

Amos Chapters 7 – 8:- Visions of Israel's Condition

There is a question in these 'visions' to which there is no human answer! 'How can an unchanging God relent and change his mind?' Scripture affirms that God does listen to, and answer, prayer. For an example read Genesis chapter 18, verses 16 – 33. Is it that God does not 'change His mind' but rather that He changes His course of action? More likely it is the fact that He knows the end from the beginning, and our prayer and the alignment of our wills with His plan, is the all important factor.

Chapter 7, verses 1 – 9:- Three visions

Verses 1 – 3 - Locusts:- Notice that it says "*He was preparing swarms of locusts . . .*". This was to be no "natural" disaster but a judgement of the Sovereign Lord! In spite of the thoughts of "*those who feel secure on the mountains of Samaria*" chapter 6, verse 1. Jacob (the country of Israel) was only weak and powerless in the face of sudden calamity.

Verses 4 – 6 - Judgement by fire:- this was probably excessive summer heat, drying up the vital underground water supplies ("*the great deep*") and burning up the growing crops. Again Amos cries out to the Lord in anguish knowing that human weakness could not survive such a calamity. "*So the Lord relented*".

Verses 7 – 9 - The Plumb Line:- The Chosen People of God were privileged to have the revelation of the Law. They were built on a sound foundation and should have been found upright. The righteous plumb line of God judged them and found them wanting. Far out of perpendicular they were bound to collapse in a disastrous fall. This time there is to be no reprieve.

Verses 10 – 17 – A clash with the Ecclesiastical Authorities:- Amaziah, the priest of the shrine at Bethel, accused Amos of being a conspirator against King Jeroboam and ordered him to return to Judah. The shrine at Bethel was one of the centres of the national established religion. Any speaking against the religion was seen as seeking to undermine the state. The folk song "The vicar of Bray" pokes fun at the priest being subservient to the ruler of the state, however, remember that establishment of religion has been a cause of trouble and a stumbling block to conscience down the years! For comparison, read Acts chapter 4, verses 1 – 22.

Amaziah told Amos to make his living by prophesying in his own country of Judah. Amos denied being a professional prophet and affirmed that he had a specific call from God to prophesy. Remember chapter 3, verses 7 – 8. Amaziah, who is implicated in the sins of the people of Israel, will suffer the consequences along with them.

Chapter 8:- A Fourth Vision and a Sermon

Verses 1 – 3 - A Basket of Summer Fruit:- The word means late summer or autumn fruit. The last harvest before winter. Israel was ripe in her sins and the end was now near.

Verses 4 – 14 - A Word from the Lord :- Another section beginning with a clear "*Hear this . . .*".

Verses 4 – 6 speak of those who recognise the outward keeping of the Sabbath but find it a hindrance to their commercial ambitions. The oppression of their fellow countrymen by the rich traders was forbidden in the law – see Leviticus chapter 19, verses 35 – 37 and Deuteronomy chapter 25, verses 13 – 16.

Verses 7 – 10 - "On that day . . ." The day of judgement for Israel is revealed as a foretaste of the final 'Day of the Lord'. The darkening of the sun and changes in the natural world are foretold in other prophecies. e.g. Joel 2, verses 30 -32; Matthew 24, verses 29 – 31 and Revelation 6, verses 12 – 14.

Verses 11 – 14 – A famine of "*hearing the words of the Lord.*" A time is coming when there will be a desire to hear the word of the Lord; maybe a word of comfort and pardon. Those who have followed the false gods at the local shrines will find them worthless.

The words of the prophet Isaiah will make a good ending to this weeks study! Read Isaiah chapter 55. Calling the nation to prayer in this time of crisis is just and right. However we must base our prayer on a sure and certain hope, not just woolly thinking!

Look up the hymn:- Jesus Is King And I Will Extol Him

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On the web:- <http://www.christianwebresources.co.uk/hymns/hymn/596/>