

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
June 28, 2015

Lesson Text: Amos 8:1-6, 9-10
Lesson Title: God Will Not Delay Justice

Introduction

The seventh, eighth and ninth chapter of Amos is generally categorized as the third section in the Book of Amos. This section includes five visions of judgment preached by Amos to the people of Israel using illustrations or object lessons. Amos was not the first, or the last, to use various emblems to set forth the message of the Lord. Moses used a brazen serpent; Isaiah used a vineyard; Jeremiah wore a girdle and went to the potter's house; Daniel used a great image to describe Babylon and the end times. Jesus, the Master teacher used word pictures, object lessons from fields, hens, rocks, water, bread, lamps, seeds, sand, flowers, oxen, and countless others. He even used a small boy with five loaves and two small fish to demonstrate His miraculous power.

By means of strong word pictures, Amos was able to communicate for his hearers and readers some of his deepest experiences with God. He drew from the surrounding imagery to deliver the message God laid upon his heart. His visions were not new revelations, or new ideas, but a new way in which to communicate the coming judgment.

Although this entire section seems to be nothing but illustrations and object lessons, it is the revelation of God to His people that He will not delay justice. Four of the five visions God gave to Amos begin with the words "*The LORD God shewed me*" (Amos 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1). Amos was declaring what God had shown him, not what he dreamed or imagined. He saw what others of his day had failed to see. God showed Amos His intentions to the ten northern tribes of Israel. It was not a pretty picture. It seems the possibility of repentance is now over (Amos 5:15). God will no longer delay His justice.

Israel is Ripe for Justice (Amos 8:1-6)

Beginning in the seventh chapter the prophet declared his vision of locusts (Amos 7:1-3) followed by his vision of fire (Amos 7:4-6). His third vision, of the plumb line, suggests God had measured and checked His people and they were found to be out of line (Amos 7:7-9). Between the third and fourth vision, there was a clash between Amos and Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (Amos 7:10-17). The messages Amos was preaching was not setting well with the religious heads of that day.

Through use of exaggeration, Amaziah charged Amos with conspiracy. Amos had not spoken any words that could be considered as treason. Amaziah wanted Amos to leave town and take his prophesying with him. Amos' response was amazing. *"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 sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. 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. 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"* (Amos 7:14-17). Amos clearly told Amaziah that Israel would be captured and the conquerors would defile Amaziah's wife, kill his children, and divide up his property.

How often the powers that be have attempted to silence God's man and God's message. Religion and liberal theology is quick to brand the voice of authority as something other than the Lord's word. We often hear statements as: "Preachers ought to preach the gospel and leave other issues alone." There will always be Amaziah's. But thank God there will always be men like Amos who are committed to preaching God's Word.

Verse 1

"Thus hath the Lord GOD shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit."

Amos' fourth vision was "a basket of summer fruit" shown to him by "the Lord GOD." In Amos' day, "summer fruit" was the last ripened fruit of the season, the end-fruit, or the last to be produced. It was usually gathered in early autumn. For the average Jew walking through the marketplace "a basket of summer fruit" was an ordinary sight. When men looked on "a basket of summer fruit" their only question was "How much?" God had shown Amos this basket of fruit for other reasons.

Verse 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."

God asked Amos, "What seest thou?" Somehow Amos was looking at "a basket of summer fruit" and seeing something more than just a basket of fruit. The "Lord GOD" caused Amos to see the deeper meaning in that basket of fruit. Amos answered the Lord's question, "A basket of summer fruit."

In God's reply to Amos, two key Hebrew words are used. "Summer fruit" comes from the Hebrew word *qayits* {kah-yits) and "end" *qets* {kates} which look and sound alike. By this dual association, the "end" was pronounced for Israel. Like the ripened produce in that basket, Israel is ripe and ready for judgment. The nation is at the "end" of her season, and is ready to be plucked and carried from the land. Although God had yielded twice to the intercessions of Amos, that will not happen again.

Verse 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."

When judgment comes "the songs of the temple" that were once joyous will become "howlings." "Howlings" mean "a loud wailing tone." The joyous songs in the temple will become funeral songs. Amos' prophesy continues to say "there shall be many dead bodies in every place." Corpses will be everywhere and "they shall cast them forth with silence." In silence, people will take the dead bodies and throw them onto a pile. Those people in Israel witnessing this sight of judgment will be silent. They will be afraid to speak or complain.

Verse 4

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

Those who heard Amos preach did not doubt that he believed judgment was coming for the nation of Israel. Amos did not have to look very hard for justification concerning his preaching. The fruits of unrighteousness were everywhere.

"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail" echoes Amos' previous indictment for the oppression of the poor and needy. The act of "swallowing up the needy" means "to pant after." The imagery may be that of a wild animal panting after its prey. The second statement, "to make the poor of the land to fail" refers to seizing the property of the unresisting poor and literally rooting them out of the land. It seems many merchants were forcing the "poor" to a premature end by their unjust and selfish practices.

Verse 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?"

Amos pointed out the selfishness and worldliness of the merchants who said, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” In other words, they were upset that holy days along with the Sabbath was cutting into their profits! They longed for those special days set aside to worship the Lord to come to an end so they could get back to “business as usual.”

Not only did they loath the spiritual interruptions to their financial profits, they were also involved in methods of cheating. Three methods of cheating the public are mentioned, two of which are easily explained. The first concerned “making the ephah small.” The “ephah” was a measure for grain equaling about eight gallons. By use of a false bottom or reducing the container size, the merchant could increase his profit. A good example is to observe the bottom of plastic containers which are often shaped to reduce quantity on the inside. The second method involved making “the shekel great.” The “shekel” was a unit of weight, which could be made heavier in order to require the buyer to place more silver on the balances. The third method, “falsifying the balances by deceit,” most likely refers to the general practice of deceit by any means.

Verse 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?”

Not only did the merchants take advantage of the poor and needy but also they took into servitude a man, his children, or his entire family as a debt payment. “They that buy the poor for silver” means they purchased the poor with money to be their slaves. They would “buy...the needy for a pair of shoes.” That is how cheap life was to these unjust merchants. They also sold the poor for “the refuse of the wheat.” They sold the “refuse” or the chaff of the wheat to the poor as if it were top quality. Meaning the poor and needy got the leftovers while the merchants kept the best, plus profited from the leftovers.

God had not overlooked how the merchants took advantage of the poor and needy. God had heard them say how they wished the holy days and special worship services would be over so they could make money. God was also aware of their deceitful business practices. He watched as the merchants treated those in debt unjustly and sold the poor the leftovers. God seen it all. Justice will no longer be delayed.

God is Ready for Justice (Amos 8:9-10)

Another oath by God, based upon the “*excellency of Jacob*” or pride of Jacob, acted as a seal concerning the validity of Amos’ words (Amos 4:2; 8:7-8). God swore that He would never forget any of the evil things they had done. Because

of their selfishness, greed, and injustice, God would send judgment and the “land” would “tremble” under His steps (Amos 8:8). “The quaking tremors would be so violent that the whole land would rise...then sink like the annual swelling and receding of the Nile... the river of Egypt. The shattered ruins of farms and buildings would cause all who lived in the wake of His path to weep and to mourn.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.)

Verse 9-10

“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: 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.”

The terrible judgment to come was described by Amos as the “sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.” The “Lord GOD” will “cause” a major eclipse with the sun going down at noon and darkening the earth when there should be daylight (Amos 5:18-20). This reveals the fearful atmosphere that is a result of the people’s sin (Isaiah 13:9-10; Jeremiah 13:16).

“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...” Every male in Israel was required to come before the Lord for three of those great feasts. It was to be a time of praise, thanksgiving and glorifying God. Now God says, since they have been celebrating the feasts but not giving Him praise, He will turn their feasts into “mourning.” The feasts will become the very opposite of what He intended them to be. The feasts religious celebrations that ordinarily brought joy will bring “mourning” in the Day of Judgment. The “songs” of joy would become songs of sadness because of their current state of judgment.

The coming judgment would be so devastating that every family would grieve. Imagine every house today having a funeral wreath on the door. “All” the people would have “sackcloth” upon their loins. “Sackcloth” was worn as an outward sign of inward grief or sorrow (1 Kings 20:31; Nehemiah 9:1; Isaiah 37:1; Lamentations 5:15). “Sackcloth” was fabric generally made of goat's hair, usually black or dark in color (Revelation 6:12), and usually placed on the bare body around the hips (Genesis 37:34; 1 Kings 21:27), leaving the chest free for “beating” (Isaiah 32:11, 12). The use of “sackcloth” symbolized the grief sin had brought the nation.

The “baldness” or shaving of one’s head was also a sign of grief and sorrow in biblical times (Job 1:20; Isaiah 3:24; Ezekiel 27:30-31; Micah 1:16). The

intensity of their sorrow is described in the words, “And I will make it as the mourning of an only son.” This is by far the most descriptive statement made by Amos. There is no sorrow like a mother’s sorrow who buries her only son, like that of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12). To bury your “only son” ended hope for a family’s future (Jeremiah 6:26; Zechariah 12:10).

“And the end thereof as a bitter day” means the end result of the coming judgment would be sounds of intense mourning like those heard from a mother who had buried her only son. It would be a “bitter” experience.

Conclusion

How applicable these words from Amos to Israel are for America. It is not hard to see that our beloved nation is ripe for judgment. God has not overlooked our selfishness and greed. He is aware that even Christians are bored with worship and Christian service. People would rather be working and making money than gathering together on the Lord’s Day to worship with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Bible says, *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”* (Romans 12:19). Vengeance belongs to God. The right to punish men and nations because of sin is God’s and God’s alone. However, Scripture is clear: God will repay. The day of His wrath is coming and it will be inescapable.

As we close the lesson today, the words of the prophet Isaiah seem appropriate: *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:6). To “seek” the Lord is to get serious about what really matters in life. It means you become intolerant of your sin and wicked ways. It means you open God’s Word, read it, and respond to the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. The time to do that is now.

You can know the Lord today by trusting His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation (Romans 10:13).

Amen.