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# The Bible Student

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## AMOS AND HIS BOOK

A. MCD. REDWOOD

It would be interesting to know how many of our readers have given time to the reading of this Old Testament Book, not counting of course those who are systematically studying the Bible with a specific object in view. It is to be remembered, however, that '*All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works'. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Apostle's words apply with equal cogency to all the prophetic Books, Major and Minor: to neglect them for any reason is to deprive ourselves of valuable lessons for our spiritual life. This does not imply necessarily that a 'detailed', or 'minute' study is called for, but in the very work of getting to know the contents of each book in a general way, there are often nuggets of 'gold', both moral and spiritual.

We know very little of the prophet's personal history: he tells us he was a native of Tekoa, a small village not far from Bethlehem and Jerusalem on a hill overlooking the wilderness of Judah (2 Chron. 11:6; Jeremiah 6:1). He was a true 'prophet of the soil', disclaiming any 'professional upbringing' (chap. 7:14). What a great lesson we may gather from these few personal features: God can, and does, choose the most unlikely people to accomplish His plans and purposes in declaring His world-wide message of the Gospel, 'that no flesh should glory in His presence'. We are reminded similarly of Moses' call to service: God took him out of Pharaoh's royal court and sent into the 'backside of the

desert': and then Saul of Tarsus from his headlong career of opposition against the Gospel of Christ and Christians in general, to become the foremost Preacher and Teacher of that Gospel and its whole divine content.

Whatever his past history, we see in Amos a man who has no doubts or uncertainty as to the character of the Lord God in whose name he had been called to speak. In common with all the prophets, Amos gives no explanation of how he came to know God and form his conception of God's character; but it is very evident that God had revealed Himself to this man in a way which none could possibly dispute. It is not 'by searching we find out God', but my listening to God's voice, and obeying His call.

The social and political conditions of the nation were anything but good. Moral degeneracy due to idolatrous customs and rites, were manifest everywhere. The detestable vileness and hypocrisy of the priests, with whom the false prophets of the day were in league demonstrated the almost complete alienation between Jehovah God and His people (see Hosea 4:12-14; 8:5, 6, 11, for example). At the same time outwardly there existed a false semblance of real prosperity in almost every direction. King Jeroboam raised Israel to the zenith of its power and splendour. The obvious predominance of this Northern Kingdom was extended over the whole range of the ancient domains of Solomon. But the prophet could not be deceived by the outward prosperity of the land. He held fast to the eternal law that sin is weakness, and that doom follows hard on the heels of crime and every kind of evil doing.

It is into such a condition of national degeneration that the prophet was sent: so that the purpose of the book is definitely to reveal the righteous judgment of God upon sin. He predicts the downfall of the throne. But God will see to it that His own divine purposes will be fulfilled and His Kingdom shall be set up in righteousness in due course. That still holds good in these days, in spite of prevailing contrary world conditions.

For the sake of those who are desirous of studying this 'neglected' Book, we give here a simple and workable analysis which has proved very helpful in actual practice. Its 'method' of teaching

is perfectly straightforward and though not in the style of our favourite N.T. Epistles, for example, it should not on that account be neglected! This applies of course to all the other Minor Prophets.

### Analysis of Amos' Prophecy

Make a note first that there are five series of addresses in the Book, but our *Analysis is not* altogether based upon *this* particular feature: Here are the 'Addresses' first:

- |     |                                    |   |      |          |
|-----|------------------------------------|---|------|----------|
| (1) | A series of <i>Denunciations</i> , | — | chs. | 1 and 2. |
| (2) | „ <i>Questions</i> ,               | — | „    | 3.       |
| (3) | „ <i>Warnings</i>                  | — | „    | 4.       |
| (4) | „ <i>Invitations</i>               | — | „    | 5 and 6  |
| (5) | „ <i>Visions</i>                   | — | „    | 7 to 9   |

### THE ANALYSIS

is as follows :

#### PROLOGUE 1:1, 2

#### I. THE EIGHT DOOMS. 1:3—2:16. THE NATIONS.

- (1) Against Damascus (Syria) 1:3-5.
- (2) „ Gaza (Philistia) 1:6-8.
- (3) „ Tyre (Phoenicia) 1:9-10.
- (4) „ Edom 1:11-12.
- (5) „ Ammon 1:13-15.
- (6) „ Moab 2:1-3.
- (7) „ Judah 2:4-5.
- (8) „ Israel 2:6-16.

#### II. THE FIVE DISCOURSES. 3:1—6:14. ISRAEL.

- (1) Threefold 'Hear the Word'. 3:1—5:17.
  - (a) The Necessity of Judgment. 3.
  - (b) Oppression and Impenitence. 4.
  - (c) Reproaches and Appeals. 5:1-17.
- (2) Twofold 'Woe'. 5:18—6:14.
  - (a) For the 'Day of Jehovah'. 5:18-27.
  - (b) For those at ease in Zion. 6.

#### III. THE FIVE VISIONS. 7:1—9:10. SYMBOLICAL.

- (1) The Locusts, 7:1-3.
- (2) The Fire, 7:4-6.
- (3) The Plumbline, 7:7-9.

(Historical interlude—Amaziah's protests. 7:10-17.)

- (4) The Basket of Fruit 8:1-14.
- (5) Jehovah by the altar 9:1-10.

EPILOGUE. 9:11-15.

*The Eight Dooms* (1:3—2:16). Starting with a saying of Joel's (3:16), 'Jehovah will roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem', Amos announces the judgment of God against the six Gentile and two Covenant nations. He begins with Syria, the most distant and least akin to Israel, and gradually works inwards 'rolling like a storm in strophe after strophe, over all the surrounding kingdoms', touching Judah on the way and finally settles on Israel—the main objective of his message.

Note the recurring phrase. 'Thus saith the Lord'. Also the other one, 'For three transgressions, yea for four'—which is not intended to mean a series of three followed by a series of four, but is a phrase implying that not only had iniquity been filled up to the brim, it had actually overflowed. And the overflow calls down the judgment. (Compare some interesting parallels of the phrase in Job 5:19; 33:29; Prov. 30:15-31, etc.). It reminds us that sin is cumulative. Note the six times repeated refrain 'I will send a fire'.

'The six heathen nations mentioned, three of which (Edom, Ammon, Moab) are related to the covenant nation, represent all the Gentile nations, which rise up in hostility to the people or kingdom of God. For the sins, on account of which they are to be punished, are not certain general breaches of morality, but crimes which they have committed against the people of God; and in the case of Judah, contempt for the commandments of the Lord and idolatry' (Keil).

It is noteworthy that, the principle upon which God acts in denouncing Judah and Israel together with the other nations is just because they *were* so privileged (see ch. 3:2). 'The intention was to impress this truth most strongly upon the people of the ten tribes (and Judah), that not even the possession of such glorious prerogatives as the temple and the throne of David could avert the merited punishment'.

The sins of Israel are mentioned in detail—injustice, immorality, profanity, sacrilege, greed. Note the bold metaphor the prophet uses to indicate the feelings of God towards Israel: 'Behold I am pressed under you as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves' (R. V. m.).

**The five Discourses** (chs. 3 to 6). The prophet now concentrates his messages upon Israel. As shown in the analysis, this section would seem to fall into two parts, the first containing three addresses and the second, two addresses. All five end with the announcement of punishment.

(1) *The first discourse* is introduced by seven primary and two subsidiary questions in which the prophet seeks to show that his appearance upon the scene is not without adequate cause—it is not mere accident that he has been sent to prophesy against Israel. The effect demonstrates a cause (see *vv.* 1-8).

He then proceeds to apostrophise Ashdod and Egypt, calling upon them to assemble on the hills of Samaria and look down into the real, and not merely the apparent, condition of things. Judgment is pronounced upon it all.

(2) *The second discourse* is first for the women of Israel; and it arraigns them for their callous worldliness and luxurious surfeit. But God will surely take vengeance upon them (*vv.* 1-3).

He then details the impenitence of the people in spite of incessant warnings. Their very worship was a crime. He had sent them (1) Famine—yet they repented not (4:6). (2) Drought—yet they repented not (4:7, 8). (3) Blasting, mildew, and locust—yet they had not repented (4:9). (4) Pestilence of Egypt—yet they had not repented (4:10). (5) Fire and earthquake—yet they had not repented (4:11).

All had failed, now let them 'prepare to meet God'—a God who is strong and mighty, Omnipotent and Omniscient. Something more terrible than all they had experienced would now come upon them—he does not define *what* it is, he leaves it in dreadful vagueness. 'Therefore *thus* will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do *this* unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!' The whole discourse is full of solemn instruction for men of all ages and nations.

(3) *The third discourse* embraces the first seventeen verses of ch. 5. He here continues with renewed accusations and reproofs. He prefaces these, however, with an appeal to seek the Lord and they would live.

(4) *The fourth discourse* is introduced by the new refrain, 'Woe unto you' (v. 18). Some would read this section as belonging to the previous discourse. Whether that is better or not, the theme is continued to the end of ch. 6. It is one unrelieved picture of the certainty, the terribleness, of impending punishment.

*The Five Visions* (Chs. 7:1 to 9:10). Here the Prophet introduces a different method of instruction, viz., by symbols. The five are divided into three and two by an historical interlude relating to Amaziah.

(1) *Vision of the locusts*. Knowing the terrible scourge implied, the prophet pleads for the land and the people. The Divine answer comes, 'It shall not be'.

(2) *Vision of the devouring fire*. Here again the prophet pleads, and as before, judgment is averted.

(3) *Vision of the plumbline* (cf. Isa. 34:11; Lam. 2:8). Here Jehovah Himself comes down to measure the city for destruction. The prophet is seemingly unable to intercede, and there is no reprieve held out.

Of these three Visions the *Speaker's Commentary* says: 'It has been remarked by an early commentator that the first three correspond with the gradual advance of the Assyrians. First, Pul invaded the land, and retired on receiving from Menahem a thousand talents of silver, which he had exacted from his wealthy subjects (2 Kings 15:19, 20). Secondly, Tiglath-Pileser, at the invitation of Ahaz, made a second invasion, and carried captive the tribes on the north and east (2 Kings 15:29; 16:7; 1 Chron. 5:26). Lastly, Shalmaneser subdued the whole country, and carried away the remainder of the people'.

Then comes the interlude. Amaziah the high priest of the calf-worship at Bethel, takes alarm at the very great effect exercised upon the minds of the people by the prophet's words, and reports the matter to the king. It is not stated that the king took any notice of the matter, but it may be he allowed Amaziah to use authority to order Amos to leave Bethel and return to his own land. This order he deems it fitting to obey, but reiterates with greater vehemence than ever the certainty of his predictions,

adding a stern denunciation against Amaziah himself and his family for withstanding the word of the Lord.

(4) *The Vision of the basket of summer fruit* follows, which is an intimation, evidently, of the ripeness of the nation for immediate judgment.

(5) *The final Vision* is that of Jehovah standing beside the idolatrous altar at Bethel. At His command the temple is shattered and any worshippers who may have escaped that catastrophe are pursued to the death, not one is left. This indicates the execution of the judgment previously threatened.

Then follows another of those descriptions of the Divine majesty which are found in the book (*cf.* 9:5, 6; 4:13; 5:8). In the process of judgment not a grain of *wheat* would be lost (9:9).

The book ends with glorious prediction of future blessing when the 'Tabernacle of David' would rise upon the ruins of a degenerate nation, never more to be set aside. 'I will raise'; 'I will bring'; 'I will plant'.

It is thought that when the prophet left Bethel he retired to his native place, where he wrote down his addresses more or less as he had given them, adding this last portion in response to a revelation from God concerning the future beyond. The storms roll far away into the distance, and there is a vision of peace.

### SPIRITUAL TEACHING

Make a study of the following suggestive list of lessons which may be learnt from this book:

(1) All nations will be called to account by God—and if nations, so likewise individuals.

(2) Special privileges bring special accountability—those who sin against light are more accountable than those who sin without light.

(3) Divine judgments fall only after His grace and His love have been exhausted in attempts to reclaim the sinner.

(4) Outward correctness in form and ritual is no criterion of a right state of heart before God—God looks at the heart alone.



(5) Repentance and obedience to the voice of God—by these means alone may judgment be averted.

(6) The Divine purposes of blessing will be realized in spite of human failure—those who thwart the Divine purpose will be removed in judgment, those who fall in with it will be carried along to blessing and peace.

Note God's appeals and what they are based upon—in ch. 2 *His grace*; in ch. 3 *their privileges*; in ch. 4 *His dealings in discipline*; in chs. 5 and 6 *His name*.

N. T. REFERENCES—Amos 3:7 in John 15:15.  
 „ 5:25-27 in Acts 7:42, 43.  
 „ 9:11 in Acts 15:15-17.

## THE LITTLE PSALTER

A. NAISMITH, M.A.

This is the name frequently given to a succession of short melodies that are in the A.V. designated 'Songs of Degrees' and in the R.V. 'Songs of Ascents'. They are found in the Fifth Book of Psalms (Pss. 107—150) and number fifteen in all, the first of the series being Ps. 120 and the last Ps. 134. The 119th Psalm which precedes the 'Songs of Degrees', the longest of all the Psalms and the longest chapter in the Bible, eulogizes in acrostic form God's holy Law using a variety of terms to denote it. The 135th Psalm which immediately follows the series begins and ends with a 'Hallelujah' and, with the exception of four verses that affirm the impotence of the idols of the heathen, extols the majesty, goodness and might of Jehovah.

Wherever we turn in the five Books of Psalms, we find instruction and comfort, and—sometimes in the major and sometimes in the minor, key,—melodious music. Dr Joseph Parker has well said:

"The Psalmists were not content to lift up their voices in the worship of the Eternal God. Those voices in the estimation of