

"SEEK THE LORD AND YE SHALL LIVE."

– AMOS 5:4-15. – *SEPTEMBER 18.* –

OUR lesson has to do with the prophecy of Amos, who is noted as being one of the earliest prophets to write down the message which he delivered. True, Moses was a prophet, and his teachings we have in written form – and David was a prophet, and we have his in the Psalms; but Moses' prophecies were chiefly through the types which, under divine direction, he instituted, and David's prophecies were in poetic form, which were not discerned to be prophecies until our Lord and the apostles so pointed them out. Samuel, the Prophet, seems not to have written any of his inspired messages, neither did Elijah, nor Elisha, nor others of their time. Amos belongs to a period about a century after Elijah and nearly a century before Isaiah, and about two centuries before Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Amos declared himself to have been of humble birth; his parents were not illustrious, neither was he educated amongst the sons of the prophets. Like David he was a sheep tender, a farmer, upon whom the Lord poured his spirit with mighty power, sending him to proclaim the disasters sure to come upon Israel unless a change of course should turn aside the deserved punishment for their iniquities.

The brunt of the Prophet's message fell against the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, but the divine method of presenting the matter is noteworthy. The Prophet's message began with the adjoining nations: (1) Damascus, the capital of Syria on the north, is mentioned as being in line with the divine retributions; (2) the Philistines on the west; (3) the nation of Tyre to the northwest; (4) the Edomites to the south; (5) the Ammonites nearly on the east; (6) the Moabites to the south; (7) Judah to the south; lastly, the center of the Prophet's message, Israel – the ten-tribe Kingdom. We can fancy the attention which would be given to his message by the people of Israel as they would hear fall from his lips words descriptive of the troubles coming

upon surrounding nations which were their enemies; but as the circle grew narrower and narrower, and the weight of the Prophet's testimony was found to be specially against themselves, we may be sure that there was intense indignation. If they at first shouted, [R3424 : page 268] "A true prophet!" they probably subsequently gnashed on him with their teeth. This denunciation of Israel occurs chiefly in chapters 3-6 and in chapter 7:9-17. When the Prophet had gone so far as to tell openly of the fall of the reigning dynasty, Amaziah, the prince of Bethel, interfered, bidding Amos return to his own country. But under the special power of the holy Spirit, using him to deliver a particular message, Amos refused to return home until he had accomplished his errand, and added to the retribution of Israel some prophecies respecting the prince's own household.

CHANGED CONDITIONS – CHANGED METHODS.

In drawing a lesson from these experiences of Amos applicable to ourselves of today, we must remember that the Lord no longer sends his messages after this manner. Conditions have changed, circumstances have changed, and prophecies of the kind inspired by the Lord in early days are no longer his method. Respecting these prophecies, the Apostle Peter tells us, "Prophecy came not in olden times by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), "Unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the holy Spirit sent down from heaven." – I Pet. 1:12.

In view of the changed conditions and difference of operation of the divine power, it is for us to preach the Word to whomsoever hath an ear to hear, to call attention to the application of the prophecies and testimonies of ancient times, and thus to make known the divine plan as it becomes due to be understood by those for whom it is intended – the Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile. For any one to

undertake at the present time to copy either Elijah or Amos or others of the ancient prophets would indicate a total misapprehension on his part respecting the divine will and message – it might even be surmised to indicate a mental unbalance. As the Apostle declares, we speak the things that we know and testify to the things spoken aforetime for our admonition. There is a good lesson for us, nevertheless, in the method which the Lord guided the Prophet to take in delivering his message.

Our Lord leaves to us of this Gospel dispensation considerable latitude in the choice of means for serving his cause, exhorting us, however, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and promising us rewards in proportion as we exercise such carefulness in his service as he can specially bless and use. Those who use wisely the talents and pounds intrusted to them are to have proportionate rewards when the Kingdom shall be set up. Let us then, in the exercise of our liberty and in accord with the Master's injunction to be wise as serpents, notice how the Prophet's message respecting unpleasant and direful things, all true, began in such a manner as to rivet the attention of his hearers. The Apostle Paul practiced this same wisdom, and mentioned it subsequently to some whom he had brought to a knowledge of the Lord; he said, "Being crafty, I took you by guile" – that is, I presented the matter to you in the form that would be most attractive to your hearts. He presented nothing untrue, however. Truth can be stated in a more or less palatable or unpalatable form.

"NOT ALL THAT SAY LORD, LORD."

Another lesson in connection with Amos' message is that his opponents rose up from amongst those who were professedly religious – the priests; and so it was with our Lord and the apostles. The priests and religious teachers of their day were the chief opponents of the Gospel in its truth and purity, and we must expect the same in our day. The Truth, in proportion as it has been declared in its purity, has always aroused opposition, and has always found its

chief opposers amongst those who have a "form of godliness" – but generally amongst those who lack its power.

Our lesson is a part of the Prophet's pleading with the Israelites that they return to harmony with God and avert the calamities which must otherwise be expected. The history of the time shows us that it was a very prosperous period, not only for Judah but also for the ten-tribe kingdom. The prosperity was of the earthly kind. Riches were accumulated, but these were in the hands of the rich and the great, and the Prophet proceeds to warn the rich that the poor are being unjustly dealt with, and he intimates that it would be from this source that the trouble would ultimately come – the only terms upon which they could hope to live as a nation would be by seeking the Lord. It would be in vain for them to seek help at Bethel or in Gilgal or in Beersheba, the centers of their religious institutions, which were corrupt. These religious institutions would all go down in the trouble which the Prophet predicted. The Lord himself must be sought with an honest heart else he would cause destruction to break out like a fire to devour the house of Joseph. The ten-tribe kingdom is here called the house of Joseph, because the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were of preponderating influence in the nation, and these two tribes sprung from Joseph; hence the fire breaking out in the house of Joseph meant destruction which would come upon the ten-tribe kingdom unless they repented.

The Prophet proceeds to particularize some of the wrongs on account of which they were in danger: Justice was not rendered in their courts. Instead of the sweets of Justice, those who appealed to their courts, if they were poor, got wormwood – that is, bitterness, disappointment. The Prophet declares that they cast down righteousness to the earth; equity was not a matter of primary consideration; but, as he proceeds to point out, bribery was rife, and wealth and power and influence could accomplish almost anything. There must be a turning from this condition, and relief could only come from turning to the **[R3424 : page 269]** Lord. The Prophet

refers to divine power in somewhat similar language to that used by Job (9:9; 30:31). Pointing his hearers to the group Pleiades in the constellation Taurus, and to Orion, he would have them see that the one whose assistance they needed was the one who was able to create the earth and the heavens also – the one who was able not only to gather the waters into the seas, but able also to call the waters back from the seas to the clouds, and to pour it down again upon the earth in its seasons. This great God was the one that they needed, and all others assisting them would be powerless against him.

THE LORD CARETH FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY.

In verse 9 he intimates that God's power would be with the poor and oppressed for their deliverance, and that this would mean destruction against the strong and powerful, those that hate reproof and abhor the upright, that are in opposition to any who reprove unrighteousness.

Verses 11 and 12 specify and particularize the nature of the injustice practised and which needs to be renounced and discontinued. Verse 13 implies that there were amongst the Israelites some who did not approve of the general course, but being helpless and in the minority they kept silence from prudential reasons, because the time was an evil one, and to have espoused the cause of the oppressed would have brought them trouble without bringing relief to the oppressed. But Amos was specially commissioned of the Lord to give this very reproof, and hence he must not keep silence because of prudence or for any other consideration, but must speak his message with boldness. Similarly, it is not the duty of every one of the Lord's people today to take the place of Amos and become public reprovers of public officials, etc., even though they may see unrighteousness practised. Prudence, wisdom, is to be used in connection with whatever we do. Our commission today is not that of reproofing nations, but that of letting our lights so shine that others may see our

good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven. Our Lord declares that he will rebuke the nations, he will humble their pride, he will cast down the mighty from their positions, he will exalt the humble in due time; and to his people he says, "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey." – Zeph. 3:8.

The lesson closes with an exhortation from the Prophet that his hearers should make a thorough reformation – seek good and not evil, love righteousness and hate sin. If they would do these things then indeed they might apply to themselves the promises of God, as they were already disposed to do, claiming that they were his people. Such claims would be appropriate enough if they would conform to the divine requirements, but not otherwise; the Lord would be gracious to them if they would come into line as a people with his regulations and requirements, but otherwise they must expect the chastisements and punishments already foretold.

Remembering that the Israelites were a typical nation, we properly enough scan the text and context to see whether anything connected with Amos' prophecy was of larger application than it appeared to him and the people of his day. We are justified in expecting this from the words of the Apostle Peter already cited, and from other examples in the prophecies. For instance, in David's prophecies how little the utterer of the words, "not a bone of him shall be broken," understood of the real fulfilment of his declaration. Again when he said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy One to see corruption," how little David or the people of Israel understood the import of those words – that David was a prophet, and in this language was unwittingly speaking of Christ and his resurrection from the dead – from sheol. So while realizing the appropriateness of Amos' words to the people to whom they were particularly addressed, we find certain items in connection with this prophecy which imply a still larger fulfilment of his predictions upon nominal Israel in the end of this age.

GIANTS IN THE EARTH FOREBODE EVIL.

It is not for us to claim that today Justice is fallen in the streets and Righteousness cannot enter; it is not for us to claim that the poor are inordinately taxed or crushed [R3425 : page 269] or robbed. On the contrary, we freely state that there is a great deal of righteousness meted out in the courts of "Christendom." We have sometimes wondered how natural men have ever brought together so many wise, just and reasonable laws and regulations. Nevertheless there is a sense in which injustice, inequity, is now operating, not so much through any individual evil as through the changed conditions under which we are living. The blessings of the new dispensation, coming to us under social conditions which are based upon individual selfishness, are tending to make a few very rich, and before very long we fear will be found to so operate as to make many very poor.

The appropriating of the advantages of our day, while legally done, under laws that at one time were equitable, is bound apparently to work a great hardship – putting the power and financial control of the world in the hands of comparatively a few. True, those few giants are as yet very moderate in their requirements and dealings, some of them even generous; but the Scriptures seem to clearly imply that it will not be very long until their power, willingly or unwillingly, will be so exercised as to bring great distress upon the mass of humanity, grinding them as between two millstones. From this standpoint the Prophet's words might well be appropriated by Christendom; but we may be sure that those in power and position are not disposed to hearken to Amos or to any one else, and hence we must expect what the Scriptures everywhere point out, that the overthrow of Christendom will come suddenly, in a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation; and that in this conflict the Lord, who made Pleiades and Orion, will be he that will strengthen [R3425 : page 270] the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled ones shall rise against the strong ones in anarchy – Verse 9.

The close of Amos' prophecy tells of the recovery of Israel and the blessing of the Lord that will be upon all mankind, including the Gentiles, at that time. It is this prophecy that the Apostle James quoted in the Council at Jerusalem, saying, "After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." (Acts 15:16,17.) We are living at the time when this prophecy is about to be fulfilled. The recovery of natural Israel is about to take place under the reestablishment of God's Kingdom in the world – the one that was once typically represented in King David, but which is to be actually established in the greater David – the "Beloved One." Under that Kingdom, reestablished under more favorable conditions, a heavenly Kingdom, the residue of men will be given an opportunity to seek the Lord, for the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.

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