

MAJORING IN A MINOR –AMOS PART THREE

We began this series, by examining in some detail, the key verses of Amos Chapter 2, especially verses 4-8. These verses, outlined why the judgement of God was about to fall, not only on the people of Judah, Israel and the surrounding nations, but by implication, the world and much of the church today as well. Let us now continue these themes, by examining Amos Chapter Four.

Amos 4:

4:1 Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.

2 The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.

4 Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years:

5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and

caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.

8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

13 For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name.

Perhaps the over-riding theme of this particular chapter, is the Biblical principle of 'sowing and reaping'. Certainly, the concept of; *as you sow, so shall you reap*, appears to be operating here. God will bring His wrath and His judgement on those who practise unrighteousness. God's principles are never negated; sometimes He stays His hand through His great mercy and grace, but the principle will always be in operation.

You have to remember, that there is a passage of time between the two operations of sowing and reaping, but the one will eventually follow the other. This cannot be over emphasised. It may sometimes appear, that no matter how hard you sow, nothing comes to harvest, but just as night follows day, so will a harvest follow a planting. Just recall, that He is the God of the harvest and He will bring it forth in His good time. The harvest and the associated reaping **MUST** come for all. Though, it should be pointed out that scripture sometimes indicates that the person who does the sowing will not always reap in the same field in which he sowed.

This principle of sowing and reaping applies not only to the good we and others do, but also to that which is less pleasing to God. Those who today are taking advantage of the poor and the needy, are sowing the seeds of destruction and damnation into their lives. There will be an accounting before the Throne of Judgement; what they have sown, they **WILL** reap.

Verse 3 is interesting.

3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the LORD.

Where do these breaches come from? God places a wall, or hedge of protection around His people. The enemy cannot get through this wall; that would make them more powerful than God. How then do the breaches appear that the enemy is able to use? The answer, is simple. We make the breaches ourselves, through our disobedience and sin. We let the enemy in; we allow him to attack and even defeat us. No-one else can do it.

I like what Matthew Henry has to say about this verse: “What is got by oppression, cannot long be enjoyed with satisfaction” Once again, you will reap what you sow. There will be nowhere to hide from God.

4 Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years:

5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

God is NOT giving them a licence to sin here, He is being somewhat sarcastic. He is describing their actions, in contrast to what their attitude should be. Note especially the beginning of verse 5, where they use *leaven* in their bread offering. Leaven, in the Bible, is symbolic and representative of SIN.

Now, consider a moment the spiritual significance of *bread*. Jesus said in John 10 that He was the living bread come down from heaven. Later, at the Last Supper, He equated unleavened bread with His body, with His coming sacrifice. Bread always has this meaning in the Bible; even the manna in the wilderness was a type of Jesus. Yet, here we have the people of Israel, offering leavened bread; to God; offering the equivalent of a sin filled Christ as a sacrifice. That sort of sacrifice could never be acceptable to God.

Strangely, it would seem these people liked their own creations and actually thought that God would like and accept them too. How similar to the message of the so called faith/prosperity gospel this is. They too have created their own sin laden offering that is far from what the Bible

requires. They like their message too, but God doesn't; it's another gospel. Sin, greed and oppression of the poor and needy are at its heart, not the love of the sinless Lamb of God.

It seems clear to me, that what God is concerned about here, is an issue that dominates much of scripture; Repentance. All that He had done, was intended to bring His people to repentance and once more they had spurned His pleas. Five times had He made His displeasure with their attitude and behaviour known to them, and five times had they refused to turn to Him and make their peace with an increasingly angry God.

The number FIVE, is an interesting number in Bible numerics. It is the number of Grace. It is by Grace that we are saved, according to Ephesians, so the significance of this number here, cannot be overstated. God was, through Amos, outlining His plan of Salvation, even though it was hidden from their understanding. As we consider the five charges God lays against His people, let us remember how important these things are in our own lives. Where God withholds for disobedience, He can also give blessings for obedience. Keep in mind, that all these things are a part of His saving grace.

The five charges are set out in verses 6-11, so let us examine them carefully.

6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.

8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

The first of these, in verse 6, is a lack of food, or famine. Trusting in the provisions of God, especially in times of famine, was a basic tenet of Jewish faith. Likewise, it forms part of our basic Christian foundations. The converse, was also true. God used famine as a punishment for sin. Frequently, in the OT, we see God using it as a means of bringing His people to repentance. Today, we are seeing a famine of the Word of God in our society; not surprising is it? This too was spoken of by Amos in chapter 8.

11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

In the OT, famine was primarily associated with a physical need for physical food, but in the NT, and in the society in which we live, it is associated more with our spiritual needs. Only as we become aware of this, will we turn to God with a repentant heart and come under His outstretched hand of grace. The Bible is our spiritual food, Jesus, Himself, said that he too was our spiritual food. If we are not to experience famine in our lives, we need more of the Word, more of Jesus. God uses famine to bring us to repentance, in our case, spiritual famine. I hope and pray that He won't lay His first charge on us. *“yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.”*

The next, is found in verse 7, there is a lack of rain. Again, we have a physical event, with a spiritual meaning. Rain was essential to the harvest in the dry climate of the middle east. Rain speaks of God's blessings and provision, so the withholding of the rain was always a serious event reflecting His judgement, usually for disobedience. Today we need God's rain, His Living water, His Holy Spirit for an end-time harvest.

The third charge is in verse 9. God has spoiled their fruit. The Bible tells us that by our fruit we will be known. What is the message then, if our fruit has been spoiled, destroyed. As Christians, we are called to be fruit inspectors. You don't find good fruit on bad trees or vines. Spoiled fruit is not the sign of a healthy Christian. In fact, God gives several warnings about people with either no fruit in their lives, or bad fruit. Refer to my message 'Beware the Axe', for more details.

Fourthly, He sends plagues and war. Look around you at the world today and what do you see? Are people taking any real notice. What is AIDS, but a plague from God. Why are our newspapers filled with stories about war and terror? Nothing has changed, *yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD*. Have things been happening in your life that could equate to either of these? Hopefully, these things apply more to nations and groups of people, rather than to individuals. However, if God is in control as the Bible teaches, then there must be a purpose behind it. Is God trying to get our attention today, as He did in the time of Amos? Is greater judgement still to come? I think the answer to both questions is the same; YES.

Finally, in verse 11 He offers the people a clear choice; Mercy, or Judgement and still they would not return to Him.

11 I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

That choice is still there and thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it will remain there until the day of His return. Yet, still, the people will not come.

Five areas of Grace are presented to the people and five times the offer is refused. There will be no more. Is there a famine of the Word of God in your life? Have the blessings, the REAL blessings of God dried up in your life? Have you inspected your fruit recently to see if it has been spoiled? Wars and Plagues affect nations, but nations are made up of people just like us. Are we at war in a spiritual sense? Are we under

attack? Which option have you chosen; Judgement or Mercy? Why is this important? Read verse 12.

12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

Are you prepared to meet your God? How will you meet with Him? You can't flee from Him; the Bible tells us that, so we must prepare to meet Him one day. Will it be as a friend, or as an enemy? The choice is still yours to make; what will it take!