

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph14N_Prophecy in the Prophets_Amos_Part 5 of 5)

Three Visions of Israel's Coming Disaster (7:1-9) – God gives Amos three visions of the disaster associated with the impending judgment that was soon to befall Israel. In the first vision (vv. 1-3), Amos sees locust descend upon Israel's wheat crops just after the first cutting. These crops belonged to the king in order to support the military establishment of Israel (1 Ki 18:5). Soon after the first cutting, the dry season came and there was not much time for further growth of a second crop.¹ Therefore, if locusts attacked just after the king's harvest, it would mean disaster for all of Israel would go hungry and have to wait months until a new crop could come. The people were helpless against a locust plague and could do nothing. They knew that famine would inevitably follow. It is no small wonder that the Jews associated a locust invasion with judgment from God (see Deut 28:38, 42; Amos 4:9; Joel 1:1-7).

In **verses 2-3**, we see something very amazing. Amos, who has been relentless in his criticism of Israel's injustices and unrepentant ways, is stirred to great compassion. He did the most compassionate thing he could do when he saw the future unfold in his vision – he prayed that God would withhold such a calamity. He saw through the Israelites arrogance to what they really were – a small, pitiable nation that was totally helpless. Their only strength and their only hope was in Yahweh's mercies toward them.

Amos did not ask for forgiveness again which indicates just how dreaded and fearful a punishment this was perceived to be. However, the nation did not escape punishment even though Amos' prayer channeled God's actions against Israel.

Principle: There is no more powerful asset in the universe at the believer's disposal than the power of prayer. Through prayer, the believer can tap the omnipotence of God Himself.

Principle: The believer can measure the quality of his spiritual life by honestly evaluating his prayer life.

Application: Perform an evaluation of your own prayer life. Is it consistent? Have you seen prayers answered in your own life? If the answer to either of these questions is not satisfactory, then it is most likely an indication that your spiritual life is in need of adjustment.

In **verses 4-6**, Amos has a vision of another judgment – the parching summer heat dries up all vegetation and all of the water sources (e.g. "great deep") also stop producing water. Then fire consumes everything. Again, Amos pleads with the Lord to not bring about such a judgment and the Lord relents.

In **verses 7-9**, Amos sees a third vision. In this vision, a plumb line is held up to a wall. A plumb line is used to determine whether a wall is vertical – sometimes in construction of a new wall and sometimes to determine if an existing wall has settled thus compromising the integrity of the larger structure. In Amos' day, Israel had strayed from the Mosaic Law and had lost her integrity in doing so.

¹ Amos was probably referring to the 1st cutting around the month of March since this is the only time of the year to this day that the Arabs feed their horses with grass. See R.A. Torrey, *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, electronic version (Westwood, NJ: Barbour & Co., Inc.) in Logos Research Systems, 1997. See also, www.bible.org for the NetBible's comments on this passage.

What did the plumb line represent? The figurative plumb line represented God's standards of holiness in the form of the Mosaic Law that had been designed to set Israel apart. Israel had violated those standards in a very blatant manner to the point of promoting "high places" and a false religious system complete with a full complement of accouterments. All of this would be destroyed including the "high places;" the sanctuaries of Bethel and Gilgal; and the dynasty of Jereboam II.

Amos' confrontation with Amaziah, priest of Bethel (7:10-17) – This scenario is so typical of the religious and/or political leader who is spiritually blind and reversionistic.² Once a person has rejected the truth and his spiritual heart has been hardened, that person enters an advanced stage of reversionism that could be termed "reverse-process-reversionism" (RPR).³ In RPR, the individual believes the truth is a lie and the lie has become the truth. Amaziah had sold out to the pseudo-security of an esteemed position as priest of Bethel – a completely false religion established by Jereboam I.⁴

Amos, who spoke the truth from God, was perceived by Amaziah to be a "seer" (7:12). While the term "seer" is sometimes used as a synonym for "prophet" (e.g. 2 Ki 17:13), the context here seems to indicate that it was a term of derision when Amaziah used it in reference to Amos. By calling Amos a "seer," Amaziah was portraying Amos as a false prophet who had received his message from Satan. In reality, it was Amaziah who had believed the lie associated with a false religious/political system.

Principle: A people (e.g. nation, culture, people-group, etc.) who have become so spiritually blind to God's character (i.e. His essence), His Word, His standards, and the divine institutions (volition, marriage, family, and nation) along with the principles that surround their perpetuation will inevitably accept the lie of cosmic thought in place of the Truth.

Application: History has proven that the masses (the majority) are extremely susceptible to accepting the lie.

² I have adopted the term "reversionism" from R.B. Thieme. See R.B. Thieme, Jr., *Reversionism* (Berachah Tapes and Publications: Houston, Texas, 1978). It is worthy of note that I have adopted terminology and concepts from many different theologians, yet that doesn't mean that I accept everything they espouse. Any pastor or teacher can profit from selected contributions of theologians of a variety of persuasions as he formulates his own paradigm for interpreting Scripture. I have always assumed that everyone understood this principle; however, I have discovered that the mere mention to some of the name of this or that theologian is enough to cause a variety of reactions and impressions among some. Thus, I hope this explanation allays any concerns or impressions that I follow any theologian's interpretation or teaching to the exclusion of independent, critical evaluation of my own. Considering the controversial, yet overall positive and impactful nature of Thieme's ministry, I find that such a qualification is necessary.

³ *Ibid.*, 25-27. I accept Thieme's definition of this phase of reversionism called reverse process reversionism – "related to the Word of God, reverse process reversionism is the reversal of the objects of the believer's affection on one hand and scorn on the other."

⁴ See previous lesson's notes captioned "Proph14M_Prophecy in the Prophets_Amos_Part 4 of 5" in which the false religious system established by Jereboam I is described. Part of that false religious system was the establishment of a counterfeit priesthood which has parallels to the priesthood established by the Danites who slaughtered the people of Laish (Judg 18:27), renamed the city of Laish to Dan and bought or bribed the grandson of Moses (Jonathan) to become their first priest. Jonathan established a pattern of compromised behavior that was to be emulated by Amaziah, Jereboam II's priest. Amaziah, too, sold himself out for the seeming security of a prosperous nation and king. Amos' words must have been like thorns pricking his conscience.

Application: Do you see examples in today's world where people have exchanged the lie for the Truth?

The temple at Bethel was the religious symbol which was designed to rally political commitment to the Northern Kingdom by deterring pilgrimages to Jerusalem. As the temple in Jerusalem drew attention to the Davidic lineage, the existence of the temple at Bethel was seen by the Northern Kingdom to imply God's sanction and support. To denounce Bethel and its system of worship was tantamount to an attack on the foundation of the kingdom.⁵ In reality, the temple's existence at Bethel had more to do with the longsuffering of God.

Amaziah may have been Bethel's chief priest, in charge of worship and personnel (cf. Jer 20:1-2; 29:26). The principle of reverse-process-reversionism is evident in Amaziah's actions when Amaziah accuses Amos of conspiring against Jeroboam, the king of Israel (**7:10**). Instead of recognizing Amos' predictions of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom as prophetic, Amaziah interpreted them as a political threat. His fears may have been rooted in a recognition of the demoralizing effect that Amos' words would have on the people as well as the fact that there had been occasions where a prophet's words against a king had been followed by internal revolt and by a change in dynasties (1 Ki 11:29-12:24; 16:1-13; 2 Ki 8:7-15; 9).

Amaziah should have known that Amos did not pose any threat to the Northern Kingdom or to Jeroboam. This is probably why Amos makes the statement in verse 14 that he was no prophet, nor the son of a prophet. By this Amos meant that he was not a professional prophet, nor was he trained in prophecy. Nevertheless, Amaziah's spiritual state made him susceptible to illogical and irrational thought. This led Amaziah to "spin" the message he reported back to Jeroboam. In quoting Amos, Amaziah deliberately omitted Amos' words about God's claim of personal action ("I [the Lord] will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam") in verse 9. Amaziah reduced the message to "Jeroboam shall die by the sword." Amaziah's "spin" was purposeful and designed to elicit a reaction from the king. Amaziah saw Amos as a menace to the status quo. Amaziah's deceitful "spin" should cause us to recall the original "spin master" in the Garden, Satan himself, when he distorted the words of Yahweh Himself (Ge 3:1 – "Has God indeed said..." and 3:5 – "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil").

In **verse 17**, Amos responded to Amaziah's distortions and arrogant refusal acknowledge the true spiritual state of the Northern Kingdom by painting a very vivid picture of what would happen to Amaziah's family and to Amaziah himself. The only way in which the wife of an important official like Amaziah would be forced to be a prostitute would be if all of her family and all of her resources were taken away from her so that she had to fend for herself. In addition, all of the land that Amaziah had accumulated (perhaps through the abuse of his powerful position) would be taken by others. Amaziah would die in a "defiled" (i.e. a pagan) land, stripped of all of the former accoutrements of position and status and forced to eat the ceremonially unclean food of a pagan land.

Did Amaziah really have an alternative in view of Amos' message? Yes. Amaziah had the opportunity to repent and perhaps be spared from the coming discipline (see Amos 5:4-6, 14-15). However, there would have likely been a significant cost associated with repentance. Amaziah would most likely have lost his position of prestige; his wife would have left him as she was probably in the category of the "cows of Bashan" to whom Amos had earlier prophesied (4:1); and no doubt, some in Israel may have sought revenge against him as a man of privilege who had accumulated his wealth by exploiting others. The Lord had hardened Amaziah's heart in the same way that the Pharaoh's heart had been hardened – by allowing him to make negative

⁵ Donald R. Sunukjian, "Amos" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1446.

decisions toward Yahweh all of his life and accumulate position, status, and wealth that made any later decisions in life to repent all the more costly and difficult.

The Vision and Explanation of the (Ripe) Summer Fruit (8:1-14) – In chapter 8, Amos is given a vision of summer fruit. There is a play on the words here that is not obvious in the English. The word for “summer fruit” can mean “ripe” or “end” and was associated with “reaping time.”⁶ The vision carried the idea that Israel was ripe for a harvest, but this harvest would not be associated with joy and thanksgiving as was normally the case. Rather, this harvest was associated with judgment.

Judgment instead of rejoicing (verses 2-3) – On the day that Yahweh would end Israel’s existence, there would be wailing instead of hymns of joy. The dead would lay everywhere and when the survivors finally looked up to find an answer, there would be only silence from heaven (v. 3 cf. 11b-12).

Israel’s evil ways described (verses 4-6) – The greedy merchants of Israel pursued a profit with utter disregard for the requirements of the Law in the treatment of the poor to the point that they despised the interruption caused by the festival days (cf. 2:6-7; 5:11). They totally missed any spiritual significance and meaning associated with these days and were not content to rest and worship the Lord. Such activities were “boring” and did not contribute to the bottom line. They found ways to aid to their profits by falsifying the scales so that the weight (“ephah”) was reduced and the price paid (“shekel”) was too high. They would even sell “bad” wheat (v. 6) which was likely wheat that came from the sweepings of soiled and trampled grain mixed with pure, clean wheat.⁷ The needy were even forced into slavery in exchange for insignificant sums – represented by the sandals on their feet.

The Lord does not forget (verses 7-8) – These injustices and covenant violations have not gone unnoticed by Yahweh. The judgment would probably even include an earthquake to which Amos refers with words and phrases such as “tremble,” “swell,” “heave and subside.” In chapter 1:1, Amos dates his prophetic book two years before the earthquake.

The Day of the Lord (verses 9-10) – The day of judgment upon Israel would not be a time for rejoicing among the elect nation and people. Rather, it would be a time of reversal of fortune – light turned to darkness and joy to mourning. The end of that day would be bitter indeed as the mourners themselves died.

Famine of the Word (verses 11-14) – Since Israel had rejected all of the words of the Lord, they would hear His words no more. A famine of silence from God would be felt in all the land. They could go as far north as Dan and as far south as Beersheba, but they would not find the Lord. The most vigorous among the people would faint in search of the Word from God, but not find it.

The Destruction of Israel – More Detail (9:1-10) – God would begin His judgment at the altar where the people expected blessing from the Lord. Instead, they would experience judgment. There would be no place for them to hide (contrast with Ro 8:38-39) because the Lord is omnipresent and sovereign over the universe (verses 3-6). Their confidence in God’s choice of them as a people was misplaced (verse 7) for they would be treated no differently than the Ethiopians who lived at the edge of the known world to the Israelite of Amos’ day. God’s sovereignty oversaw the migrations of not only the Israelites from Egypt, but Israel’s greatest

⁶ Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos,” 1447 and Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, electronic version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1976-1992).

⁷ Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos,” 1448.

enemies – the Philistines from Caphtor (probably Crete) and the Arameans (Syrians) from Kir (Mesopotamia).

Restoration in the Day of the Lord After Judgment (9:11-15) – In this passage, Amos provides hope for the remnant that God is faithful and true to His own integrity represented by His covenant promises to Israel. Just because the current generation was going to be disciplined severely by Yahweh, God would still be true to His Word. God would re-establish David's protective dynasty which is referred to figuratively by Amos in this passage with the term "tabernacle" or "booth." The term is a reference to the protective canopy over all the people of Israel that had fallen with the split between the Northern and Southern kingdoms. God will fulfill this promise to Israel and David when He raises up a Descendant of David to rule and reign forever (2 Sam 7:11-16, 25-29).

Even the Gentiles, including the former enemies of Israel represented by Edom (v. 12) would share in this time of blessing. The condition will be that they are "called by My name." At the Jerusalem Council meeting, James cited Amos 9:11-12 as proof that the Gentiles of his day did not need to be circumcised according to the Law in order to be saved. James knew that since the Gentile believers who did not have the Law would be included in the kingdom based upon this passage and others like it (Isa 42:6; 60:3; Mal 1:11), then Gentile believers of his day should be accepted into the fellowship without having to adhere to the Law's stipulations regarding circumcision.

The land will be restored to a status of unprecedented productivity. The plowman will have to wait for the reaper to finish (v. 13) and the mountains will be so abundant in grapes that the mountains will appear from a distance to be dissolving as the juice runs down their slopes.⁸ These last few verses in Amos are very similar to the descriptions of other prophets to Israel and Judah as they provide a vision of kingdom hope to those who would survive the judgments they pronounced upon their respective generations.

⁸ Donald R. Sunukjian, "Amos," 1452.