

Amos is one of the 'minor' prophets, but he has a very interesting way of bringing about God's message. Through his own hard life, he reflects the great injustices of the day between the rich and poor. He has as one of his great themes the oppression which fills his land. Amos begins his message by denouncing several of the surrounding nations with a certain form to his speech. For six heathen countries this formula holds true. First Amos declares without question that the words he speaks come from the God of all heaven and earth. Secondly he uses a poetical form in which the combination "for three... for four..." emphasizes the seriousness of the transgressions. Thirdly, the sins are so great that God will not revoke the punishment. Fourthly, there are specific reasons given for the punishment that God is sending; each country has their chief sins itemized. Fifthly, God says that he will send fire to destroy the strongholds or fortresses of the offending nation.

Take a moment and imagine the feeling of the Israelites as one by one Amos destroys their neighbors, for whom there is no love lost. I hear them 'Amen-ing' each one of these prophecies.

Suddenly, Amos changes gears and attacks their arch-rival: Judah, in Amos 2:4-5. Judah has rejected the law of God, going astray from the path of righteousness. Again, the form here is the same as the other countries before, and I am sure that there was another resounding 'Amen' from the crowd as Amos preached.

But wait just a minute! Amos did not know when to quit. His next message, and his longest one, was directed straight at Israel itself! Suddenly the crowd became dumbfounded and silent! Surely Amos cannot be talking about them! Indeed he is, however, and he has reserved most of his punch for this message. The first few verses of this passage illustrate the many instances of oppression that were being committed in the nation of Israel. Human life became cheap to them as their hunger for material things overruled everything else. Then Amos tells Israel they will be oppressed, and their strength will fly away from them because of their sin.

Let us examine the oppressive nature of Israel in more detail. In Amos 8:4-6 we find that in their tremendous greed they are selling out the poor if it will increase their own possessions by even just a little bit. This affects their worship as well, for these people cannot wait for the Sabbath to be over so that they can continue with their business! Worship is an inconvenience to them! This brings us to think about the quality of our own worship. Too many times we fulfill this as a matter of duty, instead of from the adoring heart, as it should be. In Amos 4:4-5 God calls their worship the multiplying of sin; even though they are fulfilling the outward aspects of the sacrifices. They love to do things that will be seen of men, just like the Pharisees were doing in the time of Jesus. How does God feel about the worship that is offered to him only as duty? We read in Amos 5:21-24 that he hates it! That's about as strong a feeling against something that I think we can have. Our worship is supposed to glorify God, but instead he has no pleasure at all in it. What God really wants, He shows very clearly, is that there be justice and righteousness as though they were an everlasting stream. He wants Goodness to flow from our hearts without reservation. Our worship should be day in and day out as well.

God tells us what he wants very simply in chapter 5:15, "Hate evil, love good." We should all seek the ultimate Goodness which is characterized by God. We should hate evil, as well, knowing the pain and suffering that it has caused and continues to cause to all mankind. I am afraid that most of us hate evil, but do not love Good with the passion that we should. We would be content to know that there would be no evil; in other words, if we would just be left alone. We don't want to be bothered by it all. So we do not pursue God as we should. If we do not love the Good here on earth, what will we do when that is all that there is?

Amos has many messages of impending punishment for the people, though he begs them to repent again and again. The refrain heard at least five times in this book is, 'yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.' God has mercy and patience, but it only goes so far. It does not cover people who refuse to turn to Him. The example of Amos is that no matter if we are the chosen people of God, we may need a lesson in humility! The Israelites were surprised by God's message. We hear a grave warning in verse 12, 'Prepare to meet your God!' We had better be prepared!

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