yet among the saints it is very possible, or can it be a reality, that there is a complacent ease regarding spiritual and eternal matters. We live in a world under condemnation. Every individual we meet, see, hear, or have heard of, are going to spend eternity in either Heaven or Hell.

Notes on The Word "Day" and "Days"

- 1) "Days" which lie ahead but not necessarily the end of time days (Gen. 49:1).
- 2) "Day" which signifies the end of a series (Jn. 7:37).

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- 3) “Day/Days” which indicate a time period (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48; Dan. 2:28).
- 4) “Day/Days” which indicate a time period just before the millennium (2 Tim. 3:1; Jam. 5:3; Job 19:25; Jer. 30:24; Dan. 10:14, Hos. 3:5).
- 5) “Days” which indicate the millennium (Num. 24:14; Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1; Acts 2:17).
- 6) “Days” which indicate after the millennium (Ezek. 38:16).
- 7) “Day/Days” which indicate a specific and sometimes having a repeated time frame (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Amos 5:18).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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