

## MAJORING IN A MINOR-AMOS PART SEVEN

### THE FOURTH VISION OF AMOS

In part 5 of this study, we examined the first three visions of Amos; the locusts, the fire and the tin wall, or plumb-line. Then, in part 6, we considered the response of the religious leaders and the people to his warnings and saw God's sentence for this response. Now we turn to his fourth vision in chapter 8.

*Amos 8:*

- 1. Thus hath the Lord GOD showed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit.*
- 2. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the LORD unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.*
- 3. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.*
- 4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,*
- 5. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?*
- 6. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?*
- 7. The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.*

8. *Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.*

9. *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day:*

10. *And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.*

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:*

12. *And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.*

13. *In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.*

14. *They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.*

The vision presented in this chapter, is of a basket of ripe summer fruit, that is soon to perish. This was significant, not only for the people then, but also for our world today. Remember, the key to this entire series on the book of Amos is that our society is a perfect reflection of the one he brought his prophecy to.

Today, the lies of Satan abound in our society. *“There are many paths to God; God is doing something new; God wants you to be rich; it doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as you try to live a good life; etc. etc.”*

Perhaps the most insidious, and some think the most effective, is: *“You don’t have to worry about God, or religion right now, there’s lots of time for that later. Enjoy yourself now while you’re young.”* This, or something similar is a very prevalent philosophy today, and it still is and always has been, a lie of the devil. It was no different in the time of Amos.

God had already shown His mercy and His patience with the people of Israel twice, in the first two visions, but there had been no repentance, no turning from sin. Amos had brought his warnings in the first few chapters, but to no avail. The people thought they still had plenty of time. God said no more, they were like ripe summer fruit; their time had come.

There are a number of possible interpretations of what is meant by the word translated ‘summer fruit’, but all agree that it symbolises God’s imminent judgement upon His people. Interestingly, the main association with the word has to do with Harvest. In fact, the word translated ‘end’ in verse 2, can also be translated ‘harvest’. It has even been suggested that what Amos saw was an empty harvesting basket, signifying the result of God’s coming harvest. Whether it refers to a basket of fruit about to perish, or even an empty basket, God’s patience and mercy with the people of Israel, was finished.

The message for the world today is the same as it was then. Stop playing games with God, His patience and His mercy are almost finished. You do so at your own peril. Look to the Harvest, and pray it's not an empty basket. Too many people have their own interpretation of the Harvest; we need to see what God has to say about it, but that is a separate study.

I find verse 3 interesting.

*3. And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence.*

Perhaps it's just my personal taste in music, but I consider much of what passes for modern Christian music to be little more than the 'howlings' spoken of here. While I can't really say much about a literal interpretation of the second part of that verse, I do believe that on a spiritual level, this has already happened. To me, the silence speaks of mourning, as for the dead.

So many in churches today are spiritually dead and don't yet know it. They are under deception and sadly many prefer it so. They not only don't want to hear the truth, they will actually run away from it. They prefer the lie, because it is more comfortable and in most cases, more pleasant; the truth can be and often is painful. Therefore, almost no-one speaks up for truth anymore; the silence is deafening.

Verses 4-6 flow together, and verse 6 in particular, refers to Amos Chapter 2 and the concerns I presented in my second study on the book. I don't intend to deal with that again here, but I will elaborate on some of the other issues raised. Let's consider those verses once more:

*4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,*

*5. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?*

*6. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?*

Note first, that this section is addressed specifically to those who oppress the poor and needy. Look what Matthew Henry has to say about these verses:

*They were so eager to increase their wealth, and make it more, that they robbed the poor to enrich themselves; and they fastened upon the poor, to make a prey of them, because they were not able to obtain any redress nor to resist or revenge the violence of their oppressors. Those riches that are got by the ruin of the poor will bring ruin on those that get them.*

Somehow, I doubt that those who practice such things today will heed this warning. After all, it might affect their ‘ministry’!!

Consider verse 5 for a moment, especially in terms of its modern implications. For someone who professes to be a Christian, either every day is a Sabbath, a day of resting in the Lord and in His completed work, or it is a day to be a part of the world and all it entails. There is no compromise possible. Either you serve God, or you serve the world and its ruler Satan. The Bible says it is IMPOSSIBLE to serve both.

How then, can someone who belongs to God wish for a Sabbath to be over. To me, that is a contradiction. Therefore if that is your wish, then your true focus is on the world and not on God. Your heart is desiring the things of the world, rather than the things of God. Is this true of many so called Christians today? Is Sunday, and going to church an inconvenience to them, or a Joy. How does our society view this matter? I think the introduction of Sunday trading answers that question quite clearly.

Of additional interest, is the fact that these people, who had an outward display of piety, cheated their fellow men, especially again, the poor and needy. They used false weights and measures in their buying and selling. The books of Leviticus and Proverbs give God's view on this.

*Lev 19:35-37*

*35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.*

*36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.*

*37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.*

*Prov 20:23*

*Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good.*

In some middle-eastern countries, this practice, if discovered, brought the death penalty. It probably still does. Are people being cheated today? Are the poor and needy still at the mercy of men like these? On both a natural and a spiritual level, I believe the answer is once again Yes. Many who are desperately seeking the Lord are being cheated by the charlatans out there masquerading as servants of Christ. These false ministers will one day feel the full weight of God's wrath.

One final point before moving on. In verse 6, we are told these people were even selling the refuse of the wheat. This, according to the book of Leviticus, belonged to the poor, so they had no right to do that either. Once more, they were cheating those most in need of help. God cannot and will not stand by and allow that to happen. His judgement was coming, the time for patience and mercy was past. Verse 7 clearly illustrates this point.

*7. The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.*

From here, the Lord proceeds to outline the judgment He will bring.

*8. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt.*

*9. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day:*

*10. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.*

*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:*

*12. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.*

*13. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.*

*14. They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.*

The images here, are of untold death and destruction. The reference to a flood is significant, as it conjures up images of Noah and the destruction caused by the great flood then. However, combined with this should be these well known verses:

*Mat 24:38-39*

*For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark,*

*39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

*Luke 17:27*

*They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.*

I'm struck by the expression in Matthew 24, which ties in with the context of that verse, that our Lord will return when the times are like those of Noah. How much closer can we get! How many more signs do we need? When will people wake up? No, like the foolish virgins, they fall asleep and let their light burn out.

Verse 9 echoes how quickly, how suddenly, this will happen. The sun will go down at noon, the day will be cut short. There isn't much time. Not only is it to be a time of mourning and lamentation, but as we pointed out in an earlier study, it will be marked by a famine of the Word of God. Is this not what we are seeing in the world today? How many people really know and understand the Bible? How many believe it? How many even read it!

In how many churches is the Word still being preached, or is it the case as was reported from one so called mega-church, "If you want to learn about the Bible, go to Bible college." What an unbelievable statement. What has happened to the preaching of the Word? How have we let this happen in a society where Bibles are so freely available? How have we allowed the Holy Scriptures to be so diluted and watered down, that in many cases, what is called a Bible bears little resemblance to the true Word of God! How is it that only 54% of AOG pastors believe in the literal Truth of Scripture? Truly, the words of Amos have come to pass.

Take a look in any so called Christian book store today and make a note of what is being sold. Most of it is pure heresy, but no-one either knows that, or really cares about it. Why? Quite simply, they aren't reading their Bible, so they have no idea how far from the true and living Word of God these books have strayed.

In verse 12, we are told of a people who wander the world seeking God and His Word, but they find Him not. They are not satisfied, they still thirst and they will continue to thirst. There is only One who can quench that thirst and it's the Lord Jesus Christ. It's certainly not a man, nor a place, and definitely not a ministry. People are searching, but they aren't looking in the right place. Doesn't this too echo the words of our Lord in Matt 24:26

*Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*

The entire context here, has to be referring to His second coming. This vision of Amos then, I believe, is also pointing to this same event. When Christ returns, the vision will be fulfilled in our time, in our society, and all the signs in the vision are already present now. The message should be clear, let us heed it while we still may. There isn't much time. Like a basket of ripe fruit, we have to act on it now, or all we'll have is an empty harvest. What are you going to do about it this week. Who knows, next week might be too late!!