

Seek the Lord, and Ye Shall Live

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"—Amos 3:3

THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

AMOS was one of the earliest prophets whose writings have come down to us. Only Jonah appears to have been earlier. Jonah prophesied concerning the conquests of Jeroboam II—2 Kings 14:25, apparently between the time Jehu lost these territories & Jeroboam regained them. In Amos' time they appear to have been already regained—6:2.

Amos prophesied in the days of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel: around 780-740 BC. Isaiah and Hosea also prophesied under these kings, but they both continued until the time of Hezekiah, so they in all probability started somewhat later than Amos.

Our principal purpose in studying any portion of Scripture must be for lessons and guidance for *ourselves*. This, says Paul, was why it was recorded—1 Cor. 10: 11; Rom. 15:4. We must constantly remember this.

Amos' name appears to mean *Burden or Burden-bearer*. Except for the last few verses of the book, all is judgment, condemnation & punishment. Amos' prophecy is concerned principally with the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah and Israel were both at this time at the summit of prosperity. Uzziah and Jeroboam II were strong and competent rulers. And in both cases we are told the prosperity and strength were of God's mercy and testing. But these kings and their people thought it was of their own cleverness and ability.

Everything outwardly appeared in order, and even especially blessed by God. And truly they were blessed (2 Kings 14:26-27)—

"The Lord saw the affliction of Israel... and saved them by the hand of Jeroboam."
And concerning Uzziah—

"God made him to prosper . . . He was marvellously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chron. 26).

Let us note well that just because God blesses us, it does not necessarily mean He approves what we are doing, or is pleased with us. It may be just the final test, the final manifestation of His patience, the final opportunity before a terrible judgment. It was so with Israel.

About 800 BC Assyria had crushed Syria, which had long oppressed Israel. Then followed a period of about 50 years in which Assyria was weak and inactive, which left Israel without major adversaries. With no strong close neighbour, and with Damascus in decline, Israel controlled the trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia, & Samaria became the thriving central market for East-West trade.

A powerful merchant class arose with their 'summer houses' and 'winter houses' and 'ivory houses'—against which worldly corruption and luxury Amos cries in words of simple righteousness. The poor were oppressed: the rich got richer, and accumulated wealth & lands at the expense of the poor. Then by the power of their wickedly-acquired wealth, they bought up & enslaved the debt-ridden poor. The Law of Moses was specifically designed to prevent this, and teach liberality and mercy; just as the Law of Christ is designed to prevent inequity and to teach large-hearted sharing and free liberality.

It was in this period that Amos prophesied of judgment to come. Israel was peaceful and prosperous, and very attentive to the external forms of serving and worshiping God. They were well satisfied with themselves: considering themselves to be greatly blessed for their piety and great religious activity.

The shrines and altars and images in Israel had been cleansed of Baal worship. They were now professedly devoted to Yahweh, but it was a manmade form of worship, and therefore an abomination. The only acceptable worship is that which God Himself specifies.

They had a false idea of God, like the heathen. There was no recognition of the necessity of righteousness and holiness. They thought God must protect them as long as they recognized Him and offered sacrifices to Him. It was a religion that was dead to basic inner goodness and fellow-feeling for others. Amos insists from beginning to end on the necessity of a pure, righteous, godly personal life.

All evil comes from one source: separation from and disharmony with God. Union with Him in heart and mind is the solution to everything. The closer the union, the fuller the solution. There must be an ever-increasing harmonizing and uniting of the life with God.

Amos was of Tekoa, in Judah, 6 miles south of Bethlehem, and 12 miles south of Jerusalem. It was on a high hill, the last outpost overlooking the wilderness of Judea. It was, or had been, a fortified city of defence, a watch tower—Jer. 6: 1. Rehoboam built it for defence—2 Chron. 11: 6. Bethel, where Amos was sent to prophesy, was the royal sanctuary & religious centre of the northern Kingdom—1 Kings 12: 29. It was 12 miles north of Jerusalem, on the border of Benjamin and Ephraim. It is interesting that the unnamed 'man of God' was sent there from Judah to testify against Jeroboam I, just as Amos was sent there to testify against Jeroboam II nearly 200 years later.

Amos was a resented intruder: without friends and in danger of his life, but he faithfully proclaimed God's condemnation to the high officials of Israel. The immediate result of Amos' labours was failure, as has been the usual case from Noah onward, but he fulfilled his necessary duty of warning Israel; & he was thus a faithful part of the eternal plan that can never fail.

This too has a bearing for us. Indolence, timidity and self-indulgence often hide behind the excuse that there is no use our proclaiming the Word of God, because none will listen. The flesh is always looking for an excuse. Noah could have said the same. If he had, he would have perished with the rest of the ungodly. Our duty is to proclaim the Word in season and out of season, and leave the result to God.

Amos' mission of warning failed. There was no response; and the judgments soon began to fall. Right after Jeroboam's long and strong reign, there was internal strife: 3 kings in one year: 2 murdered. The Assyrian invasion began; and within 25 years Israel was carried away, and the northern kingdom ceased.

Amos was a simple herdman and dresser of sycamore trees, a very humble, lowly class in the land. He was in no way trained as a prophet, nor had he chosen that work. God called him directly from his simple labour, and sent him to pronounce ringing judgments against the pious, prosperous, self-satisfied kingdom of Israel. We cannot help but think of bro. Thomas when we think of Amos: personally gentle and sympathetic, but rigidly resolute and unsparing in condemnation of ungodliness and ungodly systems.

We must combine these qualities. There must be deep sympathy and understanding and patience. But at the same time there must be uncompromising insistence on holiness, righteousness and condemnation of evil—but with sadness and affection: never with bitterness or aggressiveness. At Amos' personal plea—and Amos was herein typical of all godly sounders of the Truth—God's judgments that he was sent to proclaim were twice postponed. But at last they fell irrevocably.

Amos had a very vivid comprehension of the greatness & nearness of God. He lived close to God: knew His will: heard His message. He saw all things in nature and in history in a Divine light, and measured them all by Divine standards. He shows God as boundless in dominion, infinite in power, perfect in holiness: controlling the mighty forces of nature and the destiny of nations, and searching each individual heart.

Amos' emphasis throughout is on personal holiness and righteousness, *because* of the eternal holiness and righteousness of God. His is one of the few books of the Bible in which the word 'love'

does not occur: righteous judgment is the keynote. Amos' message is of obedience, righteousness, judgment: Hosea's is love, mercy, reconciliation. Both are essential: we must have the 'whole counsel' of God.

Amos' book is a ringing denunciation of all inhumanity, injustice, oppression, selfishness, luxury, unconcern for others. He emphasizes—

Justice between man and man: a deep, living, God-fearing, brotherly justice, as portrayed in the holy Law of Moses;

That privilege and blessing carries great responsibility;

That failure to rise to that responsibility brings terrible judgment.

His message is:

"Hear the Word of the Lord: Let judgment roll as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream ... *SEEK GOD, AND LIVE!*"

The whole pattern of salvation is summed up in these 4 short words: '*Seek God—and live!*' It could not be put more briefly or more strongly. This is the simple message of the whole Bible, repeated over and over: to impress, and to remind. The book is divided into 3 parts—

1. *Judgment on 6 surrounding nations, & Judah (1:3-2:4);*
2. *The bulk of the book: judgments on Israel, the northern kingdom;*
3. *The promise of final glorious restoration (last 7 vs. of the book).*

The first part—judgment on surrounding nations—concerns, beside Judah, 6 nations especially connected with Israel's history. The first 3 (Syria, Philistia & Tyre) are strictly Gentile. The second 3 (Edom, Ammon & Moab) are blood relations to Israel.

Of the 3 Gentile nations, 2 (Syria in the north and Philistia in the south) were specifically brought by God from elsewhere in His purpose of developing Israel—9:7. They were both bitter enemies of Israel, and often used by God as judicial oppressors. The 3rd (Tyre) began as a Gentile friend and helper, but became a corrupter, & at last an enemy.

All these surrounding nations were related to David's Kingdom, & were subject to him. They are referred to again in the final verses in connection with the final blessing under the greater David.

The judgments on these other nations are an introduction & build-up to the principal message: the judgment of Israel. If God judged the Gentile nations outside His specific Law, how much more Israel, who had been so specially blessed and privileged! But Israel took just the opposite message: that they could presume on special lenity and mercy. And so with us. We talk glibly about God's terrible judgments on the 'wicked' nations: what about our own so much greater obligations and responsibilities? *That* is what our concern should be.

The main part of the book (from the middle of ch. 2 to the middle of ch.9) again divides naturally into 2 parts—

1. *General judgments and condemnations (to the end of ch. 6);*
2. *Five special visions of calamity:*
Locusts, Fire, Plumblin, Summer fruit. The Smitten Sanctuary.

Amos dates his book—1:1 from 'the earthquake.' There are 8 literal, historical earthquakes in Scripture. The other 7 are all obviously miracles, so the great likelihood is that this one was too. They were—

Sinai Exod 19:18 *Jonathan* 1 Sam.14:15 *Uzziah* Amos 1:1 *Christ' death* Matt. 27:51
Korah Num. 16:31 *Elijah* 1 Kings 19:11 *Philippi* Acts 16:26 *Christ's return* Matt.28:2

This one made a very deep impression. Zechariah, 250 years later, refers to the terror it caused—14:5. Both references connect it with Uzziah: it may have been related to his presumptuous sin.

1:2—"The Lord will roar from Zion."

This word 'roar' (*sha'ag*) is the terrifying, paralyzing roar of the lion as he leaps upon his prey. We note man has borrowed this tactic: in the recent Mogadishu hijack rescue, 'stun-grenades' were used for momentary paralysis and shock. Here it indicates the judgment is imminent. This roaring from Zion is typical of the last days when—

"Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, & the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2).

It is, again, the lion-roar of the Rainbow Angel—Rev. 10:3.

1:3—"For 3 transgressions of Damascus, and for 4 ..."

Why is Syria at the head of the list? It was the worst and most recent enemy. From the days of Saul, it was almost continually at war with Israel. Even at this very moment, it—with Gog—is the most bitter of the foes who desire to destroy God's people and take their land.

God tells us by Amos—9: 7 that He had specially brought the Syrians and the Philistines to the land for His Own purpose, which was to discipline Israel. The movement of the Syrians and Philistines would *appear* very natural and self-determined. Men of 'science' in their mole-blindness spin endless learned theories on the supposed causes and purposes of national migrations. But God thru Amos gives the simple and all-sufficient answer: *He did it*. We are further told—

"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8).

We must get this picture. We must think in these Divine terms. How useless and foolish are the ignorant theories of men!

Vs. 6-8 pronounce judgment on the Philistines. These were the people who gave their name to the whole land: Palestine. They were especially brought in God's purpose from Caphtor—9 : 7—most likely, Crete. They were among those left in the land to prove Israel—Judges 3:3. They were the 2nd great enemy of God's people, during the Judges & later: more especially of Judah, as the Syrians were of Israel. They were a highly developed people, with a strong political organization. They held the best of the land: the fruitful coastal plain.

Tyre is next denounced—vs.9-10, because they remembered not the 'brotherly covenant.' Hiram called Solomon 'brother'—1 Kings 9: 13, and he made a covenant with him—5:12. They were closely associated with Israel in the days of David and Solomon, and helped to build the Temple, but in Israel's distress they treacherously attacked them.

Edom too—vs.11-12 pursued his brother, and 'kept his wrath forever.' This enmity began with Jacob's deception about the blessing. The effects of actions continue long after: even today we still see the 'perpetual hatred' of Arab for Jew. Edom (*Red*: same root as Adam) typifies the flesh, the natural man. Isaiah and Ezekiel tell us Edom shall be desolate in the Millennium, when all the earth is blessed.

Ammon—vs. 13-15 was a son of Lot. Israel was not allowed to touch them when they came from Egypt. They were always hostile and barbarous. It was Nahash king of the Ammonites who, unprovoked, desired to put out the eyes of the men of Jabesh-gilead, and make them slaves, This led to the choice of Saul as king—1 Sam. 12:12.

Moab—2:1-3 Was the other son of Lot.

Judah—vs. 4-5 despised the law and kept not the commandments: a greater degree of responsibility and of punishment. Their own lies caused them to err. If we abandon the way of truth and righteousness, our own errors cause us to increasingly err: we create our own punishment.

We now come to Israel—2:6, the main subject of the book: from here to the end. The charge against them is injustice, mercilessness, corruption and luxury. God had established an ideal

constitution under the Law of Moses: mercy, brotherliness, a simple way of life: constant renewal of the original equity & opportunity. But the flesh in its greed always takes advantage of the less able or fortunate, & is never satisfied.

God reviews His free blessings to them—vs. 9-11: destroying the Canaanites, delivering them from Egyptian bondage, giving them teachers in the prophets and examples in the Nazarites. We see here that the Nazarites were an important aspect in their national life: a blessing from God. But they corrupted the Nazarites: they resented them: wanted to bring them down to their own level.

2: 13—"I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."

This is a marvellous and touching revelation. God feels. Paul says—

"Grieve not the holy spirit of God" (Eph.4:30).

Those who love expose themselves to hurt: and God in His marvellous mercy has condescended to love us. What great responsibility is ours!

Ch. 3 contains many well-known passages: some express basic truths more clearly than anywhere else in the Bible—

3:2—"You only have I known . . . therefore I will punish you."

God has spoken of the punishment of the nations around, as they have related to His purpose and His people. But Israel is very different. They are the *centre* of the purpose: infinitely closer and more intimate to God. God says—Rom. 1 that because of the obvious manifestation of Himself and His power and divinity in all the works of creation around us, *all mankind* are without excuse for not recognizing Him (how stupid is the folly of Evolution!).

So all are guilty to a degree, and He punishes in various ways, as He sees fit, and as His purposes require. But Israel stands alone as specially chosen and brought near and taught and favoured and *loved*. Their sins were again light and love. Here is where the comparison with ourselves enters. We few have been chosen from the earth's teeming and perishing millions to be called near to God, and shown the way of life and joy, and flooded with His personal love.

God does not call all. He calls as he sees fit, for His Own glory and purpose. But when He calls, tremendous responsibilities are involved, and tremendous opportunities. Life can never be the same again. We are no longer of the nameless multitude who live and die like animals, in ignorance. We must stand before Christ, & either be accepted forever into the Divine family, or pay the dread price of the rejection of the love of God. To us, as to Israel, He says—

"*You only have I known... therefore I will punish you for all your sins.*"

The way of righteousness is always presented as the only way of happiness and pleasure and true freedom:

"There is no peace to the wicked."

—and God makes sure there will not be. The disobedient may *seem* to prosper, but they never know true peace and joy, and the final bitter reckoning is never far away. This is the great lesson of Amos: the great, simple, eternal lesson of all Scripture—

"*Seek God—AND LIVE*" (5:4).

How simple, and obvious! But how universally ignored or forgotten, even by those who should know better. Truly, there are apparently attractive and desirable things to be given up, but how small and empty they are compared to the infinite joy offered to those who seek God with all their heart! And how disappointing most greatly desired things turn out to be, when at last we get them in this life. Like Solomon, we find at last that all is vanity, except one thing alone—

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

3:3—"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

At the beginning, we have no 'agreement' or affinity with God. His is the mind of the Spirit, while we are wholly the mind of the flesh, & these 2 are at enmity, & are foolishness one to the other—Gal. 5:17; 1 Cor. 2:14.

But gradually, by the constant study of and meditation upon His Word, we come to assimilate to the intelligent mind of the Spirit, & lose the stupidity of the natural man. We are, as the Scriptures say—

"Renewed—transformed—in the spirit of our minds" (Eph. 4:23)

We enter more and more into the boundless, timeless Divine viewpoint. We put off, little by little, the corrupt, narrow pettiness of the flesh, and interest in fleshly things. Spiritual, eternal things become increasingly more important and more real to us.

This is a lifelong process: a constant, daily, *essential* process—if we are to be among the very, very few accepted at Christ's coming. This is the *whole* purpose for which we are given our present lives: to squander them on anything else is to guarantee failure.

3:6—"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

Nowhere is this essential principle expounded more clearly than here. All things are of God. He watches and controls all: even to the fall of a sparrow. This is hard for us to comprehend, with our puny mental limitations, but we must *strive* to comprehend it. It is essential to our salvation that we steadily *grow toward* comprehending it. It is not just that God could be everywhere: He *is* everywhere. It is not just that He has power to see everything: He *does* see everything—

"Are not 5 sparrows sold for 2 farthings?—*not 1 of them* is forgotten before God."

Let us meditate on this till we begin to understand these things. This is the beginning of wisdom.

God is here speaking to His people. If there is evil, it is of God; & there is a reason. Usually it is a warning against, and a punishment of, sin. It is to make men *think*, and examine themselves: to make them realize that God is all-seeing and all-powerful—that none can successfully ignore His righteous laws, or set themselves against Him. Such evil on God's people is really a blessing of His love; an evidence of His Fatherhood and care—the chastisement of beloved sons—Heb.12:6.

Evil is not always an indication of sin, but sometimes of well-doing—

"Every branch that beareth not fruit my Father taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He *purgeth* it, that it may bring forth *more* fruit" (John 15:2).

But its purpose is always the same: to teach something; to bring out inner characteristics; to test and strengthen faith by giving scope to its manifestation and exercise; to reveal to us our weakness and need; to manifest the uncertainty and brevity of present things.

3:7—"Surely the Lord will do nothing but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets."

Here again is a basic, oft-quoted scriptural principle for which we are indebted to Amos. It is a broad, comprehensive and comforting assurance that gives us incentive and confidence to study the whole range of the Divine Word of prophecy. It gives us confidence that there is a light to explain today's events, and what will come from them, as there has been for every generation.

Amos is working up to his basic message: his heavy message of condemnation and impending calamity to Israel.

3:8—"The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

All fear when the lion roars. It is an ominous, terrifying sound, signifying that he has found and is falling upon his prey. How quick we are to recognize and fear and guard against natural dangers: but how slow to recognize, and even slower to do anything about, the much more terrible *spiritual* dangers that threaten us!

God had roared from Zion in His displeasure. To the ear of faith it was as real and near and terrifying as the nearby roar of the springing lion in the darkness. Would Israel have the wisdom to fear? They were too busy with their present prosperity, which seemed so real & important & lasting. But in less than 40 short years the whole nation was cruelly herded away as slaves in a foreign land.

V. 9 calls for the heathen nations to assemble to view the wickedness of Israel. That is, Israel's sins were such as to shock even the godless Gentiles. This is a strange, and yet sadly familiar phenomenon. Doubtless this too is of God: those who despise His love He gives over to a 'reprobate mind.' We remember Paul's words to Corinth—

"Such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 5: 1).

I was deeply impressed in WWII how much more fair & considerate & patient & sympathetic—even under the great stress of national peril—some draft boards were with brethren than some brethren are with each other. Like Israel with the Law, to have the Truth without the spirit of the Truth seems to engender pride, self-satisfaction, and bitterness and contempt for others. The Catholic Church, directly descended (though apostate) from the apostolic Ecclesia, has the most vicious history of cruelty and corruption and wickedness in all human records. The flesh is an evil, deceitful, hateful thing; and men who have been called of God, unless they are transformed to holiness, tend to degenerate to demons. It is so easy, as Paul says, to use the liberty of Christ as a cloak of maliciousness. Doubtless this is Divine judgment upon abused enlightenment and privilege.

Luxury, self-indulgence by abuse of Divine blessings, and lack of consideration for others, are the sins with which Israel is charged—

3:15—"Winter houses ... summer houses ... ivory houses ... great houses."

How the flesh loves these monuments of unfaithful stewardship! They oppressed the poor, and crushed the needy—4: 1. How did they do this? The answer is quite instructive for us, because they did it quite legally and piously and self-justifyingly. Was it their fault or concern that others were less fortunate or less provident or had less ability? Were they their brother's keeper?

The Law of Moses was a divine, compassionate, spiritual dispensation with many provisions and safeguards for the comfort and care of the less fortunate or the less able. Under the Law, everyone *was* his brother's keeper, though not in the foolish modern way of burdening some so as to encourage others to be indolent. Today men do not give: they pass taxes to make others give.

Under the Law, they were not allowed to harvest their fruits efficiently, or reap their fields efficiently. They must deliberately leave some for the poor to glean—Lev. 23:22. They had to forgive debts every 7 years, and completely reapportion all real estate every 50 years—Deut. 15:1; 25:10. They could not charge the poor interest, nor refuse to lend to them. Every bankrupt, every failure—after 6 years bond-service to a successful man to teach him wisdom and industry—had to be set up again on his own, and *liberally* supplied with all the material necessities of success so he could try again—Lev. 25:36; Deut. 15:14.

The Law of Moses was all designed to teach that all things are of God, and given for the good of *all*—to teach the fundamental lesson that true living is loving, and true loving is giving. All were commanded to be liberal and open-handed; and to share their blessings freely.

Could it be possible that the Law of Christ requires less? When the people asked John the Baptist what they should do, he gave them the essence of Moses' Law:

"He that hath 2 coats, let him impart to him that hath none: & he that hath meat, let him do likewise"

(Luke 3).

Very little is recorded of what this 'burning light' preached: do we realize the revolutionary significance of what is recorded? And when Christ himself came, he preached the same heavenly gospel—

"Sell what thou hast, and give alms ... Give, and it shall be given unto you: *with the same measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you*" (Luke 12:33; 6:30-38).

All this was the very *opposite* of the flesh, but it was and is God's required Way of Life. Doubtless the Israelites to whom Amos preached did everything legally according to *man's* laws, for they were very pious and proud of themselves. But to God, their way of life was selfishness and wickedness and oppression and greed.

At the same time, there was a tremendous display of religious observance and activity—

4:5—"Proclaim and publish the free offerings."

Make a big show and boast of all the extra, unrequired sacrifices you bring—

"For this liketh you." Or, margin: "For so ye love."

They loved to glory in what they *thought* they were doing for God. It is the same story today: a tremendous show of religion and charity, but an individual self-pleasing and self-glorification, and an ignoring of the holy commandments of God and the welfare of others.

Doubtless it was so in Noah's day, and in Sodom & Gomorrah: very religious, and meticulous in worship. We know it was so in Christ's day, and he said they were worse than Sodom and Gomorrah—Matt. 11: 23.

The point for us is that these hypocritical things are not far from any of us. We all have the selfish, wicked, self-justifying heart of the flesh to contend with. Only the daily, prayerful, meditative study of God's Word can save any of us from our subtle self-deceit.

Vs. 6-11 speak of the various ways God had already afflicted them: famine, drought, blight, plagues, sword, earthquake. But they were blind and deaf in their self-delusion. We must not make the same fatal error. We must consider every incident in our lives as lessons and disciplines from God: the blessings as tests, the evils as warnings. We must be alert and awake to everything that could teach us something.

Having disciplined them with restrained and limited severity many time, God is at last about to cast them off—

4:12—"Therefore . . . prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!"

This is another of Amos' sayings that has become proverbial. "*Prepare to meet thy God!*" This should be the over-riding and ever-present thought in the minds of every one of us. This alone, in all the world, is real. All else is passing shadows.

It should be *joyful, eager* anticipation. Surely, what could be more exciting and desirable? 'Prepare to meet thy God.' It is what the righteous have longed for for ages. It is the promise to the pure in heart.

But Israel, like poor stupid animals, took no heed of the glory of the invitation, nor the dreadfulness of the warning: so it has ever been.

Chapter 5 is a prophetic lamentation—

5:2—"The virgin of Israel is fallen: she shall no more rise "

But the invitation is still open:

5:4—"Seek ye Me, and ye shall live."

This is Amos' whole message: the message of all the prophets: "*Seek God, and live*" It is very simple, very elementary: but everything in life at last boils down to this, and this alone: "*Seek God: and live.*"

5:8—"Seek Him Who maketh the 7 stars and Orion."

Surely this alone is wisdom! We marvel of the glories and beauties of Creation—on the earth and in the vast heavens. We are invited to the intimate companionship of Him Who made them all. Why, then, is it that our poor crawling animal natures cling so blindly to grubby earthy things?

5:8—"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!"

They were so convinced of their acceptability that they *desired* the Day of the Lord: wicked, selfish, luxurious Israel! Is it possible to be so utterly self-deceived? That is the whole point. It is not just possible: it is very easy, very natural. We have the same picture at Laodicea—

"I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. 2:17).

But the all-discerning Spirit's verdict was: "Poor, blind, miserable, naked."

The flesh, the natural mind, is no guide. It is only by rigidly testing ourselves by the commands of God in their full strength and import that we can see ourselves truly. Isaiah says of this same people—

"They seek Me daily . . . They take delight in approaching to God. Is this what I have chosen: to bow the head as a bulrush and spread sackcloth under him? . . . Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor into thine houses, and clothe the naked?" (Isa. 58:2-7).

And Christ says the same, in condemning the religious hypocrites of his day. The message has not changed; nor has the flesh.

5:21-23—"I despise your feast days . . . I will not accept your offerings . . . Take away the noise of your songs."

They were truly a very religious nation. God's Name was ever on their lips. But what good is religion without *personal purity and holiness*, or piety without full-hearted love and service of neighbour?

Ch.6 speaks of the thoughtless and indulgent revellings in Israel, & the terrible sufferings and tremendous death-toll of the soon-coming 3-year siege of Samaria by the Assyrians.

The sufferings were indeed terrible, as they were later in Jerusalem. God is loving and merciful, and these were God's Own chosen people; but because they chose to ignore His commands and follow their own thoughts, He gave them over to the most dreadful miseries. His love and mercy were in His constant efforts to persuade them to walk in the way of wisdom and obedience, *before it was too late*. Love & mercy are for *now*: not for the judgment seat, if the now has been wasted.

6:13—"Ye say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength?"

Paul says to the same attitude:

"What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

And Moses said:

"It is the *Lord* that *giveth* thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18).

The most foolish part of all man's foolishness is attributing anything to himself, and depending on and boasting in his own strength or wisdom or ability. God today, as foretold, has given men great knowledge and ability. Like in the last days of Israel, He has greatly blessed the race with opportunity.

But, like Israel, they have used it very wickedly—in rivalry, war, oppression and pride. What God gives, He can take away in a moment, and humble the highest and proudest in the dust. In 40 years, proud and prosperous Israel was utterly destroyed. It does not appear that modern man has anywhere near that long to go.

Ch. 7 begins visions of calamities. First, 3 visitations of increasing severity: a further warning in God's mercy. He did not bring the Assyrians all at once to destroy them, but gradually. Still Israel did not heed

7:1 — "He formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth. Then said I, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech Thee: by whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?"

Amos, the prophet of judgment, pleaded for mercy. This must be the attitude, the heartfelt desire, of all who proclaim God's judgments. Otherwise we are but fierce Jehus, with 'zeal for the Lord' only for destruction. We must, in faithfulness, point out what we believe to be wrong. But it must always be done in sympathy and compassion and the fellow-feeling of deeply-realized personal unworthiness.

This prophecy of the grasshoppers was fulfilled in 2 Kings 15:19-20, when Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, came against Israel about 740 BC. Menahem raised a tribute and bought them off. Israel now had 20 years to go. The second warning judgment followed—

7:4— "The Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part."

The king of Assyria came again about 730 BC, and carried away many captives—2 Kings 15:29. Amos, typical of the 'salt of the earth' class, pleaded for mercy for wicked Israel, and again final destruction was postponed. Israel now had 10 years to go. The specific cause of this 2nd visitation was that the kings of Israel and Syria had united to attack Judah with the purpose of destroying the House of David & setting up their own choice as king in Judah.

Isaiah promised Judah help from God, and gave the prophecy of the virgin with child, but king Ahaz chose rather to appeal to the Assyrian power, sending them all the treasures of the Temple, and causing them to come against Israel & Syria. To all outward appearances, these were just natural political events, but Amos shows us it was all in the hands of God, and fulfilling His purposes. So by the light of prophecy must we see and realize the hand of God today.

In the 3rd judicial vision—7: 7 Amos sees a plumbline, and is told—

7:8— "Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of My people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more."

This was to be the end — and so it was. The plumbline is a fitting symbol of the spirit of Amos' whole prophecy: the searching and undeviating perfect standard of righteousness: that by which all must at last be tried.

This 3rd and final judgment, from which there was no possibility of turning back, is recorded in 2 Kings 17. Typically, and in harmony with God's ways of retribution, its immediate cause was Israel's own treachery. Hoshea, the last king, after being supported in the kingdom by Assyria and covenanting to serve them, conspired with Egypt. The king of Assyria came; Samaria was besieged 3 years with great suffering and loss of life, as Amos had warned; and finally the kingdom was broken up and most of the people carried away to Assyria.

Summing up Israel's sad history, 2 Kings 17:7-22 gives a long catalogue of their persistent and continued disobedience, from the day of their coming out of Egypt, concluding (v. 23)—

"Until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day."

They had chosen from the beginning to give God lip service, but to do just as they wanted, and cater to their own desires. And this was the inevitable result at last, as it always must be.

Ch. 8 opens with the 4th vision of judgment: the basket of summer fruit. Fruit is a fitting symbol here. The Scriptures say much about fruit: good fruit and bad fruit; selfish fruit for oneself; unselfish fruit for others. Israel was indeed at this time a basket of fruit: beautiful and rich-looking, but ripe to the harvest—already plucked and soon to be devoured. Their fruit was gathered, and it was evil fruit: by the fruit the tree is known. Hosea said at this same time, and it is God's great indictment of Israel after the flesh, by which Israel after the Spirit would do well to constantly examine itself—

"Israel is an *empty* vine: he bringeth forth fruit *unto himself*" (10:1).

This has always been the great weakness and tendency of the flesh, even supposedly enlightened flesh: to spend its energies and efforts on its own interests and desires, forgetting that its whole reason for existence, and hope for the future, is to serve God and not itself. Beyond life's necessities, we have no time for anything except God's work, if we desire to be faithful and accepted stewards of God's grace. Sadly it was the same in Paul's day, even among 'believers.' He says—

"I have no man likeminded [except Timothy] who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Christ's" (Phil. 2:20).

Speaking of the oppression of the powerful, and their cruel treatment of the poor, God says:

8:8—"Shall not the land tremble for this?"

This appears to be clearly a reference to the great earthquake that Amos mentions at the beginning, & strengthens the probability that it was a Divine visitation to warn Israel and confirm Amos' words.

8:9—"I will cause the sun to go down at noon."

As Amos prophesied, to all appearances they were enjoying high noon: strong and prosperous, with much of their day before them. Everything seems stable and secure. Amos' words seemed impossible of fulfilment, but within that generation, all was gone.

8:11 — "I will send a famine, not of bread and water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord, and shall not find it."

And truly they did, when it was too late. This time will come at last for us all. We remember the parable of the foolish virgins. Today we have the Word in our hands, with plenty of opportunity to *study* it that we may be 'wise unto salvation': not just a ritual 20 minutes a day, and then back as fast as we can to present, passing things. How true for us are the words of the Psalmist we often sing—

"O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation *all the day*" (Psa. 119:97).

It is only those of such a heart who will stand approved at the last day. Today is the day of opportunity: tomorrow may be too late.

In ch.9 the thunderings of judgment reach their peak in words of terrible bitterness and severity: there are no stronger in all Scripture. Then at the end, the glorious promise of final restoration and peace.

9:1 — "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar."

This is a very striking figure. The altar is the place of worship and mercy and acceptance. But now God Himself stands upon it in wrath to slay them and drive them away.

"And He said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake."

Judgment begins at the House of God: the whole corrupt religious edifice. We cannot help but see here a veiled reference to the nation's smiting of Christ: the culmination of their sins. He is the lintel of the Door, as faithful Jews and Gentiles are the 2 Side-posts.

None shall escape the day of judgment, wherever they may flee—

9:4—"I will set Mine eye upon them for evil and not for good."

"Behold the goodness *and the severity of God*"—Rom. 11:22: infinite, inconceivable goodness, the boundless treasures of eternity, to those who cast aside everything else and seek Him with all their heart and strength— implacable severity, the deepest of sorrows, to those who are self-willed and disobedient.

As we read these terrible first 8 vs. of ch.9, they may to our fleshly minds seem dreadfully cruel. But they are of God's mercy: warnings to impress Israel and us with the tragic folly of fighting against omnipotent goodness, and ignoring God's holy commands.

9:7—"Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me?"

Israel's great delusion was that they were something special in themselves; and this is the commonest delusion among Christadelphians, too. Somehow we assume that just because we happen to have been called, we are all set, and we can please ourselves as to what we do with our lives: that we can live comfortably and amuse ourselves with goods God has entrusted to us *for His use*—just like the rest of the perishing world—and still coast into eternal salvation, just because we have memorized the First Principles of the Gospel of God.

If Israel's delusion seems foolish to us, what can be said of this delusion! God demands the whole life: the whole heart and strength and devotion. There is never a hint in Scripture that He will be satisfied with less. If the words of Scripture mean anything at all, then He demands a daily, a *continuous* 'living sacrifice,' a living service, an agonizing for perfection, a hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Is it too much to ask? Do we expect eternal life at bargain basement prices? What do we have *in ourselves*, that millions in the world do not have, and more? God's salvation is only for those who *never feel they have done enough for Him*: who are always striving to do more.

If the terrible calamities foretold by Amos for God's Own chosen and beloved people teach us anything, they should teach us this. Israel had a special place in God's purpose—for His *use and service*. So do we. We should never cease day and night to give thanks that for some reason known only to God we have been called from the world's darkness and ignorance. But it is not because we are arbitrarily favoured. It is, like Israel, for *use and service* in His purpose.

If we, like Israel, fail to rise to these great responsibilities for which we have been called, our judgment will be the same as theirs. We are 'not our own'—1 Cor. 6: 19. We are not free just to amuse ourselves and do as we will. We are slaves of a glorious Master for a glorious purpose. We must glorify God in our spirit and in our body—1 Cor. 6:20, and in *everything* we do in our whole lives.

The change to the final message of blessing begins in v. 8. Then a very striking statement follows—

9:9—"I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as corn is sifted in a sieve: yet shall not the least grain fall to the earth. All the sinners of My people shall die."

This is another very interesting and important principle of truth for which we are indebted to Amos. In all the long history of Israel's dispersion and suffering, there is nothing haphazard or by chance. There are no mistakes. *Not one true grain is ever lost.*

There is great comfort in this revelation. It gives us the true picture of God's operations among the nations. What may appear to be blanket and indiscriminate pouring out of judgment on a group just as a group, is revealed rather as a very carefully controlled and supervised operation of God's omniscience. Not one true grain, not one potential saint, is ever lost:

"Are not 5 sparrows sold for 2 farthings? Yet not one of them falleth without my Father."

It is hard for our dull minds to comprehend these marvellous Divine things, but they are recorded for our comfort and our learning. We *must* dwell upon them till our cramped and sluggish perceptions are refined. We are but a speck in time and space, and God encompasses all time and

space. And yet He invites us, for just the tiny, token price of a few brief years of service—which love, if it *is* love, will be eager and anxious to render—to share eternally His divine nature.

9:11—"In that day will I raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen."

What day? This is a new thought. The context hasn't mentioned any day. Clearly it is 'that Day' of which Peter says—

"God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets" (Acts 3:21).

In all his heavy burden of judgment, this is Amos' first and only mention of it, but his proclamation of it is one of the most striking and oft-quoted. It would not be fitting, nor complete, nor would it serve the purpose for which the prophecy was given, to close without reference to the final consummation to which the Divine plans tend.

Every one of the 16 prophetic books ends this way except Jonah and Nahum, who speak of God's judgment on the Assyrian—typical and antitypical: so they cover the consummation with equal comfort from a different perspective.

9:12—"That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the Gentiles, which are called by My Name."

Here again, as so often in the Messianic prophecies, is a reference to the inclusion of all mankind in the purpose. In the great controversy over requiring the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses, James in Acts 15 quotes this passage from Amos in reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Divine plan, and having quoted it, he emphasizes its lesson—

"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning."

This is the God in Whom we trust, and there is great comfort in finding one portion of Scripture quoted as divine 800 years later in another portion of Scripture. There is no doubt as to how the inspired apostles viewed the inspired Word. To these men, who were guided by God's Spirit, the Scriptures were in truth God's infallible Word, & so they are and will always be to those who know God in truth.

Amos speaks—vs. 13-14 of the removal of the Adamic curse, and the abundant fruitfulness of the land in the Kingdom of God. And he finally closes—v. 15 with the assurance that this last gathering of Israel will be *for ever*, and they shall never be moved again. Here is the great consummation of the Divine plan of the ages: all the earth at rest & filled with the knowledge and glory of God.

These last few verses give beauty and meaning and purpose and hope to what would otherwise be just a sad catalogue of wickedness, judgment and suffering. Truly, as Paul says, the Creation was made subject to vanity *in hope*—Rom. 8:20. And at last, after all the 'groaning and travailing together in pain,' will come the deliverance of the final eternal glorious liberty of the true Sons of God.

Let us then press forward in hope, remembering these key thoughts that Amos contributes to the great prophetic pattern—

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, except He reveal His secrets to His servants the prophets."

"Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!"

"Seek the Lord—and live!"

"Seek Him that made the Seven Stars and Orion."

"Hate the evil, and love the good."

"Let justice roll as waters, & righteousness as a mighty stream."

"I will sift the House of Israel as corn is sifted in a sieve: yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth."

*"In that Day will I raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen."
"I will plant them in their own land, & they shall no more be plucked up."
—G.V.G.*
