

# AMOS

David C F Wright DD

## Introduction and Chapter One

One hesitates to write about this prophet in the light of Alec Motyer's excellent book on Amos, but, with author's written permission, I have quoted liberally from Dr F A Tatford's book on Amos

Amos was a herdsman from Tekoa in Judea who prophesied against the northern kingdom of Israel. His message was of Divine justice and righteousness and impending judgment upon those who did not meet the basic standards required by God. This prophet would make annual visits to the north to sell the wool he had grown and would have mixed with many traders. He would also have met the peasants and the arrogant aristocracy, the conceited women who lived in luxury and the ruthless husbands, the religious people who used sacred places for sexual debauchery. God's moral standards were not being kept and, consequently, judgment would follow.

The name Amos means a bearer of burdens. Unlike some modern Christians, he says little of himself. He was a man of the wilderness and would know the ways of insects, snakes, lions and bears. His powers of observation would be second to none and he would easily see the state of things in Israel.

Amos must not be considered as to being a peasant farmer. He was very intelligent and his writings show a skill and coherence.

The date of this prophecy was in the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel and the period would be about 782 BC to 745 BC. The prophets Hosea and Jeremiah quote from Amos who was a contemporary of Joel.

In verse 2, God is described as a roaring lion ready to pounce on his prey and Syria and its capital of Damascus are the first to receive judgment and punishment.

They had been enemies of Israel for a very long time and were a vicious and cruel people. They were exceptionally violent to the people of Gilead. Their prisoners were dragged over boards with iron spikes mangling their flesh from their bones in sadistic barbarity. And so God was to send the flame of war into the house of king Hazael and the strongholds of Benhadad and the iron gates of the city would allow not hinder the oncoming army; those who lived in the valley of Aven would be both cut off and isolated and people would go into captivity. Damascus would be captured and their king slain.

Judgment is God's strange work. His has no pleasure or delight in it.

The expression for three transgressions and for four does not indicate that is the only number of crimes; it is like a formula.

The second nation (verses 6- 8) is Philistia and Gaza is the selected city along with Ashdod, Askelon and Ekron. Of course, this is the land of the Philistines. They were involved with slave traffic handing over slaves for Edom to purchase.

Gaza was only three miles from the sea and on the main trade route from Egypt to Tyre. It was also a centre for idolatrous worship and the temple of Dagon was one of its important buildings. However, Ashdod was the chief seat of Dagon. Askelon was the centre of the fish goddess, Derceto and Ekron was the centre of the Baal gods.

The Philistines raided areas to acquire slaves to sell. The abduction and selling of people is a horrendous crime.

Verses 9 and 10 deals with Phoenicia and the main city of Tyre. They were a seafaring nation and had supplied a lot of material to build Solomon's Temple.

The indictment against them was that they had given up a population of people to be slaves for Edom. Were these slaves from Israel? If so, to hand them to Edom was shocking because Edom had been enemies of Israel for a long time. All the common rights of the victims were violated. God would send fire upon Tyre and all her strongholds would be destroyed.

As with other minor prophets, the messages are clear. God loves His People and will punish their enemies yet have to discipline His own people because of their unfaithfulness.

Next in the spotlight is Edom (verses 11 and 12). Edomites were the descendants of Esau. The principal city was Sela sometimes called Petra but the prophet refers to Bozrah in the north and Teman in the south. Edom hated Israel and refused them passage through their land to the Promised Land. Edom sought every opportunity to oppose both Israel and Judah and therefore God was going to send the fire of His judgment and wrath upon them.

There are those who see in these verses the Arabs continual and irrational hatred of the Jews. The Arabs have hated the Jews since the days of Abraham and Ishmael and they have started the hostilities.

Verses 13 to 15 deals with Ammon's hatred and oppression of women. The Ammonites were the result of the actions of the incestuous son of Lot's younger daughter. Their capital was Rabbah, now known as Amman, and their god was Moloch and his worshippers made their children walk through fire to please him. One can hardly believe the cruelty of such idolatrous practices. Their barbarity was also shown in their desire to exterminate the people of Gilead with the emphasis on the murder of women and children to reduce the population and extend their territory. Hence the Lord will kindle a fire upon Rabbah and the city would collapse; the king and princes would go into exile and be humiliated and all their power broken.

Another lesson is to be learned from this is that God is a God of justice.

## **Chapter Two**

This chapter begins with the punishment destined for Moab, and, as with all other nations, punishment will not be revoked. This nation cremated the bones of the king of Edom with lime and therefore Divine fire of judgment will destroy Moab's strongholds and all of the royal household will die.

What made this deed so deplorable was that the universal law in the area was that such an act was both sacrilegious and outrageous. It was conducted in the case for criminals (Genesis 38.24, Leviticus 20.14 etc). It was a mark of unrelenting hate and an unpardoning indignity to the dead and the family. The tombs were violated and, consequently, Moab was to be justly punished.

Verses 4 and 5 pass from Gentile nations to Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem and, as with all other examples, the Divine punishment will not be revoked. Judah had not kept the Divine law and, in fact, rejected it. They had promised faithfulness to God and not kept their promises. In common parlance they no longer appreciated all that God had done for them and such matters were now irrelevant to them. The fact that God loved them, and with an everlasting love, now meant little or nothing to them. Even the priests were reprobate and there were prostitutes of both sexes performing adulterous acts on holy ground and the priests excused this. Sin was no longer a matter of concern, repentance and remorse was totally absent. Karl Menninger wrote a book *Whatever happened to Sin?* And, referring

to the time of Amos, and other times, writes about adultery, masturbation, drunkenness, gambling and idolatry as only then receiving mild disapproval. Is the church condemning these things today?

Judah was reminded that they were going astray with many falsehoods. Churches today are doing that as well. To turn away from God and His ways and take on one's own ways was, and is, a deep insult to God Himself as is the introduction of new doctrines and methods of worship.

Within two centuries, fire did descend upon Jerusalem with the invasion of the Babylonians. Centuries later, the Romans sacked Jerusalem. People, even today, will not learn the lessons of the past. Holiness and loyalty to the Lord is not given priority. True doctrine is often discounted.

Verses 6 to 8 is a record of Israel's social misconduct with its oppression of the poor, disgusting sexual practices, idolatry and perversions. They ignore the afflicted; a father and his son have sex with the same girl, usually a Temple prostitute and before the altar on consecrated clothes used as a bed for their adultery, and drink the wine purchased with fines imposed upon offenders. There was no consciousness of wrongdoing and their religion had no impact on their conduct. God could not remain silent about such appalling misconduct of these heartless and ruthless people.

There follows judgment on the Amorites which is notified to Israel. The Amorites who were tall in the sense of being proud and because they lived in the highlands. Figuratively, they were as strong as oaks and as tall as cedars but were to be destroyed root and branch with the fruit above and the roots beneath.

Some time ago I was asked to translate chapter 2 verses 9 to 16 and it may be helpful to reproduce it below;

“The words of the Lord God to the people of Israel, “The Amorites were your enemies and yet I defeated them. They were tall people; tall like the cedar trees and they were very strong, strong as the oak trees. I defeated them completely on your behalf.

I delivered you from the land of Egypt and looked after you in the wilderness for forty years and then gave you victory over the Amorites.

I raised up prophets from among your own sons so that they would proclaim My words. I raised up some of your men to be Nazarites. People of Israel, is this not so?

But you denied my laws and gave the Nazarites wine to drink, and told the prophets not to speak on my behalf. You are treating me as if I were trapped under a cart heavily loaded with sheaves.

Therefore in battle the speed of your soldiers shall be no more; the strong shall no longer be strong or have any power; even the mightiest of soldiers will not be able to escape and deliver himself. The archers will not be able to stand to fire their arrows; the speedy runners shall not be able to escape, neither will those riding horses escape.

Even the most courageous, mighty and strong shall take off their armour and run away in their undergarments which is nakedness and a disgrace.”

This is what the Lord says.”

### **Chapter Three**

This begins with a summons for all Israel to hear what God has to say against Israel who, among other things, have ignored their deliverance from Egypt and many other blessings. Israel has committed

many iniquities and yet the Lord has favoured them above all other nations having set His love upon them. They were a privileged nation. As with some Christians today, the belief was that once you were saved you had no obligation to serve the Lord in personal faithfulness.

Verse 3 is often quoted. Can two walk together unless they have agreed? In the days of Amos, and others, if you were to make a journey particularly in the hill country, it was advisable to have a travelling companion with you. It would have to be someone you could trust and was of reputable character and someone of like mind. This verse has been used many times, and rightly so, with various applications. A marriage between two who seldom agree may well be disastrous. The ecumenical movement, know as Churches Together, has created endless problems with the amalgamation of all beliefs. I cannot agree that the Virgin Mary should be prayed to because it is not Biblical. I cannot accept that the Full Gospel has the essential doctrine that speaking in tongues is proof of the second blessing. That is not Biblical.

The next verse reminds us that the lion roars when he has captured his prey after stalking it quietly. The lion has to eat and therefore act accordingly. Amos is telling the people that God has to act and this announcement is like the roar of a lion.

A bird will not be trapped in a net had there been no bait to entice it. Such a trap does not activate itself. There are reasons for the roar of a lion and for the snare for a bird.

The trumpet blast in a city was usually a warning and would fill most with trepidation. It most likely referred to an imminent attack. Punishment was about to fall upon Israel because of their many iniquities. God always warns of his actions beforehand through His prophets. God will not leave his people without their prophets. He imparts a knowledge of His will in advance. In our day, people do not hear what God has said and are not interested. Some churches issue platitudes and bon-bons and do not give the message of the need of salvation and living the life that pleases God and not pleasing self. Many churches have said that they do not want to hear about holiness and judgment but to have fun and bask in the sunshine of God's love.

It will be noted that Amos uses the name Adonai which means My Lord

In verses 9 and 10 the Lord seems to be summoning spectators from Egypt and Ashdod to see the tumults about to happen. They are called to the mountains of Samaria, the capital of Israel. It was a city 300 feet up and surrounded by mountains from which you could see into the city. The city had no walls and had the appearance of an amphitheatre. These Gentile nations were known for their violence and were now to gaze upon the judgment upon Israel. They would see what would happen to those who had lost all sight of righteousness and were ignoring of moral standards.

In verse 11, an invasion of Israel is threatened whose strength would be brought down. The adversary is not named. Ultimately Samaria would be rescued just as a shepherd would rescue a sheep from a wild animal. A remnant of Israel would remain which would include some who lived in luxury on comfortable couches and silk divans (verse 12).

From verses 13 to 15, judgment is to come upon Judah and the Lord is now referred to Adonai Jehovah Elohim. At the same time of Divine visitation upon Israel so will there be Divine visitation upon Judah. No one and no property will be immune. Bethel once a centre for worship in Israel would be cast down as will idolatrous altars in Jerusalem. Even those who sought sanctuary by grasping the horns of the altar would no longer be safe. The wealth of Israel meant that many families had winter houses and summer houses. They live expensively and despised the poor. But judgment was to come up the rich.

The sanctuary at Bethel, and elsewhere, were eventually destroyed by good king Josiah (2 Kings 23.15) because they had become places of disrepute and idolatry.

When one reads of King David being a man after God's heart (which he was at first) and those who claim that Solomon was a type of Christ. Good King Josiah was probably the greatest king of them all but is not so expressed.

## **Chapter Four**

The wealth and self-indulgence of Israel is placed in contrast to the peasant and artisan. It was scandalous because Israel's wealth had been taken from the poor. The working class had paid for the wealth of the so-called upper classes who had created suffering for the poor.

Much of this is due to sleek, well-fed women who were lazy and indolent like the cows of Bashan in the east of Jordan. This land produced the fattest and strongest of animals (Deuteronomy 32.24, Psalm 22.12) and sometimes they were used as a symbol of the mighty (Ezekiel 39.18). Here it speaks of female hedonism. They cared nothing for the price which they paid for their pleasures to gratify their every whim. It has been said that their luxuries were paid for by the tears of the poor. They demanded more from their husbands who were able to extort what their despicable wives wanted.

The Lord refers to these people of Amos's day as the kine of Bashan who will be drawn by hooks and fish hooks to meet their fate. They had to be punished for their wrong doing and were to be dragged off from their comfort and luxury for slavery. The enemy would breach the city's walls and the captives would be tormented by hooks and the crowds would gaze upon their misery. Some of the women would be handed over to prostitution to appease the Syrian goddess of love. They would be dragged naked and some would become corpses on the mountains of Romman and history confirms that this actually happened.

Verses 4 and 5 introduces irony. Wordsworth wrote that "it is a characteristic of idolatry and schism to profess extraordinary zeal for God's worship and go beyond the letter and spirit of His law by arbitrary will-worship and self-idolising fanaticism." This is so prevalent today in modern and trendy churches where the emphasis is on self and personal abilities. Social injustice meant nothing to Israel but self did. Their lack of moral and decent standards were of no importance to them. In the times of the day, and in so many churches today, self reigns with personal promotion at the fore, and the Lord Jesus and the worship of God is rarely honoured. The emphasis today is on the Holy Spirit and the charismatic gifts to extol self, whereas all the pre eminence must be given to the Lord Jesus.

Here Jehovah tears away the rags of false pretences and hypocritical postures and reveals His contempt for insincerity and unreality. There was evil in their hearts although they would not accept that. In their eyes; they were doing nothing wrong and they deceived themselves that their worship was true.

Gilgal and Bethel were sites when worship was made but how now could God receive the offerings when they were insincere and their pious posturings were hypocritical. The Lord bids them come to Bethel to transgress and to Gilgal to multiply their transgressions as an acknowledgment of their false piety. They had no consciousness of their guilt. Sin and trespass offerings were no longer made as the people of Israel said that were unnecessary. God calls the people in mockery to bring tithes every three days, instead of annually and to proclaim their freewill offerings to indicate their self-proclamation. They loved to proclaim themselves and perform the ritual of worship to advertise themselves. In churches today, there is self proclamation on a massive scale which is not in the service of the Lord Jesus and God has no place for unreality, insincerity and self adulation.

Verse 6 continues in what some have called God's mocking style and from verse 6 to verse 11 there are several catastrophes which God is to bring upon Israel with the intention of arousing them to repent and turn back to Him and realise their dependence on Him. Their failure to return meant that Divine blessings were withheld. The five catastrophes were famine (6), drought (7 and 8) crop failure (9), pestilence (10) and earthquake (11). The cleanness of teeth is picturesque language. Famine was

one of the means that God employed to chastise them for wrong doing. Some has rightly said that Israel was God's covenant people and Israel had broken the covenant time and time again. Yet the Divine punishment had no effect upon the people.

The drought means the withholding of rain although harvest was only three months away. Some cities would have rain and some would not and the same would apply to land. Some dry cities would travel to wet cities to drink water but there was not enough. And all this was because the people would not return unto the Lord. In common parlance, the people were incredibly stupid and brought all these calamities upon themselves.

The ignorant people always blame God for calamities. Richard Dawkins is an atheist and yet writes and blames God for all sorts of things. He blames someone whom he says does not exist. God was blamed for a fire in my town which destroyed a theatre but it was proved that it was started by a cigarette. Does God smoke?

The failure of the crop is the next curse threatened if Israel did not obey Jehovah. This would be of blight and mildew (Deuteronomy 28.32). Again the people of Israel should have known from the past that God had punished before with this condition. As famine and drought had been ignored surely this disaster in the fields would bring them to their senses.

The blight was caused by the strong east winds and the mildew was caused by a combination of heat and damp. And then there were the locusts, destroyers of all green things. Despite all these troubles, Israel did not repent and did not return to the Lord and they only had themselves to blame.

Is there any condition in the church or any denominations where the people are stubborn and are resisting God' requirements?

Pestilence was also shown in the Law as one of the ways in which the Lord punished Israel. God sends them a pestilence which is likened to one that was sent upon Egypt. There had been a recent conflict and many in the army had been slain and their unburied bodies gave off a terrible stench and probably contributed do the pestilence. It was sent to draw the people back to Jehovah but they still persisted in their stubborn resistance.

The last retribution was an earthquake comparable to the one that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities were blotted out because of their gross sin and immorality. Here mercy saved some as if brands plucked from a fire.

The final warning is in verses 12 and 13. After all of God's pleadings and judgments Jehovah warns the people of Israel to meet God. The text gives no indication of what is in God's mind and there is no suggestion of any national repentance on behalf of Israel.

Before we briefly pursue this, even in our day and among Christians there is complacency. Some believe that as their future is secure there is nothing to worry about and no need to be perturbed. Churches can worship God any way they like, or so they believe whereas self-expression is not a requirement of worship. Worship is to reverent and quiet and honouring to the Lord Jesus. It is not to be entertainment or like a variety show with jumping up and down and noise. God is not deaf. Worship does not and must not involve self -exaltation but the acknowledgment of the worth of the Lord Jesus. He alone is worthy, not the pastor, the worship leader of the band of musicians.

As in this passage in Amos we must all live our lives in the knowledge that at any time we may meet the Saviour and these days may be more urgent than in the days of Amos. There is going to be a full revelation of the Lord to gather the living and dead believers to Himself at the Rapture and then there will His return to the earth in power and great glory. As with this prophecy, the Lord will tread on the

heights of the earth and will reveal wonders in the heavens. At His Coming in glory, every eye shall see him and everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord including the atheists, Marxists, Communists and those of other faiths

## **Chapter Five**

The first three verses introduces a dirge and a funeral dirge at that. Amos has called upon the people to prepare to meet God, to return to Him and to repent, but all the calamities that befell them did not bring them to their senses. There was no sign of contrition.

Amos personifies Israel as a virgin maid laid on the ground violated by savage foes. The city might send out a thousand strong army but only a hundred would return. If a hundred went out, ninety would perish. And this all could have been avoided had Israel heeded the word of God and not been so arrogant.

And still the Lord calls his people to repent and not to visit the sanctuaries at Bethel or Gilgal but to visit Him. It may be relevant to state here that, even in our day, people seek a priest, a vicar, a minister or a pastor whereas they would do far better to seek the Lord. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength writes Isaiah. We live in days of platitudes such as ‘ Come to Jesus ‘ or ‘ Give your heart to Him ‘ but, as in the days of Amos, what must be dealt with first is sin and the people must come to the Lord and truly repent and accept the new life in Christ. Sloppy sentimentalism is no good.

Some denominations pride themselves on the alleged fact that they lead so and so to the Lord and were instrumental in their healing and recovery. That is trite doctrine. It is the Lord who calls and who is a very real help in times of trouble. No human flesh can glory in His presence. All Divine blessings are just that... Divine. There are some who think that they can do what God can do, and sometimes even better. I have heard people actually say this in accumulating glory for themselves. God resists the proud and that is a strong statement in the epistle to James and must be heeded.

I have heard some so called Christians say that all you have to do is to love Jesus and then they go on to imply that doctrine is not that important and whatever our doctrines are and whatever the doctrines of other denominations are, that does not matter one iota since all that matters is that you love Jesus. How can an unregenerate sinner love Jesus? It is not like putting a coat on! That is an insult to human intelligence and to God Himself!

To travel over the frontier to Beersheba will not help because the curse is upon the people wherever they go God’s wrath was upon His people and with just cause. The remedy is not a different location but a change of heart! The people either returned to God or continued in their sin and be justly punished.

God as creator in one of the reminders in verse 7 to 9. He laments that righteousness has been cast down and turned into wormwood which is plant with a bitter taste. Justice in the courts had been unfair on the poor who had to suffer consequent bitterness. The rich and wealthy held sway over the legal system. Yet the Lord can turn the shadow of death into a beautiful morning but, because of the sin of the people, he could plunge the day into darkness. The brightness of prosperity could be changed into the dark night of adversity and the Lord calls the waters of the sea to cover the earth like a flood. God caused the destruction upon the strong and mighty and the strongholds were destroyed and, as we have said, all of this could have been avoided but for the continual sin of the people and their deliberate acts in violation of the Divine will since God had loved and helped His people with great love and mercy.

As verse 10 indicates justice was often dealt with in the gateways of cities and large towns with the elders and judges sitting on the city walls to hear the cases and give a verdict. They were susceptible to bribery and corruption. When a monitor spoke up against injustice he caused anger and, in presenting the true facts, faced bitter opposition.

The following three verses are eye-openers. The wealthy class had acquired land of small farmers by foreclosing mortgages and by other devious means and also by extortion. Those who had been subject to such frauds had now to pay rents on their own land. Such wealthy schemers are denounced by Amos and these badly treated farmers would have to pay a toll of wheat in addition. These evil people had houses of hewn stone while most houses were built with dried brick. They planted vineyards for their own enjoyment but now they would not live in such luxury houses nor enjoy the fruit of their own vineyards. Judgment was coming. The sins of these people were great in oppressing the poor, gross injustice, taking bribes and the total disregard of the needy. All this evil meant that the wise men of Israel kept silence since whatever they said or did would be futile.

God had to do something! The absurd notion that God is cruel is not valid. As someone has said, "It was not that God was engaged in butchery, but in surgery." To all decent people, all evil and injustice must be eradicated.

The following verses, 14 and 15, introduce positivity. If good is sought then Israel would survive. This alone was the way forward, but people are so proud, self-promoting and, frankly, stupid. If Israel continued in their evil ways, all Divine favour would be removed. But, as the apostle John wrote, "People love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." If Israel were to change and detest evil and put it away, Jehovah would again be to them the loving and merciful God as before. But repentance and justice were the priorities.

There are messages for us today as God's people. There is inconsistency and hypocrisy which is widespread in some so-called Christian circles. If we love our sins and indulge our desires, even in secret, how can we escape justifiable punishment? Why are there churches preaching false doctrine and praising mere men and allowing themselves to enjoy both self elevation and self-importance. Christianity is Christ and not self. Why do some follow man-made Christianity with modern, trendy and worldly ideas? These are false pretences. We are to love and serve the Lord His way, not ours.

Verses 16 and 17 introduces us the weeping and wailing of the people everywhere as God's righteousness fell upon them. Death passed through. No longer could punishment be delayed and even professional wailers would take part. Even those who kept the feast days and made offerings were rejected by God. Lip service is not the same as genuine service and it should cause us to think that our service for the Lord is merely a habit and just something that we do because we have always done so. God cannot have fellowship with unworthy worshippers and does that not also apply to those who worship God their own way and not His way?

The day of the Lord is regularly referred to in the Old Testament as a day of judgment with clouds and thick darkness. Yet the people of Israel had longed for this day presumably not realising what it meant. Of what possible benefit would it have for them? It would be destruction and death and unexpected disasters. A man would be bitten by a serpent in his own house or flee from a lion only to meet a bear and the Syrian bear was fiercer than a lion. You cannot escape the righteous punishment of God.

It is worth remembering that God is righteous in all His ways and that judgment and punishment is His strange work in which He has no delight. Jeremiah wrote of God, "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

God had no pleasure in the burnt offerings, the meal offerings, the peace offerings or their observance of religious festivals nor does he enjoy their songs chanting the praise of God. They could not be accepted because these practices were not meant and their lives were saturated with sin. Will we be rejected at the Judgment Seat if Christ because of our inconsistency? Of course, our salvation is secure

Verse 24 calls for justice to roll. If the offerings and festivals were unacceptable to God what could the

people do? If communion with God was to be restored then justice must be revived and repentance be made sincerely. All injustices must be swept away and all evil to be no more, dishonest practices were also to be no more. Justice must flow as in the rainy season and when the streams constantly flowed even in the driest places. Justice had to run through the whole of society and there were to be no exceptions.

In the wilderness, sacrifices were made for forty years. Were they essential for fellowship with God or did the people fail in all their obligations to God. Today, we must realise that fellowship with God must be real and vital and fellowship is not sharing everything with others. It is not nosiness as practised by many, even in Christian circles where some want to know all about you. Is our communion with God a mere obligation?

The final verses, 26 and 27 indicates that the people of Israel were not honouring God and they were freely paying homage to other gods such as Moloch and Chiun. The whole matter of idolatry is raised again. Israel had turned to false gods and false practices. Why when they had had the benefits of God's goodness and love for so long a time? The people would go into exile beyond Damascus, an indication of some unknown place, and their fate was because of their sins, evil ways and their refusal to obey the Lord

## **Chapter Six**

This chapter concerns the wealthy people in Israel who live in ease and luxury and put their trust in the security of Samaria. They were oblivious to their real state which was of sin, idolatry and disregard for God. Their men were men of mark that is to say men of distinction, or so they thought, and people came to them as they had political and economic control. Amos referred to Zion, that is to say Jerusalem capital of Judah, the southern kingdom, who were also complacent. In verse 2, Amos asks if any surrounding nation is comparable with the two kingdoms. Were these other nations superior? Calneh and Hamath were important cities but were they superior? I do not know why Gath is mentioned as Uzziah had captured it in 760 BC.

Verses 3 to 6 refer to the pampered rich who ignored the warnings of impending doom for the dreadful sinners of Israel. They had listened to Amos with pessimism and believed that nothing would happen to them. All of his prophecies were idle talk and meant nothing. The day of God's judgment would not happen and the people ridiculed the judgment that was to come in evil days. They were digging their own graves although they had luxury beds, the best of food, musical entertainment, drank much wine and perfumed themselves with expensive ointments. They were not concerned about the house of Joseph, their own land. None of this was honouring to God and rapidly heading to self destruction of Israel.

The following two verses speak of the status that Israel had reached. They lived in wild revelry and their parties could be heard. Today would be a day of mirth but soon will come a day of judgment. Jehovah hates all of this and will put an end to it and to the cities and strongholds. God hated their pride as he does today even among Christians who boast and talk about self. Such pride is an abomination to God. Self-sufficiency was also of no avail to Israel and they had no concept of the Lordship of Jehovah.

It would not now be long before the Assyrians would capture Samaria and its strongholds and the people be taken into exile. God's words to Amos would be fulfilled.

As Christians today, we must not live in luxury or be gluttons. The church is not to be a vehicle for entertainment, dance and quasi pop-music. Nor should we make our appearance in any way to be glamorous or trendy and it is the Lord Jesus that must be preached and spoken about, not ourselves.

While we do not wish to detract from the work of the Holy Spirit there are many modern churches who make the Holy Spirit to be elevated and have the most attention. His function is to draw men and women to Christ and not to Himself.

Verses 9 and 10 refers to the siege of Samaria in which many would die. Military conflict was not the only problem, disease and a possible plague. The siege would produce starvation and malnutrition, Corpses would have to be cremated. If someone was found dead in a house a call would be made to see if there was survivor and the name of Jehovah would not be mentioned in case they produced a further Divine curse. Or it may refer to the mention of Jehovah as an admission of the sin of the people. Whatever is said, the people of Israel were suffering because of their sin and evil ways. It was their fault entirely.

The next verse talks of Jehovah's commands and houses of the rich and the not so rich would be destroyed. No one will escape.

Horses do not run on rocks and the sea is not ploughed with oxen and yet Israel has turned justice into gall and righteousness into wormwood. Amos taunted the people with rejoicing in Lodebar which name means a thing of nought and glorying in when they captured Karnaim which names means horns and strength. This was no cause for rejoicing as these victories were insignificant. Some people when they experience some acknowledgment, this boosts their ego and we live in a society which thrives on this and this also happens with some Christians... a little bit of limelight encourages them to pride and self-importance. There are Christians who are empire builders. We must not praise ourselves, or a fellow Christian since even our own righteousness is like filthy rags. In all things, yes, all things, Christ must have the pre eminence certainly not self, the pastor or any human being. Praising God is not self-congratulation nor ever should it be.

God will raise up a nation against Israel at a time when they appear to be rejoicing over some previous minor successes. Like Zion. Israel believed themselves to be perfectly secure and that no trouble would befall them (verses 1 and 13 refer).

It reminds of the scripture, Let him that thinks he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

## **Chapter Seven**

This appears to be a dialogue between the prophet and God. All the visions given to Amos about the forthcoming Divine punishment indicates that Amos pleads for the people to be spared.

The chapter begins with a vision of a swarm of locusts attacking the rapid growth of crops after the rains of March and April. The kings mowing may refer to the tax levied on pasture land to obtain food for the horses. Locusts would consume and destroy all greenery including vegetables. They were a regular curse and when they had eaten everything what would be left for human consumption? The locust was often an instrument of God's curse (Deuteronomy 28.38).

Amos beseeches the Lord to spare the people and the Lord changed his mind and did so.

Jehovah hears the cry of his people via their representative. The prophet Isaiah called upon God to deal with the people in consideration and this is another example of the merciful God. It is important to note that Amos was the prophet, the Lord's spokesman, but also the intercessor for the people.

Verses 4 to 6 speak of another vision in which Jehovah is calling for judgment by fire which would devastate the land and the water supply. Fire is often the symbol of God's wrath. Here Amos pleads for Divine mercy and to show forgiveness to Israel as the prophet had requested when commenting on the vision of the locusts. Again the Lord repented, that is to say changed His mind.

Although many churches do not emphasize doctrine and are not concerned about the meaning of words and terminology it must be stated here that God repenting does not in any way mean that God had sinned. Repentance means to turn away from sin but God is not, nor could be, a sinner. Repentance means to change one's mind. Amos uses his same plea that God's people are so small.

We have already mentioned that judgment is God's strange work and He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

The use of the plumb line is now discussed. Here is the Lord standing by a wall with a plumb line in His hand to see if the wall was perpendicular. The wall was apparently beginning to crack and, therefore, becoming unstable. The wall was a picture of Israel and that God was using a plumb line in the midst of His people and, like the wall, the people were no longer safe and to be levelled to ground and Divine judgment was about to fall. Amos, whom God now calls by name, makes no plea or intercession here.

Jehovah had passed by His people in the past particularly at the first Passover but now all the high places and sanctuaries would be destroyed. Jeroboam had tolerated the sin and idolatry of the people and so judgment would be poured out on his house.

It causes us to consider how God might deal with the leaders in our country particularly those such as George Galloway and Ken Livingstone who despise the Jews and have strong atheistic views and a hatred of the God of the Bible. However, we read that Divine judgment will begin at the House of God. It is imperative that we, as Christians, have lives that please God and are true to Scriptures.

As in the verses before us, God is sovereign, the Ruler in the heavens and the earth.

There now follows a dispute between Amos, Amaziah the priest of Bethel concerning king Jeroboam. The priest complains to the king that Amos is saying things that are unbearable and stirring up a controversy. Furthermore, he is forecasting the death of the king. Amaziah saw nothing spiritual or anything of God in the message and, as priests were chosen by the king, he was obliged to be loyal to the throne and put the monarch first. As far as the priest was concerned, Amos should not be allowed to say these things or wander around making these comments. The prophet was probably accused of treason. There appears to be no action taken by the king.

Amaziah tells Amos to run away and go into Judah and leave Israel alone. Why should a southerner denounce the northern kingdom? What was it to do with him? He is not to prophesy against the royal sanctuary of Bethel as it was a temple of the kingdom. Amos replies that he is not a prophet as such but a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees but God had called him to prophesy to the people of Israel. Anyone who resists Amos's message was resisting God.

So it is today and not only with unbelievers but with some who call themselves Christians who add to the Bible or take away from it and who introduce new doctrines not found in the sacred Scriptures.

The final verses of this chapter is a Divine rebuke against Amaziah. He is told that his land will be forfeited, Israel shall go into exile, his wife will become a prostitute, which was an abominable shame to any husband, and his children will perish. The punishment was severe but it would fall on all Israel and it was their fault because of the sin, evil ways, idolatry and total disregard for God.

## **Chapter Eight**

This chapter begins with the vision of summer fruits. This may represent an offering made at Bethel in the autumn which happened at the end of harvest.

The contents of the basket indicated the end of the harvest since the end had come for Israel who were ripe for judgment. It was too late for penitence. Jehovah said, "I will never again pass by them." Mercy had been shown them, warnings had been given but they had taken no notice but continued in their evil ways and idolatry. Harvest was a time for rejoicing but now it would be of wailing. Divine judgment would come and there would be numerous deaths that burials would prove impossible. There would be nothing but grief and sorrow brought upon them by themselves.

In our day, God is blamed for many things. Even the atheist, Richard Dawkins who does not believe in God blames Him for troubles. With other cases, if no one can be considered for blame such events are called acts of God which is both unfair and ridiculous. A theatre in my town was burned down and it was claimed to be God's fault or that God allowed it to happen. It was discovered that the fire was caused by a cigarette and someone said, "God does not smoke!"

John had a stroke at the age of forty two and is paralysed for the rest of his life. God has been blamed and it has been said, "If God is a god of love He would not have allowed this! It is God's fault. "

There are other reasons concerning his life style which may have caused his illness.

Verses 4 to 8 deal with the traders and merchants who exploited the poor and trod them down and increased their poverty and probably caused their end. If the poor died the traders could take over their land and houses and gain further advantage. The traders' religious ceremonies were a mockery and when those ceremonies were over they continued to inflict the poor ruthlessly.

There is another lesson for us here. It is not for us to criticise, but some people go to church for various reasons, a sense of duty, for prestige, to meet with others to exchange business matters, to see what Mrs Jones is wearing and, even in evangelical churches, to have fellowship, which is nosiness, or to promote self. The church is to honour and worship God, to learn His ways and walk in them. We do not follow any rites or rules of any church but study the Scriptures and follow Christ.

Amos was tearing away hypocrisy. The traders were deceitfully using false balances. They deliberately increased the weight of the shekel to make further gains. Driven to such penury even a pair of sandals was donated towards an unfair debt and some went into slavery. Farmers selling their own produce were now in the hands of the ruthless traders.

The following verses speak of the earthquake to come which would cause fear. It was linked with the disgraceful behaviour of Israel and there would be no escape. The disaster would be no mere natural happening but God punishing the inhabitants of Israel.

The upheavals and convulsions of the Nile was a fit symbol of the earthquake (Isaiah 24. 19ff). Amos tells us that this event would be accompanied by an eclipse of the sun. There was a total eclipse of the sun in Israel on 15 June 763 BC and this may be the event here. The sun would set at noon and the earth would be in darkness. The festivals which were times of rejoicing would be of severe lamentation since the judgment of God would come and the happy songs would be like funeral dirges. At a time of grief the people would wear sackcloth round the loins (2 Samuel 3.31) and shave their heads although this was against the law (Deuteronomy 14. 1). Nothing escapes the eyes of God. It would appear that the Lord allows men to go unchecked for a long time but the day of reckoning will come.

A time of famine would follow but it would be a spiritual famine not a thirst for water but to know what Jehovah is saying. There would be a frantic running to and fro throughout the land to hear the words of Jehovah. Amos and the prophets had been disregarded and they would eventually die and who then would speak the words of the Lord. When people are in trouble they may seek God whom they do not believe in and have hitherto ignored and, as in Amos, realise their loss and seek the words of God. The

people of Israel, including the young ones, would swoon in exhaustion in their search for any contact with God but the heavens would be as brass.

We live in days when countries who once honoured God no longer do so and have turned their backs upon God and refuse to listen to His word. The Scriptures have been both ridiculed and despised. This also happens among Christians who add to and take away from the Word of God. In 1899 the Pentecostals began basing their stance on what they called the new revelation of God with the claims of the second blessing and the speaking in tongues and healing being available to all and essential to all true believers. The Jehovah Witnesses also believe that they are the only ones who are right but have false doctrines.

The final verse in this chapter speaks of idolatry which not only referred to false gods but hypocrisy in worshipping the true God including at Beersheba to which religious pilgrimages were made. The guilt of Samaria probably refers to the worship of the golden calf at Dan and there was the goddess Ashimah who was worshipped at Hamath and elsewhere.

In our day, we worship God and do not put our admiration on the pastor, music group, dancers, entertainment, worship leader or our denomination. In all things and in everything Christ and He alone must have the pre eminence.

## **Chapter Nine**

With all the gloom and doom of the first eight chapters we now come to the final chapter which is of ultimate blessing and also deals with the dispersion of Israel. Adonai is standing by the altar prepared to implement justice. The name Adonai speaks of Divine Sovereignty whereas the name Jehovah refers to the God of the covenant.

This would be an ominous sight. The altar had seen many foolish and hypocritical sacrifices but now there stands the Almighty God presumably at Bethel. The whole place would shake and collapse and bury any worshippers in the ruins. The people had boasted that the Lord was with them (Amos 5.14) but Adonai was now to demonstrate that there was hypocrisy and no fellowship, no truth or sincerity.

A lesson for us is that we must be sincere, but some people are sincere but wrong. Do we realise that God is worthy of our devotion and willing submission to Him? Worship is worthship. In quietness and confidence is our strength. It is not in exuberance and self-expression. We are to worship God with reverence and godly fear. That is to say respect. Worship is not the lifting of hands since God is not worshipped with hands. Reverence is the bowing of the head, heart and knees although this may be expressed as symbolism.

God requires worship His way and His ways are not our ways. Worship is not entertainment or a variety show.

Verses 2 to 4 has a grim message. No one will escape the holocaust, the Divine judgment to fall upon Israel. They may seek refuge in the depths or the heavens but there would be no hiding place since no place is out of reach of the Almighty (Psalm 139, 7 to 12) and this included Carmel with its many caves and impregnable forests. Even if the people could seek safety at the bottom of the sea the ferocious hydrophidae would find them and bite them. The people would go into exile but there would be no protection. God would set His eyes upon them but not for good but for the deserved evil of punishment.

We must try to see all this from God's viewpoint. He had loved these people, showed them every consideration and everlasting love, tenderness and mercy and yet they were ungrateful, evil, pursuing idolatry as did their ancestor, Solomon. They had no sense of social justice but were cruel and ruthless,

despising the poor and their mistreatment of their own people was second only to their dismissal of the Lord.

The next two verses major on the power of God in the context that what He said He was going to do He had the might and power to do so. Amos declares that when God touches the earth it melts and rises and sinks like a river, heaves like a flood and the inhabitants are terrified. The melting rocks will pour out lava disturbed by the earthquake. The prophet further declares that God built His upper chambers in the heavens and the vast firmament is like a massive arch over the earth. The ancients believed that there was a vast supply of water above the firmament released by God as rain.

Verse 7 is significant. Israel had rejected the Divine messages through Amos and continued in their appalling and evil ways. They behaved as if God did not exist and were therefore on the same level as the nations round about. The most remote people were the Cushites, also known as Ethiopians, who lived in Nubia and were despised because of their black skin.

The wife of Moses was a Cushite (Numbers 12.1). Israel often used Cushites as slaves.

Israel accepted that God had delivered them from Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan and had also directed the migration of other nations. The Philistines went from Caphtor to Crete (Jeremiah 47. 4) and there were the movements of the Aramaeans (Syrians) from Kir in Mesopotamia. This shows that the Lord was concerned with all nations of the earth which subject Paul took up in Romans 3. 20. Israel had a cavalier attitude to the Lord who reminded them that there were other people in whom He was interested.

The next verse deals with the dispersion of Israel described by the Lord as a sinful kingdom which is to be destroyed from the face of the earth. The whole of Israel will be shaken at the command of the Almighty. Israel shall be sieved as grain and such sieves were large and used in threshing possessing a large mesh to separate the trash from the grain. Some of the debris would be stones and so God's action would be a violent shaking. The Lord says that the other kingdom, Judah, also known as the house of Jacob, would not be utterly destroyed. Yet complacent Israel insisted that evil would not come upon them.

The Assyrian invasion is in mind here and all the sinners of Israel would be slain. The very false security of Israel and their evil ways is the reason for their coming downfall.

But there is hope. God's covenant with David stated that David's prosperity would never be completely exterminated and his political kingdom of Israel would continue for ever (2 Samuel 7, 12-16, 1 Chronicles 17, 11-14, 22, 9 -10). This did not imply that there would be an unbroken successions of kings but that a descendant of the royal hoses would sit upon the throne (Jeremiah 33. 17-21). Israel was to be conquered by the Assyrians and, eventually, Judah would be conquered by the Babylonians and both the people of Israel and Judah would be dispersed.

God's message to the people via Amos was that the kingdom of Israel would fall but, at some Future date, would be raised and restored to its former glory. It is implied that the two kingdoms would be reunited as in the days of old which indicates a long period of time. The other nations may refer to those corrected by the Lord's actions Amos was stating that there was a glorious future ahead for Israel.

The final two verses speak of the future and the blessings of the millennial reign of the Lord upon the earth (Revelation 20. 5). This would be a time of unparalleled fertility in the land. Growth would be so productive that the reaper would be at work almost immediately. Normally ploughing started after the October rain and harvesting of barley and wheat would be in April and May. The vineyards would be very productive. Israel would be restored to her lands and never be removed

from it again. All the towns and cities shall be restored and inhabited. Gardens would be prosperous and fruit would be in plenty.

Recent conflicts between Palestinians and Israel have been widely presented totally as Israel's fault and the claim that the Holy Land does not belong to the Jews. The world is full of anti-Semitism and some politicians in the UK have such irrational and cruel hatred towards the Jews that it encourages more violence. But one day, all these evil politicians will bow the knee to God and be shown up as those who hated God's people and they will be punished accordingly. In fact everyone will admit that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2. 10ff)

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