

AMOS THE FEARLESS PROPHET

– *NOVEMBER 28.* – *AMOS 5:1-15.* –

AMOS THE SHEPHERD BECOMES AMOS THE PROPHET – DISASTERS TO COME UPON THE TEN-TRIBE KINGDOM – DIVINE METHOD OF PRESENTING THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE – ISRAEL GUILTY OF INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION – LESSONS FOR OUR DAY – ISRAEL'S RECOVERY FORETOLD – FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY OF AMOS NOW DUE.

**"He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully."
– Jeremiah 23:28.**

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 we have his teachings in written form. David also was a prophet; and we have his teachings in the Psalms. But Moses' prophecies were chiefly through the types which he instituted under Divine direction; and David's prophecies were in poetic form, but were not discerned to be prophecies until our Lord and the Apostles so pointed them out. The Prophet Samuel seems not to have written any of his inspired messages; neither did Elijah, nor Elisha nor others of their time.

The Prophet Amos belongs to a period about a century after the Prophet Elijah and nearly a century before the Prophet Isaiah, and about two centuries before the Prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Amos declared himself to have been of humble birth. His parents were not illustrious; and he was not 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 transgressions against their Law.

The brunt of the Prophet's message fell against the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. 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) Tyre, to the northwest; (4) the Edomites, to the south; (5) the Ammonites, nearly on the east; (6) the Moabites, also to the south; (7) Judah, to the south; and lastly, the center of the Prophet's message, Israel – the ten-tribe kingdom.

We can fancy the attention which would be given to the Prophet's 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 as the weight of the Prophet's testimony was found to be especially against themselves, we may be sure that there was intense indignation. If at first they shouted, "A true Prophet!" probably they afterwards gnashed upon 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 priest of Bethel, interfered, bidding Amos to return to his own country. But under the special power of the Holy Spirit, using him to deliver a particular message, the Prophet Amos refused to return home until he had accomplished his errand. He also added to the retribution of Israel some prophecies respecting the priest's own household.

CHANGED CONDITIONS – CHANGED METHODS

In drawing from the experiences of the Prophet Amos a lesson 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 Peter 1:21.) Again, "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." – 1 Peter 1:12.

In view of the changed conditions and the difference of operation of the Divine power, it is for us to preach [R5805 : page 348] 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 designed – the Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile. For any one to undertake at the present time to copy either the Prophet Elijah or the Prophet Amos or any other of the ancient Prophets of Israel would indicate a total misapprehension on his part respecting the Divine will and the Divine message; indeed, it might even be surmised to indicate a mental unbalance. As the Apostle declares, we speak the things that we know, and we testify to the things spoken aforetime for our admonition. (Romans 15:4.) 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. He exhorts us, however, to be as wise as serpents and as harmless

as doves; and He promises us rewards in proportion as we exercise such carefulness in His service as He can especially bless and use. Those who use wisely the pounds and talents intrusted to them are to have proportionate rewards when the Kingdom of God's dear Son shall have been set up. Let us then, in the exercise of our liberty and in accord with the Master's injunction to be as wise as serpents, notice that the Prophet's message respecting unpleasant and direful matters, all of which were true, began in such a manner as to rivet the attention of his hearers.

The Apostle Paul practised this same wisdom, and mentioned it subsequently to some whom he had brought to a knowledge of the Lord. He said, "Being crafty, I caught you with guile." (2 Corinthians 12:16.) That is, he presented the matter to them in the form that would be most attractive to their 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 the Prophet 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 the 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 roused opposition, and has always found its chief opposers amongst those who have "a form of godliness" – but generally amongst those who lack its power.

Today's lesson is a part of the Prophet's pleading with the Israelites that they return to harmony with God and thus avert the calamities which must otherwise be expected. The history of that time shows 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 great; and the Prophet proceeds to warn the rich that the poor were being unjustly dealt with. He intimates that it would be from this source that the trouble would ultimately come; that 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 had sprung from Joseph. Hence the fire breaking out in the House of Joseph meant the 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 righteousness was cast down to the earth; that equity was not a matter of primary consideration. He proceeds to point out that bribery was rife; that wealth, power and influence could accomplish almost anything. There must be a turning from this condition; and relief could come only from turning to the Lord.

The Prophet refers to Divine Power in language somewhat similar to that used by the Patriarch Job. (Job 9:9.) Pointing to the group Pleiades in the constellation Taurus and to Orion, he would have his hearers 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 also to call the waters back from the seas to the clouds and to pour it down upon the earth again in its seasons. This great God was the One whom they needed; and all others assisting them would be powerless against Him.

GOD CARETH FOR THE POOR AND NEEDY

In verse 9 the Prophet 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, against those that hate reproof and abhor the upright, those that are in opposition to any who reprove unrighteousness.

Verses 11 and 12 specify and particularize the nature of the injustice which was practised and which needed to be renounced and discontinued. Verse 13 implies that there were amongst the Israelites some who did not approve of the general course; but that these, being helpless and in the minority, kept silence from prudential reasons – because the time was an evil one, and to have espoused the cause of the oppressed would have brought trouble upon them without bringing relief to the oppressed. But the Prophet Amos was especially commissioned of the Lord to give this very reproof. 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 light so shine that others may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven. Our Lord declares that He will rebuke the nations; that He will humble their pride; that He will cast down the mighty from their positions; that

He will exalt the humble – in due time. To His people He says, "Wait ye upon Me, until the Day that I rise up to the prey." – Zephaniah 3:8,9.

The lesson closes with an exhortation from the Prophet that his hearers should make a thorough reformation [R5805 : page 349] – that they should 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 as a people if they would come into line with His regulations and requirements. But otherwise they must expect the chastisements and punishments already foretold.

Remembering that the Israelites were a typical people, we properly enough scan the text and the context to see whether anything connected with the prophecy of Amos was of larger application than it appeared to him and the people of his day. From the words of the Apostle Peter already cited, and from other examples in the prophecies, we are justified in expecting this. 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 was unwittingly speaking of Christ and His resurrection from the dead – from Sheol! So, while realizing the appropriateness of the Prophet Amos' words, 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 that Righteousness cannot enter in. It is not for us to claim that the poor are inordinately taxed or crushed 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 so to 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 to work a great hardship – putting the power and the financial control of the world into the hands of comparatively few. True, these few giants are as yet very moderate in their requirements and dealings; some of them are even generous. But the Scriptures seem to imply clearly that it will not be long until the 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 the Pleiades and Orion, will be He that will strengthen the spoiled

against the strong, so that the spoiled ones shall rise against the strong in anarchy. – Verse 9.

The close of Amos' prophecy tells of the recovery of Israel and of 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 Israel, 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 Kingdom which once was 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 glory of the Lord shall fill the whole earth.

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