

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

AMOS

In the reign of Jeroboam I, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel (I Kings 13:1), who confronted the king at his altar, and foretold its desecration by a prince yet unborn. While Jeroboam II reigned over Israel, another man of God came out of Judah, and at Bethel (Amos 7:13) cried against the sin of the people and prophesied the fall of Samaria.

It was Amos, one of the most ancient of the prophets whose ministry, according to Home, Angus, etc., lay between the years B. C. 810-785. He was the contemporary of Hosea, probably also of Isaiah, as verse one of chapter one would indicate. His native place was Tekoa, a few miles south of Bethlehem, a region adapted for grazing, and for no other purpose, we are told.

His call to the prophetic office he thus describes: **“I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel,”** 7:14, 15.

He was not a prophet by succession; he was not trained in any of the prophetic schools; he sat at the feet of no great teacher; he passed through no preliminary or preparatory study. He was only a shepherd on the wild uplands about Tekoa, and he combined with his pastoral life the care of the sycamore trees in the neighborhood. Little dreamed he while thus engaged amid the rugged scenery of his native place that he should stand in the presence of kings and people, and utter the sharp and threatening word of the Lord against the sinful practices of a nation. God called him from his humble walk as “cowherd,” as one has named him, and sent him forth to be His mouth to a rebellious and idolatrous people, sent him forth to be tried, opposed, persecuted, discouraged, weary, but to finish his mission right manfully.

God is never straightened for instruments. If priests and ministers fail in their testimony through indolence, perverseness and apostasy, He will raise up those who stand outside of the regular calling altogether, and filling them with His Spirit and grace send them forth on His errands.

We learn from 1:1, that the words Amos **“saw”** concerning Israel began **“two years before the earthquake.”**

This earthquake cannot have occurred after the seventeenth year of Uzziah, since Jeroboam II died in the fifteenth year of that king's reign. Probably it was some years before Jeroboam's death that Amos was called to witness against the iniquity of Israel. The earthquake here mentioned made a lasting impression. It was remembered by Zechariah three hundred years afterward, Zechariah 14:5.

It is singular that the sole account of it should be found in the prophetic books; the historical having no trace of it. Josephus mentions it, and says it occurred at the time Uzziah was smitten with leprosy, II Chronicles 26:16-21. The king was bent on offering incense on the golden altar. The high priest forbade him. The monarch, angered at the resistance, boldly set forward toward the holy place, when lo! the ground began to rock beneath his feet; the temple swayed back and forth as a leaf shaken in the wind; the Mount of Olives shook and reeled; the earth cleft asunder; and the dreadful leprosy mounted to the king's forehead.

1. The design of the book is quite apparent.

The main object is to witness against the idolatry of Israel, against its concomitant evils, effeminacy, dissoluteness and immoralities of every kind. His ministry was confined to the Northern Kingdom. Judah is mentioned, indeed, as an object of judgment, as also other nations, but only incidentally.

Amos appeared on the hills of Samaria to denounce the nobles for their luxuriousness and despotism, 4:1; at Bethel's sanctuary to predict the fall of the altar, and of the royal house and of the kingdom, 3:14, 15; 5:4-6. It was this prophet who uttered that solemn, piercing cry which was addressed to the royal family and the ten tribes, "**Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel,**" 4:12.

2. The contents of the book may be arranged under three divisions:

I. Burden of the nations, 1:2.

II. Three addresses to Israel, 3-6.

III. A series of five visions, with explanations, warnings and promises, 7-9.

(1) *Burden of the nations*, chaps, 1:2. They are those which were contiguous to Israel. He specifies the sins of each as it comes in review before him. The storm passes without pausing in its course, sweeping on irresistibly over Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah; then stops to pour out its fullest woes on Israel. Here it rests, and gathers blackness, and thunders long and loud.

There may be, as has been thought, an object in the prophet's thus arraiging one nation after another before he begins to deal with the Northern Kingdom. Thus would he secure a hearing, win attention, and so gain a more favorable hearing for the awful tidings he had to deliver in the name of Jehovah. Like Paul, Amos would catch them with guile, II Corinthians 12:16.

(2) *The three addresses to Israel follow*, 3-6.

In the first address the prophet reminds the people of their obligations to the Lord; charges on their conscience their transgressions, and warns them of the penalty, chap. 3. The fact of their being God's people, redeemed out of Egypt, and chosen before all others, instead of being a palliation of their sin, was rather its aggravation, and would be the ground of more strict reckoning with them, vs. 1, 2. God hath revealed to His prophet what is soon to come to pass: An enemy shall press Israel on every side, invade the whole land, and a mere wreck and fragment of the nation will be left, no more than a courageous shepherd snatches from the jaws of a lion—the two shank-bones and a bit of ear, vs. 11, 12. The allusion, no doubt, is to Assyria.

The second address, chap, 4, is taken up with reproofs for prevailing sins, and with the chastisements with which they have already been visited. Oppression of the poor and weak, intemperance, wantonness, unauthorized worship at Bethel and Gilgal—these sins are charged upon them, and are shown to be the primal cause of the drought, famine and pestilence which they had suffered. But all these divine visitations were only harbingers and heralds of far worse woes to come. Since chastisement and paternal discipline fail to attain their object, exterminating judgments are on the way. Therefore, **“Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”**

The third address, chaps, 5:6, contains a call to repentance, and predicts the overthrow of the kingdom and the subsequent captivity. With lamentations and profound grief the fall of the virgin daughter of Israel is announced. The helpless wail of the miserable people, the summons of professional mourners, the shouts of the conquerors and the cries of the vanquished, all is set before guilty Israel with unfaltering fidelity.

Yet the Lord, the prophet tells them, is pitiful; His voice is lifted in mercy and entreaty: **“Seek the Lord and ye shall live.”**

Nevertheless, he warns them in the name of the Lord, the great and dreadful God, that no mere outward service of feasts and offerings will avail to arrest the approaching doom. The reform that will serve to avert the judgments, must be one that is genuine, spiritual, and deep; one that affects the heart and conduct alike; one that will be a thorough conversion from sin to holiness, and from the service of idols to that of the living God.

(3) The visions, and denunciations of judgments which are connected with them, occupy the remaining chapters of the book, 7-9.

- The first is a vision of locusts devouring the land.
- The second is a vision of fire, all-devouring.
- The third is a vision of the Lord with a plumbline in His hand measuring a wall to cast it down.

At the close of each of the first two visions Amos intercedes for Israel who of course is aimed at in all, and his intercession is heard and the threatening turned away for the time. But afterward there is no further intercession, and it is intimated to the prophet that God will cease to hear any plea for them, their doom is sealed, 7:8; 8:2.

The three visions mentioned above are thought to symbolize three successive invasions of the land, each increasing over the preceding in severity.

- The first was that of Pul, king of Assyria, who exacted one thousand talents of silver from king Menahem, and retired, probably in consequence of Amos' intercession, II Kings 15:19-21.
- The second invasion was that of Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, who took possession of the east and north of the territory of Israel, and carried many of the inhabitants into captivity, II Kings 16, cf. II Kings 15:29. Doubtless the judgment was again staid at the instance of Amos' prayer.
- The third was that of Shalmaneser who put an end to the kingdom of the ten tribes, and removed the people to Assyria, II Kings 17.

In connection with the third vision distinct reference is made to the sacrificial heights and shrines of Israel, as if to draw attention to the fact that the reason of the judgment is traced to the idolatry and other guilty practices of the people. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, incensed against the repeated denunciations of this prophet of God, and perhaps also conscience smitten, brought against him before king Jeroboam the charge of treason, and openly sought to have him silenced, at the same time quietly advising him to flee to Judah, 7:10-17. Amos' reply is a prediction against the priest and his family. We nowhere find in the historical books its fulfillment. None who observe how briefly the story of Israel's fall and Samaria's three years' siege is told in II Kings 17 will be surprised at the silence of Scripture about Amaziah. There much is said of the people's sins, nothing of their sufferings.

The fourth is a vision of ripe fruit, chap. 8. The basket of summer fruit which the prophet saw represented the guilty nation now ripe for judgment. Long time they had gone on in transgression, heedless of every warning, deaf to every entreaty. And the Lord, merciful and gracious, with whom judgment is His strange work, had suspended the penalty they had incurred. Now at length the cup of iniquity was full; punishment could no longer be delayed; and the Lord said, "**The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass them by any more.**"

The fifth is a vision of the Lord standing beside, or upon the altar, commanding to smite, chap. 9. It is disputed what altar is meant—that of Bethel or that at Jerusalem. If we confront chap. 3:14 with 9:1, we will be helped to some right understanding of the point. But it is not very material to the apprehending of the prophecy which is meant. The altar itself is of subordinate importance. The prime thought is that Jehovah Himself is directing the judgment in such a manner that Israel shall in no wise escape. He is its executioner.

The book closes with a magnificent promise of resurrection and glory for the fallen tent of the house of David, 9:11-12; and of the prosperity that shall attend it, vss. 13-15. It is quoted in Acts 15:15-17 by James, and applied to the ingathering of Gentile believers into the Church, but an ingathering which is to be followed by divine favor shown to the house of David, and to the outcasts of Israel. The promise looks on to the period when the purposes of God touching both Jews and Gentiles shall be made good in the realization of universal blessing.

~ end of chapter 32 ~

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