

THE MISSION OF AMOS

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is a consciousness in man that God concerns Himself about all our actions and even our thoughts. Serious questions immediately arise. In what way does He do so? What is His attitude towards us? The conscience feels that it has to do with Him. As beings responsible for our actions we have to give account of them to God someday. If we think of meeting Him as a Judge, conscience at once makes us aware that we have sinned. How is it possible to be happy with a God who knows our sin? We know that He must hate it, for He is Himself absolutely righteous and holy, hating sin with a perfect hatred. These questions can only be answered by revelation. God interests Himself in man in the way of revelation; revealing Himself and making Himself known by that which He does to reconcile man to Himself.

God may make Himself known to man as the One who weighs all his actions (1 Sam 2:3). But the soul only finds terror in the thought if it is not conscious of God's favour. If an offended God, and we feel that we have offended Him, judge without mercy, what will become of those who have nothing else in which to hope but mercy?

When God reveals Himself according to what He is in His nature the soul gets the answer to its need. God is known, and this is just what the soul needs. He has perfectly revealed Himself in Christ, and in Christ love is found consistent with that which God is in the holiness of His nature. The revelation was made to man when He was all ungodly. *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* By the activity of this love towards man, revealing what God is, truthfulness and uprightness may enter a soul that is made conscious of its sin.

Until Christ came God spoke to men in various ways. The angel of His presence appeared unto men in times of old, and when the law was given to Israel at Sinai, angels were the immediate instruments of God through which the law was ministered, adding the high dignity of their glory to the proclamation of the law. But when the people of God proved unfaithful to His word of command, and neglected the true worship of Jehovah, or mingled it with idolatry, He raised up prophets. The utterances of the prophets were a marvellous and convincing proof of God's concern in the conduct and state of His people. It was not the visible powerful action of angelic intervention, but God working through the thoughts and feelings of men who were kept by God in the secret of communion with Himself, and taught by Him. Their words were the words of God and were endorsed with His authority. Prophecy was also the testimony of God which lighted up the path of the faithful until Christ came. The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets.

Israel was once the seat of God's government on earth, but because of their departure from God and their falling away into idolatry they were given into the hands of their enemies, who were sent by God to chasten His people. But before God brought down these enemies upon them He sent prophets to warn Israel. The prophets testified against the evils of the day, they warned of coming judgment, and encouraged faith, preserved in grace, by the promise of blessing in a future day, when God would no longer leave the stability of His government to the responsibility of men. Jehovah would reign in power amidst His mercifully restored people, and the government would depend on His stability.

The prophets not only pronounced judgment against wickedness, they were the proclaimers of God's testimony for the day in which they lived, and they revealed the unchangeable character of His nature: "truth and mercy" are wonderfully intermingled. In general the prophets do not speak of the great public events in the government of God, but taking account of the moral condition of Israel they reveal God's way with His people, and we learn what God is in a way that a simple expression of His power could not teach. The message of the prophet met the need of souls oppressed by evil. It did more, it awoke true sentiments and thoughts about the evil which had developed in the midst of the people of God. God's own character was revealed in the words of the prophets; the unchangeable God was weighing the conduct of the nation which was responsible to bear witness to His name, and He wrought amongst them for His own great name's sake (Ezekiel 20). In long-suffering patience He bore with the iniquity which He exposed by the mouth of the prophet and about which He voiced His indignation. Yet as they were His people whom He had sworn to bless. His purpose to bring to pass all the good His heart desired for them is found at the end of the prophecy, and the blessing is, in certain books, definitely connected with the Messiah, the true Son of David.

The hearts of the prophets burned with love as they entered into the moral judgment of God against the sin of the people. Deeply affected by the knowledge God loved that which He was about to chasten with sore affliction, they spoke as they felt. Prophets such as Jeremiah and Hosea moved among the people, and the anguish of heart which the Spirit of God produced in them at the sight of the wickedness is reflected in their style of expression. Jeremiah pleaded with a people whom he well knew would not repent, and he is seen to be truly a man of sorrow.

Hosea, who prophesied before all Israel, pursued the sin of the nation with "*consuming fire of jealousy and of moral revenge.*" The evil was in the midst of God's people and this was TOO horrible to contemplate.

Amos utterly condemns the wayward conduct of Israel, but he stands apart from the people. He does not go so far as Hosea into detail concerning the sin which he judges with no uncertain judgment. He stands apart with God and reviews the whole land—the two houses of Israel and those nations on the borders of the land that had molested Israel. The spirit of the prophet is burdened with another sorrow, Israel is addressed in the same manner as their guilty heathen neighbours, who come under the judgment of God for their cruelty, which violated even natural human sensibility.

We see plainly in the prophets how deeply God concerns Himself with the actions and thoughts of His people. In the word of prophecy God is taking up the cause of His people. He

exposes the motives of all their activities. He feels for them and enters into their feelings. The very fact that God searched out their sin, and disclosed their inmost thoughts in the words of the prophet, and yet cared for them, showed that He still left open to them a way of repentance; while faith, which through grace clung to Him, was encouraged in spite of failure.

As God was warning Israel and not yet judging the nation, the people were responsible to acknowledge their sin when it was disclosed to them, and to seek the presence of Him who alone could deal with it, and with them in mercy. Without mercy they were lost, and the prophet, although he is faithful to expose the evil and pronounce God's judgment on it, is the herald of the mercy of God, for all the prophets promise the fulfilment of the counsels of God in faithfulness and in mercy. It is this revelation of God's unchangeable character, and His unwavering purpose to bless, which in faithfulness to the divine glory He will perform to the full, that saves man from destruction.

God was not fully revealed until Christ came, but He was rejected by man who was responsible to recognize and receive Him. It was then proved, in the rejection of Christ, that man was completely a slave to sin and wholly under the power of the enemy. A real work had to be done to free man from the chains of his slavery. The price for his redemption had to be paid, the power of death had to be broken, and it cost the life of the Blessed Substitute before any soul could be set free and be perfectly at peace in the presence of God. Then the whole sphere of divine favour was changed, and it was changed by the resurrection of Christ.

Righteousness had to be found before man could stand before God; divine righteousness is now revealed from heaven. A kingdom will be set up; it will be the kingdom of heaven that brings peace and joy to a blessed earth. The Man Christ Jesus has gone on high to be the Head and Centre of all God's counsels of grace and government. By His rejection on earth the whole earthly course is changed; all blessing for earth is now centred in heaven, and flows down, not merely in grace from heaven, but from the Man who is exalted to the right hand of power on high.

Such was the goodness of God to Israel that He sent witnesses to testify against the evil, and He judged it by the word of prophecy so that faith might hear it and rejoice in anticipation of the day of blessing, when all evil would be removed and the earth be blessed in righteousness. The faithful were "kept," as the apostle Peter says, *"by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:5). Until the day of glory comes the elect of God are kept by His power in a moral way, that is, through faith, which is begotten and strengthened by the word of God. Faith lives in the power of salvation, a power already revealed in the resurrection of Christ, and a salvation yet to be realized to the fullest extent of the counsels of God. Israel will enjoy God's counsels of blessing for an earthly people when their hearts turn to Him.

Amos was one upon whose heart divine grace wrought while he pursued his daily occupation. He had not been brought up in the family of a prophet, he was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (Amos 7:14). God opened his eyes to see the evil that had polluted the land, and he proclaims the severe judgment of God on all those who dwelt in it, and also upon the nearby nations that had troubled Israel, especially those who still retained a place in that portion of the land which God had promised to Abraham. The prophet chiefly addresses Israel. Judah and Israel were morally no better than their neighbours, and Amos has much to say about the sins of

Israel. He prophesied in the days of Uzziah the king of Judah, two years before a notable earthquake. The historian Josephus states that the earthquake happened when king Uzziah went into the temple to offer incense and was struck with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

CHAPTER I

The first two chapters go together and give eight short denunciations of judgments against the people immediately surrounding Israel and also against the "whole family" of Israel. The remaining chapters each contain a separate prophecy. The first verse states who the prophet is and the time of prophecy. In the second verse Jehovah roars from Zion and makes His voice heard from Jerusalem. The prophecy of Amos begins where Joel ends. Joel speaks of the destruction of the northern hosts which invade Palestine at the close of the "*times of the Gentiles*" and Amos tells of the clearing of the land of all that pollutes it. Moab, Ammon, Edom, and the Philistines are left in Palestine until the true King David comes, and then Israel under Him will subdue their old enemies. (See Daniel 11:41; Isaiah 11:10-16).

Beginning with Syria and naming Damascus its capital, Jehovah announces that there is a full testimony of wickedness against it. "*For three transgressions*", which is adequate witness, "*and for four*" punishment would come upon Syria. Four is the number that signifies universality, for example, the four quarters of the globe; and it is generally used when the whole scene of creation is in view. The whole state of Syria was evil. They had not shown mercy to Gilead, therefore they would be treated with the utmost severity.

The Philistines, who remained in the southern coastal districts, would perish by fire. They too had filled up the cup of iniquity with four transgressions. But it was their treatment of Israel that Jehovah remembered in particular. They delivered the captives of Israel they had taken into the hands of the Edomites, Israel's inveterate enemy. They could not have done worse.

Tyre had been friendly with Israel in the days of David and Solomon, but had forgotten the brotherly covenant. The enmity of the natural heart against God breaks out at some time, and God must deal with those who show their hatred of Him by their contempt for and hostility to His people.

Edom's wrath for Israel was perpetual; and he "*cast off all pity*" and "*kept his wrath for ever*". It was not a matter of mere robbery for gain, but the heart of Edom was eaten up with hatred for Israel. Edom showed no mercy to his brother but pursued him, with the sword. In the day of reckoning Edom would be punished without mercy.

The natural cruelty of Ammon was exposed in the pursuit of their ambition to enlarge their borders at the expense of Israel, and it was revolting to God; it would meet a just recompense, and Ammon's king would go into captivity.

CHAPTER II

Moab violated the natural feelings of humanity by a savage act of vengeance to their already full tale of transgression. Moab killed the king of Edom and burned his body. Their own city would be destroyed by fire and their princes would be slain.

Judah and Israel are addressed in the same manner for morally they had sunk down to the level of their neighbours, and their cup of iniquity was overflowing. Judah had departed from the law of Jehovah and followed falsehood. Israel is more searchingly examined and much emphasis is laid on the way in which the poor were oppressed. The extortioners were utterly heartless with the poor, who had to pledge their clothes to find a means of existence; they slept with the garments given by the poor as security, contrary to the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 24:12, 13). They spent in riotous living the fines which had been inflicted for transgressions. In all this careless and Godless behaviour Israel had forgotten the merciful way Jehovah had brought them up out of Egypt and into Canaan, driving out the Amorite to make way for them. They led the Nazarite astray, perverting those who were set apart to God, and they silenced the prophets. But judgment would overtake Israel, and those who were strong in their evil ways would be without strength or courage in the day of chastening; none would escape.

With calmness and with dignity the prophet speaks to the whole family of Israel of their waywardness. This was the people whom God brought up out of Egypt. A most important statement is made in Amos 2:2; Jehovah declares "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth.*" Israel stood in a very special place and their responsibility was measured by their favoured position. (See Deuteronomy 4) God chose to make Israel the centre of His ways on earth and to bear testimony to His name and ways among all peoples. He could not ignore their failure and allow evil to be attached to His name. He might bear with them long, but the time must come when He would be compelled to vindicate His name and to punish them for their iniquities. His family was of more account to Him than all the rest of the world. He could not forget them, and their ways should have rendered a true testimony to His character. God will yet use Israel's defection to bring honour to His name in the earth when He deals with them in mercy in the day of their repentance.

While Israel is set aside the Church takes the place as God's witness on earth, "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" Christ, the Head of the Church, is on high and the Church here should testify to His heavenly glory. Christians are not mere witnesses to the world of God's earthly government; though the Father in secret disciplines His family for their good that His children might partake of His holiness and not be condemned with the world. The world to-day knows Christ through the testimony of the Christians, in it. The word of God anticipates the time when the Church, as in the case of Israel, fails to present a true testimony to the world, and Christ Himself takes up the testimony (Revelation 3:14). The outward responsible, but fallen Church, will be judged according to its profession and the privileges it has known. Its end will be terrible and final, for the testimony entrusted to the Church has been heavenly and eternal truth. If this be falsified or denied by word and practice it cannot be revived by a fuller revelation, for the Church has been told all the truth and shown all power; there is no place higher morally into which to take it when it has fallen from its first estate. It may be called to repentance, but when the truth is given up only judgment remains. The testimony of Israel has been partial and passing. Israel awaited the fuller revelation

of heavenly blessing and the power of resurrection to bring it in. When they are brought to acknowledge their sin and their need, God will put away the evil from them, and in grace establish all the blessing purposed for Israel, by power in a risen Christ. Israel failed when placed under law, so they could not retain nor fully enjoy the inheritance, but God has the power and the right to bring Israel into the blessing He purposed for them before they were made subject to law; it is on the ground of grace, and through the death and resurrection of the Messiah He will do so.

Two principles arise from the fact that Israel is known of God. "*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*" (Amos 2:3). And, if Jehovah speaks has He not a reason? Jehovah roared from Zion (Amos 1:2), and if He lifts up His voice surely He has cause to do so? (Verses 4-6). But He will not inflict punishment without first warning the people by the words of the prophet, who was in communion with Him (verse 7). Verse 8 sums up the foregoing words of the prophet.

An adversary would come and smite the land but a remnant would be saved. A few fragments such as might be rescued from the mouth of a lion when he had devoured his prey would be preserved from destruction. Samaria boasted in the strength of Israel, but God would bring down all its pride

Beth-el, "*the house of God*" had become the centre of idolatry in Israel. God first appeared to Jacob in a dream at Beth-el, and He gave Jacob to understand that the house of God on earth—the gate of heaven—was to be connected with him and his seed (Genesis 28:17). God spoke again to Jacob in a dream and He called himself the God of Beth-el. Israel had made the house of God the home of one of the golden calves of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (1 Kings 12:28-29). Jeroboam erected an altar to the golden calf at Beth-el and a man of God, from Judah cried against it (1 Kings 13:2) ; this prophecy was executed in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 23:15, 16). Idolatry in Israel had continued throughout the days of their history in spite of the warnings of the prophets and the chastisements inflicted upon Israel. The prophet now says that all their pleasant places would be smitten.

The Church in the days of her responsibility has not kept herself from the world, and like Israel of old, God has had to allow her to feel the consequences of associating with it. Many days of affliction have been allowed, to make the Church realize that the world is not her home, but that she is a pilgrim and stranger here on earth, dependent on God in her sorrow and widowhood. The world will tolerate her religiousness but it will not endure a living testimony to her glorified Head in heaven. The Church must deny her relationship to Christ before she can join with a world which is at enmity with God.

CHAPTER IV

With authority and with power the prophet rebukes the great in Israel for oppressing the poor; every one of the offenders would be turned out (ver. 3). Both Beth-el and Gilgal, places of wonderful memory in the land, were defiled with idolatry. The people found pleasure in offering their regular and voluntary sacrifices, but Jehovah was not pleased. Until the day came when Israel was carried into captivity God warned them and chastened them with minor judgments through providential means. They suffered scarcity of food, the lack of rain on some cities and not on

others, blasting and mildew, pestilence, and stench from the dead bodies of slain men, Some had been overthrown as were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, while some had been saved as firebrands plucked from the burning. But it was all of no avail. Each occasion of disciplinary chastening was sent from Jehovah, but He has to say, "*Yet have ye not returned to me, saith the LORD*". Now they must prepare themselves to meet God, the God of Israel. He is the Creator, the One who reads the thoughts of men and is above all their thoughts; He pondered the paths of their feet, and weighed every action: Jehovah, the God of hosts, is His name.

CHAPTER V

The prophet laments the fall of the house of Israel; the ruin none could remedy. The heart of God yearned over Israel, and the prophet who was filled with the greatness and power of Him who brought into existence the whole vast creation, enters also into the thoughts of God about the evil and His desire for Israel's repentance. Jehovah still said, "Seek ye me, and ye shall live." While the judgment waited, their one and only hope of deliverance was to return and seek the LORD. Who at Beth-el could stay the searching fire of Jehovah's judgments? Beth-el, Gilgal, and Beersheba, places of renown and blessing in Israel, were no longer to be regarded; deliverance could not be found in these places; all the former glory had departed from them. Israel must seek Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, who sustained all creation by His power, He could bring light to dispel the darkness, and turn the shadow of death into a morning of light, the light of resurrection (ver. 8).

They hated all rebuke, and him who gave the rebuke. They abhorred him who spoke uprightly, for evil had the upper hand. The poor were oppressed, but Jehovah would take their part, His works would be manifest amongst them. Those who had prospered by oppression and bribery would lose all their gains. Because of the prevailing evil the prudent would keep silence. There is a time to speak and there is a time to keep silence. It is a great rebuke for His people when God closes the mouth of His prophet (Ezekiel 3:26).

The principle for the enjoyment of blessing under God's government, which is ever-recurring in scripture, is here strongly pressed on the conscience. "*Cease to do evil, and learn to do well.*" "*Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live*" (verse 14). "*Hate the evil, and love the good*" (verse 15). The way of repentance was open; may be, even at such a late hour, Jehovah God of hosts would be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph's numerous family, which had been promised much blessing (Deuteronomy 33:).

There were those who professed a desire for the "*day of the LORD*" but they did not know what that day would bring. The keynote to the prophecy of Joel is "*the day of the LORD*". It will be "*A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness*" (Joel 2:2). A great and terrible judgment will overtake the apostate nations, and particularly apostate Jewry, in the day when the "*sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken*" (Matthew 24:29). Terror and disaster will overtake those who have not made the LORD their stronghold, but have turned a deaf ear to Jehovah's gracious warning. There will be no way of escape for the presumptuous in that day of reckoning.

God despised feasts and offerings which mingled idolatry with the true worship of Jehovah. Their songs were not music to His ears; their incense was not a pleasing odour to Him. He desired true judgment and righteousness. The Spirit of God, who searches the heart and the motives of the will, tells us here that the idolatry which they had learned in Egypt was practised by the children of Israel all through the wilderness journey. They had also adopted the god of the Ammonites; and all this idolatry had come to full bloom. It would be the cause of their captivity when the unnamed enemy carried them away to the north. Other prophets tell us the Assyrian would be that foe, followed by the Babylonians to carry Judah into captivity. (Compare Stephen's defence; Acts 7, especially verses 37-43).

CHAPTER VI

Unless a testimony is received in the heart and conscience as the word of God, the conscience only hardens itself against the testimony, and seeks to rest in visible and apparently stable forms built up by the mind of man. Israel was resting in the false security of the strength of Samaria. Insensible to the true state of Israel the people of Zion took their ease. God is slow to anger, but He will not allow those who profess His name to ignore His moral claims indefinitely. The fate of Calneh and Hamath, two cities that had been taken by the Assyrians, ought to have been a warning voice to Israel. But the prosperity of the moment deceived those who wished to be deceived. Luxury is a snare; the human mind cannot in its own strength escape its deadening effect. Rendered indolent by the ease of living, they found pleasure in the mere forms of religion, and they gave no thought to the affliction of Joseph, who was once sold into slavery. Israel itself would be the first to go into captivity. Jehovah hated all that exalted Jacob. Israel used none of its gains to glorify Jehovah but to please itself; therefore desolation would be its portion.

The warnings did not burden their consciences but passed unheeded. The people boasted in their gains as though won by their own strength, but their wealth would not save them when the coming foe from the north overwhelmed them and afflicted the whole land

CHAPTER VII

Using a picture familiar to Amos in his daily life, the LORD shows him the land devastated by locusts, and connects the infestation with the chastening judgment which would fall on Israel. The prophet in intimate communion with the mind of the LORD, intercedes for the family of Jacob, and the hand of the LORD is stayed in judgment.

Again Jehovah forewarns the prophet; He calls for fire to consume the land. Once more the prophet, whose heart and mind are in the secret of Jehovah, intercedes, and Israel is not destroyed. But the evil in Israel was great and Jehovah appears with a plumb-line in His hand. It was time to bring the iniquity to an end, Jehovah would no more pass by. Judgment would fall on the house of Jeroboam, who was a descendent of Jehu. The prophecy concerning the house of Jehu was about to be fulfilled (2 Kings 10: 29, 30). Jeroboam would fall by the sword and Israel would go into captivity (verse 11).

Amos interceded twice for Israel (verse 2, 5) and Jehovah withheld his hand. Twice in the history of the kingdom of Israel there had been revivals; once when the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat fell, and again after the house of Ahab was destroyed. Now that the time was come to judge the house of Jehu, the end of the kingdom of Israel was in sight, for Jehovah would no longer endure Israel's idolatry.

Without understanding the full import of his prophecy (see 1 Peter 1:10-12), the prophet, in communion with God, entered deeply into the state of Israel and acted in perfect accordance with the mind of God; this is true communion.

The prophet had come up from Judah to Beth-el to prophesy and announce the coming judgment on the kingdom of Israel. The king's chapel was at Beth-el, and to speak there of the passing away of the kingdom seemed indiscreet and most offensive. Amaziah, the priest of Beth-el, charged Amos with conspiring to overthrow the throne, and he repeats before the king the prophecy of Amos. The priest tells Amos to return to the land of Judah and prophesy there. A chapel where a golden calf was worshipped by the king was scarcely the place in which the truth could be spoken. Either the idol must be given up or the truth be driven away.

The true prophet of God professes to come from God and to speak the truth for God. The lying prophet always reasons from circumstances and seeks to attach the authority of God to his utterances; his way is subtle but truth is bold, it hides nothing and it is the light of God's presence. The conscience feels the weight of truth, but it fears that which it may recognize but cannot change.

That the established order could be changed was unthinkable to minds in the grip of sensuous idolatry. Truth must depart. Truth tells exactly what is and exposes the whole state. It is essential, and is always practical. It is not a theory, nor a myth impossible in practical life. However the mind of man may symbolize the attributes of God, the symbol is not the truth, but it becomes the object of veneration to the mind, which has not the knowledge of God. The mind then exalts itself above all that is called God, and God Himself is lost completely. Where any thought of Him remains, He is only that which reason or imagination attributes to Him. Man makes his god, and God becomes less than man. God was forgotten in Israel; a golden calf had taken His place in the worship of Israel.

Jehovah no longer owned Israel, Judah was still acknowledged as the centre of His governmental ways, and the prophet could speak the word of truth there. This was recognized by the priest of Beth-el, and he understood it to be right. Truth might be found in Judah; it could at least be spoken there, but it could not be tolerated where an ordered course of worship contrary to God and the revealed truth was practised. The visiting prophet was expected to say only the things which pleased the false worshippers at Beth-el. The truth condemned all that was being done at Beth-el in every action, and revealed the moral darkness of all their thoughts. The conscience of the priest was aware of this; in the practice of his office as a priest of an idol, he was occupied in silencing the consciences of others, for the consciousness of the demands of God on man persists despite of all that may be introduced between man and God. Though there is this consciousness in man it does not give the knowledge of God, and now that man has shut God out

of his will, he must learn to know Him in the revelation of the truth for his need, when by the activity of his will he has brought himself to destruction.

The intervention of God by the testimony of the prophets proves God's concern about the ways and thoughts of men, and particularly of those who bore witness to His name before the world. The word of truth lights up the path and makes the conscience aware of the state when all is not as God would have it in the ways of His people.

The testimony of Amos sounded completely out of place in the chapel of the king of Israel. When challenged, the prophet disclaimed any thought of thrusting himself forward. He had not chosen the office of prophet, nor had he received it from man. The words which he spoke were the words of Jehovah and were to be received as God's warning. Did not their consciences tell them the words were true and the voice was the voice of God though by the mouth of a man? The word judging in their conscience was sufficient evidence of its divine origin.

The priest himself would come into judgment. The word of Jehovah was in the mouth of the prophet and God would establish every word. The enmity of Amaziah, the priest of the idol at Beth-el, was not merely against the prophet but against Jehovah God whom he offended by his idolatry, and now also by his contempt for the warning message. Israel would surely go into captivity, and the instruments of Satan were trying to withhold this message from the people.

CHAPTER VIII

Jehovah shows Amos another picture easy to be understood by a man of his calling, and he readily sees by it Israel at the end of its summer days. The days of Israel's national life were numbered, and its worship was abhorred. The sacred music of the temple may have pleased the people but Jehovah God found no pleasure in their songs. A day was fast approaching when their singing would be turned into howling, for Jehovah would not pass by them again. Greater and fuller blessings were awaiting both Israel and the whole world, but in a wholly new way. Israel was filling up its history of responsibility under law, and proving that the law had no power in it to keep the people constant. As responsible to meet the full demands of the law, they stood utterly condemned by a broken law. Only through grace and by the perfect revelation of God, in which He is known in mercy and in power as the God of resurrection, could they ever hope to be saved, delivered and blessed

The oppression of the poor so evident on every hand would bring God in to judge the oppressors. Instead of a day of prosperity with the sun shining in its glory, a day would come when the sun would set at the height of its strength. God would remember the deceit of their behaviour one toward another and it would be a bitter day.

A famine for bread and water, the mainstays of natural life, is a terrible affliction, but Israel would know a famine of a far more depressing and fearful character, even a famine for the word of the LORD. No prophet would be sent, no one to offer hope, no one to cry, "*How long?*"

The day is fast approaching when the world will be without the moral guidance to be found where the Bible is freely circulated and read without restriction. Men will seek relief from great

moral depression and not find it. The world drove Christ out when He came in love and lowly grace to reveal the truth of all things: heaven has received Him out of human sight. Though God has shown great patience while He is calling a people out from the world to have part and place with Christ on high, yet a time is coming when He will withhold the light of truth from those who have despised it, that man working by his own will, may do his worst and prove his enmity against all that is called by His name. God will do this when the world refuses to hear the testimony He has given to men in the power of the Holy Spirit for the acceptance of faith. The light of the Word will be withheld in judgment. Those who trust in false gods will fall in that day, and they will never rise up in the world again to oppose the truth.

CHAPTER IX

Again the prophet sees the hand of the Lord Jehovah Judging in Israel, and He begins at the altar. (Compare Ezekiel 9:1-7; 1 Peter 4:17). The Lord Jehovah directs the judgment, His eye and hand will search out every corner; none of the wicked will escape (Zephaniah 1:12). Though they be driven into captivity, yet there the eye of God would be upon them and their evil ways would not pass unnoticed, He would pursue them with the sword.

The Philistines had been providentially brought up from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir long ago, and God had placed them in the land of Canaan (verse 7). Israel would be counted as one of them and be sifted among the nations. Not the smallest grain would be lost, every one would pass under the eye of God for judgment (verse 9). All the wicked would be overtaken (verse 10), for they chose to live in a false security and refused to believe that disaster could reach them.

Present circumstances are here connected with a future day; the prophecy of verse 11 has not yet been fulfilled. At that time the house of Jeroboam and Jehu will not be set up, but the sure mercies of David will be accomplished for Israel. The tabernacle of David will be rebuilt in its glory; the throne of David will be established in power and blessing for all Israel. The house of David is in ruins to this day, but God's unalterable counsels of grace must prevail. Edom will be destroyed and all his confederacy (see Obadiah). Israel will possess what remains of Edom, and also the remnant of the heathen that are left, who are brought to know the name of Jehovah (verse 12). (See Acts 15:16-17).

Jehovah God will bring back Israel from captivity and the land will be blessed in the fullest way. They will eat the products of their planting; and Jehovah God will plant Israel in the land and none shall pull them up. They will possess the land as a people restored in grace and by the power of God. Their blessing will be connected with the rebuilt house of David, which will never again be over-thrown.

Whatever partial judgments Israel may have suffered, whatever revivals they may have known, or whatever providential mercies they may have experienced, the latter part of this prophecy has never been fulfilled. It awaits the coming of Christ, the true Son; of David, who died and rose again, and who will set up His kingdom in the power of His resurrection. He will establish an everlasting kingdom in the power of His victory over the adversary, whose might is death. He went under the power of death to destroy its strength; going down under it to rise superior to its

power. He will come as the victor over death, in resurrection power, to bring in the sure mercies of David for Israel, and through Israel, blessing for the whole world. David's son is David's Lord, and in Him Israel will find their deliverance and blessing (Psalm 110).

Israel was not judged merely because through dissensions a tribe was missing, nor even because the tribes were divided into two separate kingdoms. The sin of Israel was more fundamental. The people had not only grown used to the idolatry around them, but it was in their midst and accepted as the national form of worship.

It was not the worship of Baal, that is, the acceptance of another lord, so displacing Jehovah God as their Lord, which Amos was sent to condemn; but they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like a four footed beast (Romans 1:23). It appeared as though they gave God their homage in some aspect of His power, but it was idolatry, and they gave honour to the creature rather than to the Creator. When God was dethroned in their minds all the accompanying evils of lowered morality followed. Such a state had to be brought to an end, though God waited long in great patience, and time after time He sent prophets to declare His name and His claims before Israel.

The state of trial under which Israel laboured and failed had to be brought to a close, that God might show His resources of grace, and bring in better blessing in a fuller way for the remnant whom He would save. He must judge evil and put it away, but in mercy He will deliver a remnant whose ears are opened to His word and find in Him, through faith, a shelter in the coming storm.

Although Jehovah God had delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, and made Himself known in their redemption, yet the idolatry which they had learned in Egypt they retained through all their history. Taking the idolatry of Egypt as a matter of course, they found in it that which gave scope to their natural tendencies; it did not make demands of holiness on them which the knowledge of the presence of Jehovah claimed from them. "Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy: for I am holy," was the demand of God's presence on a people whom He had redeemed unto Himself (See Leviticus 11:44, 45; Exodus 19: 4 - 6.)

Sacrifices and offerings were the basis of heathen religion, but they could be offered without one moral or spiritual thought, and the heathen called these outward observances his religion and gloried in it. Israel also had these outward forms as the ground of their worship, but God used the figures, revealing to Moses a true significance and order of these sacrifices, whereby faith might profit, and man in the flesh be tested to see if he could stand before God and serve Him. But Moses was shown only the pattern of heavenly things, not the things themselves. These sacrifices were a testimony to faith of man's approach to God and prefigured the realities that are only to be found in Christ. The figures were no longer of use when the perfect sacrifice was offered. The types after all were but "*the weak and beggarly elements (or rudiments)*" (Galatians 9:9). God made use of them for the moment while man in the flesh was on trial under the law, and until Christ came to meet the full claims of God, upholding the responsibility of man and the claims of God on man. Christ glorified God in the work that He did in meeting those claims, and He revealed the infinite love of God in the fulness of His nature, for He came from God and offered Himself to God a perfect sacrifice for sin.

While men were on trial and the law was the measure of their righteousness, God veiled His presence among them, and He covered them by these provisional sacrifices until the perfect offering was made, so that the holiness of His name might be preserved among them, and that the people might obtain His mercy in righteousness.

The prophets, taught of God, saw the evil about them with the eyes of God, and they spoke with righteous indignation as His ambassadors; all the authority and power of heaven was behind them. Many were slain, and in their death anticipated the death and rejection of their Lord and Master when He Himself came and offered Himself to Israel as the great Prophet of God; but their testimony remained, and every word shall be established by the power of God in His own good time. Meanwhile the path of faith in this world of moral gloom was lighted up by the words of the prophet, until Christ came to reveal not only the governmental ways of God, but to make known the glad tidings of God and the riches of His grace according to His eternal counsels. While most of the prophecies remain to be fulfilled, nothing can be completed until the heirs of a better hope than that which is offered in prophecy or earthly promise, have received their heavenly portion with Christ (Romans 6:19; Ephesians 1:3-6; Hebrews 11:40).

God is rich in mercy and His mercy endures for ever (Psalm 136). The glory departed from Israel when the Philistines took captive the ark (1 Samuel 4:21). But when David brought the ark and set it up in Zion, he wrote a song to celebrate the enduring goodness of Jehovah, who wrought wonders in the earth for Israel, and remembered mercy in His judgments. He is the Creator (Amos 5), the wonder-doer of His people, and His mercy endures for ever. It endures through the long night of their rejection, and Israel will yet know the extent of its endurance. (See Romans 11, especially 26-32). The closing words of Amos assure faith of the sure mercies of David.

In the Old Testament the government of God is largely unfolded; man is under trial and his conduits governed by law, his fallen state is exposed and his need of mercy disclosed. The time of trial is over in the New Testament with the rejection of Christ, the sent One of God. Then it is that God is revealed coming forth triumphing over evil and proclaiming mercy in righteousness through the blood of the perfect sacrifice. For God has set forth Christ Jesus a mercy-seat for all who come to Him having faith in the blood of Jesus, and they are received according to the value the blood has in His eyes. Justice and judgment shut fallen man out from God, mercy and truth bring God out to man to meet him in all his need.

Adam hid from the voice of God walking in the garden, but God in mercy sought him out. When the law was given it only proved the inability of men, who have once acted by their own will, to live by the law. Now God has come forth in perfect grace to declare the glad tidings concerning His Son, who is "marked out Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead..." (Romans 1:4 JND). These glad tidings are the proclamation of God's power of salvation brought to man, and it is for everyone who believes. Salvation is for all men on the principle of faith. God's attitude now towards men is that of pure grace. The apostle Paul could say, *"Now then we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"* (2 Corinthians 5:20, 21). Fearful will be the lot of him who despises such grace. But God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Instead of blotting out the whole world by an act of power when sin entered to spoil the work of His hands, God set to work to redeem men from their lost condition and reconcile them to Himself. From the beginning of the world He began to unfold the plan of His eternal salvation, and by types and shadows prefigured the blessing of men and of the whole universe, to be effectuated in the second Man, the Man of His counsels, even Christ.

When the trial of man was over, and he had proved, that left to his responsibility, there was no hope of his entering into God's rest, then God revealed the highest thought in His eternal counsels of grace, which He had kept hidden in Himself from all ages and had not revealed in prophecy. But not until He had a Man in His heavenly glory, one there by right and by His power, could He make known the full extent of His blessing for man. Consequent on the risen and ascended Christ taking His place at the right hand of God on high, the Holy Spirit was sent down to make known the whole story of the grace of God for man in Christ. Now believers are united by that same Spirit to a glorified Christ in heaven, and this gives them a, heavenly character, a heavenly hope and destiny.

God came down to man in the Person of Christ to make Himself known in all fulness of grace, to win back the confidence which the devil destroyed in the garden. He has revealed Himself in grace and power in the salvation of poor, needy, sinful men. When the needy heart learns this, it learns to know God, to love Him, and to walk with Him.

It knows a God who enters into all his trials, and his sorrows, and is glad to have all his thoughts and ways opened before Him, that the soul may be led in the way everlasting, where alone it can walk with the conscience in the light before God, and be happy with Him.

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