

The Visions of Amos the Herdsman
Lesson 2
Amos 3:1 – 5:27

In the previous verses, Amos revealed to Israel the tragic visions of doom that would come to her and all her neighboring countries and towns. At the end of chapter 2, the Lord specifically reminded Israel of all that He had done for her and that He was weighed down by her transgressions. Amos continues to reveal the Lord's vision concerning Israel in chapter 3.

Against Chosen Israel

Amos 3:¹ Hear this word which the Lord has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt: ² "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Israel heard Amos' entire message sometime between 801 BC and 778 BC and in 722 BC, the Lord sent the Assyrian Empire to overrun her and carry her off to into exile. For all practical purposes, Israel had half a century to repent and turn from her wicked ways but she failed to do so. Therefore, this announcement should not have been a surprise. In 966 BC, Solomon began building the Temple in Jerusalem and it took him seven and a half years to complete it. At the dedication in 959 BC, the Lord spoke the following words to Solomon and made a glorious promise to Israel, a promise that did not apply to any other nation or people.

2 Chronicles 7:¹² Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵ "Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer *offered* in this place. ¹⁶ "For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. ¹⁷ "As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, even to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, ¹⁸ then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man *to be* ruler in Israel.'

However, Solomon did not follow the Lord's instructions as he began to sin by marrying wives who worshiped foreign gods. When the kingdom was divided at Solomon's death, the north never repented but continued in her evil ways. After 244 years of rebellion, the Lord had had enough and He sent the Assyrians to punish them. Amos delivered this warning at least 50 years before the Assyrians captured the kingdom. The north had had many warnings and because they refused to listen, they would be punished.

Questions

Amos 3:³ Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment?
Amos 3:^{4a} Does a lion roar in the forest when he has no prey?

- Amos 3:^{4b} Does a young lion growl from his den unless he has captured *something*?
- Amos 3:^{5a} Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it?
- Amos 3:^{5a} Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all?
- Amos 3:^{6a} If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble?
- Amos 3:^{6b} If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?

To prove His point, the Lord asked seven questions, all with definite answers. The most revealing is the last question that implies that all of Israel's calamities have occurred with the permission of the Lord, but not without warning.

Against Samaria

Amos 3:⁷ Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. ⁸ A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy? ⁹ Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see *the* great tumults within her and *the* oppressions in her midst. ¹⁰ "But they do not know how to do what is right," declares the Lord, "these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels." ¹¹ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "An enemy, even one surrounding the land, will pull down your strength from you and your citadels will be looted." ¹² Thus says the Lord, "Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion's mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, So will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away— With *the* corner of a bed and *the* cover of a couch!

Amos was sent by the Lord to warn Israel and particularly its capital city of Samaria that He would bring calamity upon the entire Northern Kingdom if they did not repent. Furthermore, Amos was there to tell Israel to share the visions with the surrounding nations because their doom was also at hand. Additionally, if they did not repent, the Lord would send their enemy, whom we now know to be the Assyrians, to tear Israel's strongholds apart and snatch her away into captivity.

Against Jacob

Amos 3:¹³ "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," Declares the Lord GOD, the God of hosts. ¹⁴ "For on the day that I punish Israel's transgressions, I will also punish the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and they will fall to the ground. ¹⁵ "I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; the houses of ivory will also perish and the great houses will come to an end," Declares the Lord.

Amos was delivering all these prophecies in the town of Bethel. Jacob had moved to Bethel with his family after they returned from Laban's house. He built an altar there and the Lord renewed the Abrahamic covenant with him. Later, he moved the family to Egypt. Moses brought his family out of Egypt 430 years later and 480 years after that, Solomon started the building of the Temple in 966 BC. After another 188 years, Amos delivered this message and finally Josiah fulfilled this prophecy between 640 BC and 608 BC as recorded in 2 Kings. ¹¹

¹¹ Genesis 35:6-7

2 Kings 23: ¹⁵ Furthermore, the altar that *was* at Bethel *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah. ¹⁶ Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that *were* there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned *them* on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things.

Who built the ivory houses in Bethel that were torn down by Josiah? First Kings answers that question.

1 Kings 22: ³⁹ Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did and the ivory house which he built and all the cities which he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

The evil Ahab, the eighth king of the Northern Kingdom, was the builder of the ivory houses in Bethel.

Against Bashan

Amos 4: ¹ Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, "Bring now, that we may drink!" ² The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, "Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks. ³ "You will go out *through* breaches *in the walls*, each one straight before her, and you will be cast to Harmon," declares the Lord. ⁴ "Enter Bethel and transgress; in Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. ⁵ "Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love *to do*, you sons of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

Bashan stood on the east side of the Jordan River between Gilgal and Harmon which was known for its lush grazing fields and fattened cows, but Amos was not speaking about animals in this passage; he was speaking about the women who lived in the town. The women were wealthy arrogant drunks who controlled their husbands and forbade charity for the poor and needy.

The prophecy reveals that when the enemy breaks through the walls, the Israelites will try to escape through them but they will be caught and taken away to Harmon. Bethel's sins were great but the cows of Bashan would profane the city of Gilgal, a place that should have remained forever sacred because it was there that the covenant of circumcision was established. The "cows" of Bashan held to the required Mosaic offerings while at the same time they sacrificed bulls to their foreign gods. They profaned the offering with leavened, not unleavened, bread. Second Kings 19 speaks of three battles with Syria in the Bashan area. After those battles, the town of Bashan virtually disappeared from history although Ezekiel and Jeremiah used it as a reference point for the place of the lush green pastures.

No Food

Amos 4: ⁶ "But I gave you also cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places, yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord.

The teeth of the Israelites were clean because they did not have food to eat and make them dirty. The contents of this passage had already occurred as recorded in 2 Kings.

2 Kings 8: ¹ Now Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go with your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will even come on the land for seven years."

Rain Withheld by God

Amos 4: ⁷ "Furthermore, I withheld the rain from you while *there were* still three months until harvest. Then I would send rain on one city and on another city I would not send rain; one part would be rained on, while the part not rained on would dry up. ⁸ "So two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water, but would not be satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord. ⁹ "I smote you with scorching *wind* and mildew; and the caterpillar was devouring your many gardens and vineyards, fig trees and olive trees; yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord. ¹⁰ "I sent a plague among you after the manner of Egypt; I slew your young men by the sword along with your captured horses, and I made the stench of your camp rise up in your nostrils; yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord. ¹¹ "I overthrew you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from a blaze; yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord.

The Lord had been sending hard times on the Israelites to chastise them, but they did not learn their lessons. They did not repent and the Lord would not wait much longer.

Meeting with God

Amos 4: ¹² "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." ¹³ For behold, He who forms mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what are His thoughts, He who makes dawn into darkness and treads on the high places of the earth, the Lord God of hosts is His name.

The words "prepare to meet your God," have been misused throughout history. These words apply to this passage and its context alone. It applied to Israel, the Northern Kingdom and no other country or nation. In 722 BC, Israel will meet her God when He sent Assyria to overrun her and lead her away from her Promised Land forever. He was warning Israel of her impending doom if she did not repent and He sent Amos to proclaim the news. They were not without warning and the Lord would wait only a little while longer before He sent the evil army, an act that occurred a little more than 56 years later. As we will soon see, not many northern Israelites actually lived to go into exile; therefore, not many would return 186 years later when Cyrus the Great allowed them to go home.

Dirge for Israel

Amos 5: ¹ Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel: ² She has fallen, she will not rise again— the virgin Israel. She *lies* neglected on her land; there is none to raise her up. ³ For thus says the Lord GOD, "The city which goes forth a thousand *strong* will have a hundred left, and the one which goes forth a hundred *strong* will have ten left to the house of Israel." ⁴ For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, "Seek Me that you may live. ⁵ "But do not resort to Bethel and do

not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity and Bethel will come to trouble. ⁶ "Seek the Lord that you may live, or He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, and it will consume with none to quench *it* for Bethel, ⁷ *for* those who turn justice into wormwood and cast righteousness down to the earth." ⁸ He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness into morning, who also darkens day *into* night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is His name. ⁹ It is He who flashes forth *with* destruction upon the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. ¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks *with* integrity. ¹¹ Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, *though* you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. ¹² For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *you* who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate. ¹³ Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴ Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, just as you have said! ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

The Lord provided the liturgical dirge for the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, yet within the dirge, He provided the way to escape the coming onslaught and it was no different from what He had expected from them all along. What was His way of escape? He repeatedly told them to repent of their sins and turn from their wicked ways and He would forgive their sins. However, Israel would not turn and because of that, 90% of the Northern Kingdom did not survive the battle with Assyria. Only 10% would live and go into exile. The punishment for the various towns and countrysides had been announced and it would be fulfilled. The foolish Israelites who entered those areas would be annihilated. It was to be a sad time for Israel. What were the people doing to incur the Lord's wrath? First, they were not seeking Him. Second, they were taking advantage of those who were less fortunate. Israel's doom was set and she would be defeated because the Lord had proclaimed it so.

Wailing and Mourning

Amos 5:¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, "There is wailing in all the plazas, and in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning and professional mourners to lamentation. ¹⁷ "And in all the vineyards *there is* wailing, because I will pass through the midst of you," says the Lord.

The vineyards were always a place of joy as well as the market plazas, but when the Lord came through, they would be places of weeping and mourning. Everyone would mourn when it occurred, the farmers as well as the paid professional mourners. Jeremiah speaks of the professionals.

Jeremiah 9:17 Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the wailing women, that they may come!

The Lord would pass through the midst of Israel and destroy it. He did the same in Egypt to save Israel, but they had forgotten what He did for them then.

Day of the Lord

Amos 5:¹⁸ Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for what purpose *will* the day of the Lord *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; ¹⁹ as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. ²⁰ *Will* not the day of the Lord *be* darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?

The Israelites understood that when the Day of the Lord occurred, the remnant of Israel alive at that time would become the premier nation of the world; it was the Lord's promise because they were His chosen nation. All along, the Israelites were looking forward to that Day of the Lord just as the Church looks forward to the great snatching away.¹² The Lord knew the thoughts of Israel and He had Amos address their longings about the Day of the Lord to make sure they understood that the coming destruction and captivity of the Northern Kingdom was a different event.

God Rejection of Israel's Worship, Offering, Songs

Amos 5:²¹ "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; and I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. ²³ "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. ²⁴ "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. ²⁵ "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? ²⁶ "You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

Not all worship is true worship. Groups of people all over the world go through the motions of religious rituals in the name of God and He detests what they are doing. Their offerings are not pleasing to Him and He refrains from sending blessings on them. They struggle to meet financial necessities and they flounder in their missions and programs. Israel was a perfect example of such fallacy. The death of a local church body and the closing of their doors never to worship again reflects the justice of the Lord rolling down like waters and righteousness and an ever-flowing stream. It's what needs to happen. It's what God wants to happen. Israel knew how to worship; they learned how in the wilderness, but they forgot when they entered the Promised Land. Sikkuth was the shrine of Saturn also known as the god Molech, the god they worshiped instead of the Lord. Kiyyun was the image of Saturn or Molech which the Israelites worshiped. Saturn was the major image of all the images worshiped by the Israelites. None of them were real gods, but the Israelites made them with their own hands and worshiped them anyway.

Israel Exiled Beyond Damascus

Amos 5:²⁷ "Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

Because the Israelites were worshipers of Saturn instead of the Lord, they would go into exile beyond Damascus in the land of Assyria. The purpose of this prophecy was to make sure they understood who the true God was and why He was sending them away.

¹² Rapture