

Amos Chapters 3 – 4:- Two Sermons against Israel

These two chapters expand on the theme of the transgressions and punishment of Israel, foretold in chapter 2, verses 6 – 16. Amos as a prophet of the Lord God is under compulsion to speak out chapter 3, verse 8. A prophet did not just foretell the future. Rather he or she (there were certainly New Testament female prophets – Acts 21, verse 8 – 9) was fully aware of the sinfulness of the world around them and of the holiness and righteousness of the Lord God. Between these two realities, the prophet was squeezed as between the jaws of nutcrackers and compelled to speak out. A good Christian preacher should do the same!

Chapter 3, verses 1 – 15:- a Declaration of Judgement

Verses 1 -2:- The people of Israel, brought out of the slavery of Egypt, kept throughout the desert wandering and brought into the Promised Land, were meant to be the Lord's *"own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* Exodus 19, verses 5 – 6. Again we are reminded that *"judgement begins with the household of God"* 1 Peter 4, verse 17. As Christian believers we know that we are not our own, we were bought with a price – 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verses 19 - 20. At the time of the prophet Amos, the people of God (Israel) had turned away from following and worshipping the One to whom they owed their very existence.

Verses 3 – 8:- The warning is clear! The Lord God has spoken and now He prepares to carry out His judgement.

Verses 9 – 11:- The enemies of Israel are called by God to execute His judgement. Samaria, as the capital city of Israel was used as a synonym for the land itself. The people have exercised violence and robbery against their own, now they will be punished.

Verse 12:- as a shepherd, Amos may have been speaking from experience! The ethnic cleansing policy of Israel's enemies meant that only a small number of them would eventually regain their own land.

Verses 13 – 15:- The punishment of destruction was against the religious and the wealthy alike. The sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan would be destroyed along with the *"mansions"* (the margin reading in my Bible says *"many houses"*) of the elite. The poor were trampled into the dust (chapter 2, verse 7) while the rich had summer and winter residences.

Chapter 4, verses 1 – 13:- the Depravity of Israel

Verses 1 – 3:- *"Cows of Bashan"* is an unkind reference to the well fed women of Samaria. Bashan was a fertile area to the east of the Sea of Galilee and was famous for its wheat and fat cattle! The women of Samaria were at fault for the demands they made on their husbands for the luxuries of life. They would be led out of the city like cattle with hooks through their noses. So many that fish hooks would be used when they, the enemy, ran out of slave rings and hooks. They would be led out through the many breaches made in the city walls by the besieging army and taken into slavery.

Verses 4 – 5:- There is irony in the statement that the more the people visited their shrines and offered polluted sacrifices, the further they were from the Lord God. Even if they should offer their yearly sacrifices every morning, their sacrifice of leavened bread was against the law. (Exodus 23, verse 18 and Leviticus 7, verse 12). The *"free-will offering"* should have been the most sincere expression of one's religion. They were using it for self aggrandisement by boasting about it.

Verses 6 – 11:- The Lord God had used a series of plagues and misfortunes as warnings. Time after time the people had been called to repentance and still the heartbreaking cry from a loving God - *"yet you have not returned to me declares the Lord"* - the end of verses 6; 8; 9; 10 and 11. I am reminded of the Lord Jesus Christ weeping over Jerusalem – read Luke 19, verses 41 – 44.

Verse 12:- Time after time the Lord God has called the people to repentance. Now Amos predicts the final judgement - *"prepare to meet your God, O Israel"*.

Verse 13:- The prophet speaks in the name of the Almighty Creator God, the Lord of the hosts of heaven.

These chapters from Amos do seem to be full of doom and gloom! However they are emphasising the long suffering and forbearance of the Lord towards His creation. 2 Peter 3, verse 9 is worth remembering *"The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*