

November 9

Scriptures: Read Amos 3 & 4

Key Verse: "... you have not returned to Me,... Therefore... prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (Amos 4:11-12)

Overview

From chapter three to the end of the book, Amos expands upon his charges against the Northern Kingdom of Israel and continues his pronouncement of doom. Though his message is directed to Israel, it is an indirect message to Judah as well, for they too were among the "whole family" which God redeemed out of Egypt (3:1), and they too are included in the Lord's claim to have "known" them of all the families on earth (3:2a). This refers to the close covenant relationship that they had together. They were privileged and favoured (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 4:20; 7:6-8; Ps. 147:19-20). This does not mean that God showed partiality (Rom. 2:4-5, 11). Israel's selection was because of God's faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham, and it would also fulfill His purpose in sending the Messiah whereby all families on earth might be blessed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8, 16). Along with their privileged position came a greater responsibility (3:2b). They were supposed to reflect the Lord and His laws to the nations, but instead they marred His reputation and profaned His holy name because of their disobedience to Him in breaking the covenant. Their failure called for severe punishment, for they did not fulfill their duties and obligations.

As a shepherd and a farmer, Amos was familiar with nature, and so he takes much of his imagery from nature and the animal kingdom. Through a series of questions, Amos illustrates that wherever there is an effect, there must be a cause. If a lion roars, it is because he has caught something. If a bird is caught, it is evidence of the presence of a trap. Amos wants them to understand that when the calamity comes upon them, it will be evidence of the Lord's judgment which was caused by their sin. Unlike a hidden trap, God reveals His message to His prophets so that the people might be warned and come to repentance (3:7). God has spoken (the "roar") to Amos; therefore, his only reaction is to prophesy the Word of the Lord (3:8).

It is a sad commentary that the people of God should be judged by the heathen who are called upon to view the oppression and unrest ("violence and robbery" by the rich to the poor) in Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom. If the Egyptians and the Philistines, who have not had the law of God, can condemn Israel for her heartless crimes, then how much more should the righteous Judge, the Lord God, call them to account for their guilt (3:9). Israel's sin had blinded them from having spiritual and moral discernment (3:10). Amos then declared the message of judgment. The adversary, who would surround them and sap all their strength, destroying their palaces and idolatrous shrines, would be the king of Assyria. This was accomplished in the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. The Lord's plans for the world, however, were not to be thwarted by Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. Just as a shepherd would rescue only a small portion of his sheep from the lion, so too the Lord would save only a small remnant of Israel from destruction (3:12).

Chapter four reveals the depravity of even the women of Samaria (well-fed strong cows) who have encouraged their husbands to keep up their life of luxury; they too share in the guilt of

oppressing the poor and needy. The Lord would not tolerate this any longer! God's holiness and justice would be vindicated by His punishment of sin. Before long, these wealthy oppressors and their children would be dragged off in single file, and in humiliation as captives to Assyria (4:2-3). What good will their wealth and luxuries be to them then?

With irony and sarcasm, Amos invites them to go and perform all their outward acts of religiosity at the pagan shrines in Bethel and Gilgal, which would only add to their guilt. Their motivations were self-pleasing and self-serving. Bethel was the centre of idolatrous calf worship (from Egypt) established by Jeroboam I, the first king of the Northern Kingdom (3:14; 4:4; cf. 1 Kings 12:26-33). Jeroboam was always remembered as the one "who sinned and who made Israel sin" (1 Kings 14:16; 15:30, 34; 16:19, 26; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29; 13:2). Like Bethel, Gilgal was another idolatrous centre where they would mix worship of God with Baal worship (syncretism; cf. Hos. 4:15). Their offerings, which were supposed to be given to God only in Jerusalem, were given to an idol and to a corrupted priesthood (1 Kings 12:31-33)! The Lord was still gracious in His many attempts to bring them back to Himself. Every time He chastised them, whether it was by hunger, drought, mildew, locust, pestilences, plagues, military defeats, or destruction, they still refused to turn to Him. Any one of these things should have been enough to bring them to their knees before God, but because of the hardness of their hearts, due to persistent sinning, they still did not repent.

After so many loving attempts, the all-powerful and all-knowing Lord God of Hosts (4:13) resolved to come personally and see to their punishment. Therefore, in yet another attempt to elicit their repentance, Amos declares: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel! (4:12). In the past, they had resisted God's messengers, but now there would be no possible way for them to resist Him personally.

Prayer

Almighty God, grant that we may take great care in all we do for You. Thank You for being interested in the details of our lives and our service.