

MAJORING IN A MINOR-AMOS PART TWO

In part one of this study, we considered verses four and five of Amos Chapter 2, concentrating on the four major transgressions of the people of the Northern Kingdom of Judah. These were:

1. They have despised and rejected the Law of the Lord.
2. They have not kept His commandments.
3. They have walked after Lies.
4. They have erred and gone astray like their fathers.

It is now time to turn our attention to the Kingdom of Israel, but first, let us re-read the relevant verses of Scripture from Amos Chapter 2.

Amos 2:

4 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked:

5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

7 That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

8 *And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.*

9 *Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.*

10 *Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.*

11 *And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD.*

12 *But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.*

13 *Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.*

14 *Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself:*

15 *Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself.*

16 *And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.*

Beginning with verse six, we again see four transgressions against the Lord. These are:

1. Perverting Justice.
2. Oppressing the Poor for Personal gain.
3. Sexual uncleanness, immorality and incest.
4. Idolatry- Profaning the Name of God.

Note, there is a clear link between the first two, and a similar link between the last two. Perverting Justice, by oppressing the poor in favour of the rich is still prevalent in many places today, and the spiritual link between adultery and idolatry, is very well known. Israel was guilty of all of these and as we shall see, even worse, because they attempted to involve God in their sin.

Let us focus on verses 6-8 as these hold the key to understanding what the Prophet was attempting to say. We need to consider the various implications inherent in the original Hebrew to get a clear idea of the situation. Amos is trying to paint a picture here of corruption and social injustice that in many ways echoes what we see in the world today.

The first key word in verse 6, is the Hebrew word *Tsaddiq* (6662) which is normally translated *righteous, just, or honest*. It also signifies someone who is obedient to the Laws of God. However, as used by Amos, it is more than that. The righteousness expressed here, is meant as a reflection of the relationship between man and God. God alone is truly righteous, and our righteousness comes from Him, through our relationship with Him. Therefore, our righteousness, is based on a relationship, the one we have with Him, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The righteousness then in verse 6 is one based on relationship; it is seen in how men treat each other, with an emphasis on social justice and meeting the needs of the oppressed. This was not being done in Israel, as it is not being done today. Simply put, how we treat others is a reflection of our relationship with God, which is the basis for any righteousness we may claim. The leaders of Israel, were operating out of greed, rather than justice. They sold those who were truly righteous, for silver, just as our

Lord was sold. If these leaders had been righteous, they would have been obedient to God's Laws and protected the people as they were commanded to do. Therefore, their actions betrayed the truth of their real relationship with God. In fact, such was their greed, they could be bought or bribed for the cost of a pair of shoes. God repeatedly commands that the poor be looked after; these men disobeyed God, for purely monetary reasons. Money, mammon was their god, not our Heavenly Father. I see echoes of this in many churches today.

Psalm 42 :1, tells us that we are to pant after our Lord, in the same way a thirsty deer pants for water. Yet, see what it is the leaders of Israel were panting for in verse 7.

7 That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek:

The word translated dust, is the Hebrew word *aphor* (6083) which was the dust a person poured on their head to signify grief or mourning. These men, the magistrates and priests, were longing to see the poor which they were pledged to protect come to grief. Why? So that they could be further enriched as we see in verse 8. Is it any wonder that our God was totally outraged. We clearly see here, the first two transgressions, of Perverting Justice, and Oppressing the poor for personal gain. Are some of the con-men in so called ministry today, who beguile the poor into sending them money any different, or any better? Many of them are also guilty of the second part of the statement, 'turning aside the way of the meek.'

Dherekh (1870) is the Hebrew word translated ‘way’. It means a journey, or way of life and is the equivalent word for the NT word ‘way’ in such well known passages from the book of John as “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Therefore, this statement refers to those whose way of life followed the Laws of God, those who were obedient, those who were righteous. These were the meek, whom Jesus told us would one day inherit the world.

I think I would be correct in saying that this statement also refers to us, who follow the Way, our Lord Jesus Christ. Beware any who would lead people astray from the true way, the true Gospel, as Paul himself warned. There are many false prophets and teachers in the world today, who are attempting to do just that. God will deal with them at Judgement, if not before.

Let us now turn our attention to the third transgression, found in the second half of verse 7

: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

The word translated here as ‘profane’, is the Hebrew word *chalal* (2490) which has several meanings all relevant to this verse. It means to profane, defile, or pollute, usually sexually and frequently in the context of incest. It can also mean to do violence to the established Law of God, or to desecrate something Holy. Any or all of these could apply here.

There is also, a clear link to the first two transgressions, because profaning His name refers to the mistreatment of the poor and the destitute which, according to God's Will and Commands, they were supposed to help and protect. Israel profaned His name, because they made slaves of free citizens due to minor debts, oppressed the needy and sexually mistreated helpless female slaves. All of this was in direct violation of His Commandments and His revealed Will. Remember too, that adultery, which this was, is always linked with idolatry in the Bible; the fourth transgression. So we come to verse 8.

8 And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Before we examine the two key words in this verse, note one important thing; the implied idolatry. They lay before EVERY altar, not just the altar in the temple, but all the pagan ones as well. Not only that, but in doing this, they made use of items pledged to God. The word 'lay' also is the same word often translated 'bow down' as in worship. They were worshipping other gods using items belonging to the one true God. In a sense, we see similar things happening in some churches today. People are worshipping a god, but it is NOT the God of the Bible; it is a god created by men; idolatry.

The first important word to examine in this verse is the one translated as 'pledge'. In the Hebrew, it is *chaval* (2254) which means to bind, or pledge; to bring forth with pain, as in childbirth; to deal corruptly, to offend, or to destroy. To understand this verse, we also need to use scripture to interpret scripture.

Ex 22:

26 If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:

27 For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.

28 Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.

Deut 24:

17 Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge:

Prov 20:16 and 27:13

16/13 Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.

These are some of the passages governing the taking and the using of pledges for debt. Note especially Ex 22:26. This garment had to be returned by sundown. Obviously, this was not happening. However, as we have already seen, these strictures were there to protect the poor and destitute, but in the time of Amos, they were being completely ignored for the personal pleasure of the rich and powerful. They demonstrated a total lack of respect for those who were not well off.

Consider this verse from Isaiah chapter one;

23 Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

The prophet was equating them with thieves and calling them rebellious. The Bible warns us that rebellion, is as the sin of witchcraft. Try these verses.

Deut 24:

12 And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge:

13 In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.

14 Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:

Verse 12 clearly shows that they weren't supposed to sleep (lie down) on a clothing pledge, but that's what Amos tells us they were doing. Of more interest, is verse 13. Note that returning the pledge at the appropriate time was accounted as righteousness before God. These people then, were showing themselves to be unrighteous by their actions, no matter what their lips were saying. God was/is concerned about the poor and the needy; they weren't. I hope you can see the modern parallels.

Let us return now to the second part of Amos 2:8. The key word to focus on here, is the Hebrew word *anash* which means to urge; or to inflict a penalty, or impose a fine as punishment for a crime. These men were taking wine obtained in this manner, or as a tax, or in payment of a debt and were drinking it at a supposed worship service, thus making God a partner in their crimes and a partner in their profits. This He could not allow. It was further idolatry; they weren't worshiping Him, they were only pretending to. It was an excuse to drink wine that didn't really

belong to them. Pretending to worship, calling something worship that really isn't, is still idolatry today. Woe to those churches who practice it.

From here, God proceeds to judgement. In the second half of verse 9, Amos makes an intriguing statement.

'yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.'

God doesn't deal in half measures. He didn't just destroy the fruit, He destroyed the roots as well. When God executes His judgement on the church, and by that I mean the false church, not the true church of our Lord Jesus Christ, He won't just destroy the fruit, that which everyone can see, but he will totally destroy the roots; all that is hidden, all that sustains and nourishes it. It will be a complete work. Woe unto those churches in that day. Their practices of oppression and idolatry will not only be visibly destroyed, (their fruit), but they will be destroyed from within as well as without, (their roots).

Let us not be caught up in similar practices. The four transgressions of Israel are still with us today both in the world, and in what purports to be the church of Jesus Christ, but really isn't. They need to be purged from each and every one. This is not primarily a word of warning to individuals, but to leaders and churches as a whole. Be righteous before God, be Holy, be obedient, or be judged.