

November 10

Scriptures: Read Amos 5, 6 & 7

Key Verse: "... Seek Me and live". (Amos 5:4)

Overview

In chapter five, Amos takes up a lamentation, speaking with a heavy heart, because of the people's sin and coming judgment. With his mind's eye he sees the falling of the "virgin of Israel" (5:2), possibly so called because she had never before been dominated by a conquering nation, Amos envisions her raped and forsaken, with no one to help her. He prophesies that ninety percent of the inhabitants of Israel will be destroyed (5:3). Such a thought grieved the Lord and prompted Him to give yet another call for repentance (5:4-5; cf. Isa, 55:6-7). If they would only seek Him and worship Him alone, forsaking all their idols and the evil of social injustice and oppression, then they would have hope. The judgment might be postponed or diminished, and it might cause the Lord to be gracious to those who would escape (5:15).

The people were to know that the almighty Creator God was certainly able to perform all that Amos had prophesied, such as destroying their idolatrous city centres (5:8-9). The Lord despised and rejected their empty, vain acts of religious devotion to Him, which were also accompanied by devotion to idols. He demands that His people worship Him alone and with pure hearts and right motivations, not hypocritically with outward man-made ceremonies. Since the very beginning of the nation, however, their hearts had been divided because of their idolatry (5:21-27; Hos. 10:2; cf. Isa. 1:10-20; Ps. 50:7-15; 1 Sam. 15:22; Micah 6:6-8; John 4:23-24).

Amos constantly exposes the sins of the people in the midst of his messages. Again he condemns them for oppressing the poor, perverting justice, and quieting anyone who speaks against them, including the prophets. These rich leaders were so strong and corrupt that the common people were afraid to voice their opinions and complaints (5:13). The Lord would not permit such a situation to continue. As He once punished the Egyptians, so also He would now send His death angel through Israel, and all the people will be in mourning, for no household would escape without tragedy (5:16-17). On that day, they will know it was the Lord's judgment, and when the surviving relatives come to bury the dead and burn spices or incense for them (not burn the bodies; 6:10; cf. Jer. 34:5; 2 Chron. 16:14; 21:19), they will not even mention the name of the Lord, out of fear He hear and make a complete end of the household (6:9-10).

Amos exposes two misconceptions about the day of the Lord. There were those who wanted that day to come, thinking God's judgment would come only upon their enemies and not themselves, since they were the people of God. They mistook God's favour for favouritism. Amos asks them to examine the heathens around them, so they might conclude that they were no better (6:2). "Woe" was pronounced, for that dark day would come upon them suddenly and unexpectedly, just as it had previously come upon the heathens.

Another misconception was that the day of the Lord would never come, and if it did, it would be far in the future. Therefore, they lived their lives as though God was not taking notice. They indulged in luxuries, drank to excess, and did not care about the plight of the poor. Their lifestyle

was senseless and would surely lead to disaster, just as a horse would break its leg if it ran on rocks (6:12). God hated their lifestyle and their palaces which were built at the expense of the poor. What they thought would never come would come upon them first. Their homes would be crushed beyond repair, all the land they had conquered would be conquered by another (6:13-14), and they would be the first to go into the captivity that would take them beyond Damascus (i.e. into Assyria, 5:27; 6:3-8, 11).

Chapter seven begins another portion of the prophecy that relates five of Amos' visions (7:1-9:10). The Lord now allowed Amos to see, through a direct visual revelation, the things that He had purposed to bring upon Israel (cf. 1:1; 4:6-13). In the first six chapters of the book, however, it was the spoken word of the Lord that Amos heard. The purpose of the visions was to warn Israel of the coming destruction and move them to call upon God and repent. Amos' intercession moved the Lord to change His course of action and stop the plague of locust before it destroyed the people's food for the winter (7:1-3). That the Lord "relented" does not mean He changed His mind; it is a change of direction based upon His merciful and loving nature. In a similar vision, Amos' intercession once again moved the Lord to stop the intense heat which would produce a drought. Amos' intercession shows the faithfulness and love of a true prophet who did not wish to see their destruction, even though they did not listen to him. In the third vision, however, no amount of intercession would change God's purpose (cf. Ezk. 14:14-20). The Lord showed how far off they were from where they should be by employing the plumb-line (used to test if a wall is perpendicular). Judgment, which included the destruction of the dynasty of Jeroboam II, was inevitable (7:7-9; cf. 2 Kings 14:23-24; 15:8-10).

How bold Amos was to prophesy these things right from Bethel, the idolatrous centre of Israel! Even when the priest of Bethel attempted to quiet him and send him back to Judah, Amos became even more bold by telling him that his was not just a profession, nor was he a graduate from the school of the prophets or the son of a prophet, but the Lord had called him and he genuinely spoke the word of the Lord. His prediction of the corrupted priests' captivity and misfortune was surely to be fulfilled.

Prayer

Oh Lord, teach us to speak Your Word more effectively and in truth. We present ourselves to You today. Use us to share Your good news with others.