

## MAJORING IN A MINOR- AMOS PART FIVE

### THE FIRST THREE VISIONS OF AMOS

The duty of an OT prophet, was twofold; first he was to bring a warning and then he was to pray for those he warned. The Book of Amos, is divided into two parts; the warnings and the visions. So far in these studies, we have focused on the warnings given by Amos, now, by examining the visions of Amos, we shall see not only God's final judgements upon the nation of Israel, but also the effect of having a man of God stand in the breach in fervent prayer.

The Bible tells us that the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, and when that prayer is for a sin-filled nation, or a sin-filled church, then we shall see that God's forgiveness is greater than ours.

The final three chapters of the Book of Amos deal with a series of five God given visions that have much to say to us. They cover everything from the mercy of God, to His wrath and eventual judgement. Let us turn to Amos chapter 7.

*Amos 7:*

*1. Thus hath the Lord GOD showed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings.*

*2. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.*

3. *The LORD repented for this It shall not be, saith the LORD.*
4. *Thus hath the Lord GOD showed unto me and, behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part.*
5. *Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.*
6. *The LORD repented for this This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD.*
7. *Thus he showed me and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand.*
8. *And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel I will not again pass by them any more*
9. *And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.*
10. *Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel the land is not able to bear all his words.*
11. *For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land.*
12. *Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there*
13. *But prophesy not again any more at Bethel for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.*
14. *Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit*

*15. And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.*

*16. Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac.*

*17. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.*

The first two visions, of Locusts and Fire, found in verses 1-6, show forth the great mercy of our loving Heavenly Father, both then and now. In fact, in the vision of the Locusts, we see two clear examples of that mercy, and the possibility of a third.

Firstly, note that the Locusts were not sent until the time of the latter harvest. God could have sent them earlier, but in His great mercy, He did not. Locusts, first mentioned in Exodus chapter 10, were symbolic of God's judgement on a rebellious nation, and were included as one of God's curses for covenant disobedience. It is interesting to note, that Locust plagues are also a part of the visions in the book of Revelation.

Rev 9:3-4

*And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*

*And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.*

The parallel is obvious.

Next, we see that the prayer of Amos brings forth the mercy of God a second time (verses 2 and 3).

*2b O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.*

*3. The LORD repented for this It shall not be, saith the LORD.*

It must be pointed out, that God does not repent as we repent, He doesn't have to change the direction in which He is going. Rather, the prayer of Amos was able to extend God's inclination towards mercy even further. Perhaps this is how we need to pray today for the society in which we live.

Finally, the question is posed, "*by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.*" Faced with not only their sin, but also the consequences of that sin, there was only one answer for this question and it is found in James 4:10

*'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.'*

No-one but God Himself was able to lift up the people of Israel, and then only if they finally humbled themselves, repented and returned to Him. The same holds true for us and the church. Remember too, that while God may readily forgive sin, that doesn't negate the consequences flowing from that sin. They still have to be faced and dealt with.

In verses 4-6, we see the next vision, that of fire, and how once again, God showed forth His mercy in response to prayer. Fire too is an important consideration in the book of Revelation. In fact, the Bible is full of references to God sending forth His fire and this is a subject worthy of separate study. The only additional point I'll make at this time, is that fire is linked with the altar used for sacrifices, especially the sin offering. This image appears several times in the Book of Amos and helps give it a multi-layered coherence.

The significant aspect of these first two visions, however, is the demonstration of the manifest mercy of God in response to the fervent prayer of a righteous man. That should be an encouragement to all of us, to pray for both the nation and the church.

Now we come to the third vision God gave to Amos, found in verses 7-9.

*7. Thus he showed me and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand.*

*8. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel I will not again pass by them any more*

*9. And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.*

There are two competing interpretations of these verses, so let us examine each one. Basically, the difference boils down to how one translates the Hebrew word '*Anak*', which in the KJV, is translated 'plumb-line'. Let's consider the alternative rendering first.

Some scholars and theologians contend that this word ‘*Anak*’ could rightfully be translated ‘tin’. Verse 7 would then read that the Lord was standing on a wall made of tin, with tin, (probably a sword,) in His hand. Verse 8, would similarly have a wall of tin set in the midst of the people of Israel. If this rendering is correct, then the obvious question is what is the significance of ‘tin’?

For those who promote this translation, tin signifies weakness, something that will perish easily, or which can easily be destroyed. Parallels are drawn with Jer 15:20 and Ezek 4:3.

*Jer 15:20*

*And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD.*

*Ezek 4:3*

*Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.*

However, in this instance, God was no longer willing to protect His people, so the wall was no longer of Brass/Bronze, or of Iron, but only of much weaker tin. Note how OT prophets are often associated with some type of metallic wall which symbolises the protection of God for His people. In this case, tin would indicate softness, uselessness (for protection) and its obvious perishability when compared to something

like iron. Was God here signifying the end of His protection, as He was about to stand against them with a sword in His hand. This is one possible interpretation.

The better known translation of this word ‘*Anak*’, is that given in the KJV and in Strong’s. Here, it is rendered ‘plumb-line’.

A plumb-line, is a device used by a builder to ensure that a wall or a building, is straight and true. Thus, if this is the correct translation, then here God is setting a standard for both Israel and ourselves. This metaphor is used elsewhere in scripture. This is perhaps the best known.

*Isa 28:16-17*

*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.*

*Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.*

We know, that Jesus is the cornerstone mentioned in verse 16, but see how the plummet, or plumb-line is associated with righteousness in verse 17. That’s what is being measured and all lies will be swept away in that day. We know that Israel was found wanting when measured against God’s plumb-line, but where would we stand in the same situation? The Bible tells us that our righteousness, is as dirty rags, it doesn’t measure up. Only the righteousness we obtain from our Lord meets God’s standard; only it is straight and true, for He is the Truth personified.

Which then is the correct interpretation? Does it really matter? Both sound good to me, and both can be equally valid interpretations. Let us move on to verse 9, where God gives His judgement.

*9. And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.*

Note the reference to ‘high places’. That indicates idolatry. These, the prophet says, will be torn down and made desolate. This is God’s judgement on ALL idolatry. There will be no sanctuary, no place of safety from God’s wrath in the day His judgement falls. All lies and deception will be swept away and the land will be laid waste. His mercy is NOT forever. Yes, prayer will extend its time, but Amos clearly shows that a time will come when God will no longer be merciful.

What then is our response? I believe, that we are in the position of Amos. We may not be God’s chosen prophet, but we are His voice in this day, in this society and in this nation. If we won’t speak forth a word of warning, then who will? If we won’t declare forth the Truth of the Gospel, then who will? If we don’t take any action, but continue to sit and just enjoy our little fellowship, then who will be ultimately responsible for the judgement that descends and for the people who perish for want of a vision, for want of hearing what God has to say? Think about it this week.

With that sobering thought in mind, next time, we will examine Israel’s response to Amos. Why? Well, their response, is likely to be the same one that we’ll get, so we might as well be prepared. Strangely, I don’t think you’re going to like it.