

selves winter-houses and summer-houses. Ahab's palace at Jezreel evidently was his summer home (I Kings 21:1; II Kings 9:30ff). These homes were expensive with walls and furniture inlaid with costly ivory. These wicked and powerful rich (their power was dependent upon their riches) will be stripped of the riches in which they so vainly trusted. They would be powerless, destitute, prisoners! How foolish men are to seek satisfaction, joy, power in the fleeting, temporal, vain *things* of this temporal existence. We are reminded of Solomon (Ecclesiastes) and the Foolish Farmer in Luke twelve!

QUIZ

1. What does the calling of the heathen nations point out concerning the extent of Israel's sin?
2. What happens to people when they refuse to have God in their knowledge?
3. What did Amos mean to say to Israel by the figure of a shepherd rescuing pieces of his sheep?
4. What did tearing off the horns of the altars of Bethel signify?
5. Why would the people of Israel especially feel the loss of their luxurious homes?

REASON CALLS FOR REPENTANCE— GOD'S HOLINESS DEMANDS PUNISHMENT FOR EVIL

TEXT: 4:1-5

- 1 Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, that oppress the poor, that crush the needy, that say unto their lords, Bring, and let us drink.
- 2 The Lord Jehovah hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue with fish-hooks.
- 3 And ye shall go out at the breaches, every one straight before her; and ye shall cast yourselves into Harmon, saith Jehovah.
- 4 Come to Beth-el, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days;
- 5 and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill-offerings and publish them: for this pleaseth you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. Who is Amos calling "kine" of Bashan?
- b. How would Israel be taken away "with hooks?"
- c. Is the prophet authorizing the people to transgress?

PARAPHRASE

Listen to Me, you fat cows of Bashan living in Israel—you sensuous women who encourage your husbands to rob and oppress the poor and crush the needy—you debauched women who nag your husbands to supply you with intoxicants: The Lord God affirms most certainly that by His holiness which cannot tolerate unrighteousness, He is bringing days of judgment upon you. Your enemies will come and violently tear you away from your place of comfort and ease just as a fisherman hooks a fish and takes it out of its natural habitat. You will be taken prisoner out of your city not through the gates because they will have been destroyed; no, you will go out through the great gaping holes in the walls of your city. And because of your sins you will have thrown yourselves into captivity toward Hermon. God ahead and sacrifice to idols at Bethel and Gilgal; if you offer slain sacrifices every morning, and tithe every three days you only multiply your apostasy from the living God. You have so completely perverted true religion that you think you can, by your excessive zeal in offering even leavened sacrifices and by legally commanding "freewill" offerings, continue on in your sins, fooling the Holy God. This is not because you don't know what God's holiness means, but because you love to do evil.

SUMMARY

God's holy nature, which they knew but refused to live up to, warns them of the impending judgment upon their unholiness.

COMMENT

v. 1 . . . YE KINE OF BASHAN . . . THAT SAY UNTO THEIR LORDS, BRING, AND LET US DRINK. Most commentators feel that Amos is referring to the sensuous women of Israel when he calls them "cows of Bashan." Bashan was noted for its fat, sleek, cattle well-fed on Bashan's luxurious pasture lands (cf. Deut. 32:14; Micah 7:14; Num. 32). These indulgent women were pampered by their husbands (lord) who in turn had to oppress the poor and crush the needy to supply their wives with the means of debauchery, (cf. Amos 6:1-7). Compare Isa. 3:16ff and

32:9-13 for further description of the wantonness of the women of Israel. There are many "cows of Bashan" today in the world. Sensuous women who tempt their husbands to evil scheming in order that they may have the means to continue in their libertine living.

v. 2-3 THE LORD . . . HATH SWORN BY HIS HOLINESS . . . THEY SHALL TAKE YOU AWAY WITH HOOKS . . . YE SHALL CAST YOURSELVES INTO HARMON . . . These poor and needy have no recourse for justice. They are exploited even by the judges who should stand for justice. But the Lord, because He is holy, righteous, just, merciful, rises up as their Vindicator. The Perfect Holiness of Jehovah cannot tolerate evil (Psa. 5:4-5; 11:5), especially in a people whose call and blessing was that they should be a holy people! The rich of Israel were making no attempt to be holy in their living. We must be holy if we wish to be in communion with God (cf. Rom. 6:19; Heb. 12:14; Isa. 6:3; Col. 3:12; I Pet. 1:15-16; 2:5; II Pet. 3:11, etc.). We like the way John wrote it, "Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous," (I Jn. 3:7). There is the imputed holiness God gives us through what Christ accomplished on our behalf; on the other hand there is a holiness of living and thinking which we ourselves must work—motivated and energized, of course, by that holiness of His which He freely bestows upon us through the Gospel.

Because of their unholiness God would allow their enemy (the Assyrians) to come and violently "jerk" them out of their luxurious fish-bowl like a man who hooks a fish jerks it out of the water. They will be violently torn from their pleasant surroundings and caused to flounder and thresh in agony as a fish out of water. Amos is not referring to rings literally placed in the ears and noses of slaves, as was the custom then, but he is simply describing the sudden and awful change of circumstances that are about to come upon these debauched rich.

The gates of their cities will be so utterly destroyed and piled high with debris from war's destructive forces and their walls so completely torn down that the people will be marched off to captivity through the great gaping holes in the walls instead of the gates. These people of Israel, because of their sins, brought upon themselves this captivity. They are said to have cast themselves into this foreign land "Harmon" (which most translators believe is the territory beyond Mt. Hermon, or Damascus and beyond.)

v. 4-5 COME TO BETH-EL, AND TRANSGRESS; TO GILGAL, AND MULTIPLY TRANSGRESSION; . . . SACRIFICE EVERY MORNING . . . TITHES EVERY THREE DAYS . . . SACRIFICE THAT WHICH IS LEAVENED . . . PROCLAIM FREEWILL-OFFERINGS . . . FOR THIS PLEASETH YOU . . . Amos uses the figure of speech called *irony* here to show Israel the folly of her sins. Irony is a "kind of ridicule which exposes the errors or faults of others by seeming to adopt, approve, or defend them . . ." Other examples of the use of irony in the Bible are Job. 12:2; I Kings 18:27; Eccl. 11:9; Judges 10:14; I Kings 22:15; I Cor. 4:8. Amos was *not* approving or authorizing the people to sin! He as much as says, "Go ahead and do the sins you are doing, you are only multiplying God's displeasure with you in so doing!" They were "presuming upon the forbearance and patience of God . . . and by their hard and impenitent heart *storing up* wrath for themselves . . ." (cf. Rom. 2:4-5).

They had so perverted true religion of Jehovah they thought that by their superabundance of offerings they could fool God into thinking they were righteous. They did not stop with offering sacrifices of unleavened cakes upon the altar; to make sure they offered an abundance they even offered some of the leavened cakes (forbidden by the Mosaic law) as well. Not only this but the offerings which were supposed to be motivated out of a purely spontaneous impulse (freewill-offerings) (cf. Lev. 22:18ff; Deut. 12:6) they forced from people by making laws regarding "freewill offerings!" This was entirely the wrong attitude toward the Holy One of Israel, for He looks not on the outward man but upon the heart! Isaiah just a few short years later brought scathing denunciation against such conduct (Isa. 1:1ff). Israel is less sensible than the ass or the ox! They do not know God! But this is not because God has not revealed Himself—not because they have no opportunity to know Him—not because He is unknowable! No; they love to have it so! This type of religion pleases them. It soothes their consciences. Men who do evil, hate the light and love the darkness, because their deeds are evil and if they should come to the light their deeds would be exposed—then they would see how utterly vain and foolish their deeds are (cf. Jn. 3:18-21). Any man who thinks God is pleased with a trust in forms and rituals is foolish. Of course, there are certain specific forms of doctrine which we are obliged, by the very nature God Himself (holy, loving, trustworthy, omnipotent) to perform. But our faith is not in the act or rite itself but in the Person who commanded it! Again, if we refuse to do the thing which God has clearly commanded in the New Testament, it simply shows we do not trust the Person who commanded it—we trust our own wisdom more! On the

other hand, a mere perfunctory repetition of rituals does not necessarily mean we trust God the Person either. Sooner or later, just how much we trust Him, love Him and want to be like Him shows up in our daily living! This was true of Israel then, and it is true of all men now. For a list of Old Testament saints who trusted God and what that trust led them to do, see Hebrews, the eleventh chapter.

QUIZ

1. What does the phrase "kine of Bashan" describe?
2. Where did their "lords" get the "drink" demanded by these "cows of Bashan?"
3. Why does the Lord swear by "His holiness" that they shall be judged?
4. Why would they "go out at the breaches?"
5. To what extent had these people perverted the worship of God?
6. Why is God not pleased with mere repetition of religious ritual?

REASON CALLS FOR REPENTANCE— CHASTENING IN THE PAST SHOULD MAKE THEM THINK

TEXT: 4:6-11

- 6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.
- 7 And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.
- 8 So two or three cities wandered into one city to drink water, and were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.
- 9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: the multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees hath the palmerworm devoured: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.
- 10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, and have carried away your horses; and I have made the stench of your camp to come up even into your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.

- 11 I have overthroned cities among you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. What is "cleanness of teeth?"
- b. Is God still responsible for famine, drought, war, as in Amos' day?
- c. What does Amos mean that Israel was "a brand plucked out of the burning?"

PARAPHRASE

I have tried all means of turning you to me, yet you love to persist in your wickedness. I have brought famine and starvation upon this nation and yet you have not returned unto me, says the Lord. I have caused drought; I have withheld the latter rain (three months before the harvest) which is sorely needed for the proper maturing of the crops. On the other hand, in order to show you even more clearly that the sending and withholding of rain belongs to Me, I have caused it to rain here and there, upon one town and one field, and not upon others. This caused such drought that the people of the areas where it had not rained were forced fainting of thirst to stagger great distances for their supplies of water, and then couldn't get enough to supply their needs; yet you did not return unto me, says the Lord. I smote your grain crops with blight and dry-rot; I sent locusts to strip and devour your orchards; yet you have not returned unto Me, says the Lord. I have sent among you all the diseases of Egypt; I have caused your young men to be slain in wars; I have caused your war horses to be slain; I have caused the stench of the slain to come into your nostrils as a reminder of your sins; yet you have not returned unto me, says the Lord. I have brought you to the verge of complete destruction as when I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and you were left destitute of everything like brands plucked out of the fire; yet you did not return unto me, says the Lord.

SUMMARY

The prophet calls Israel's attention to past judgments of God in an attempt to get them to repent. These judgments took place at different times all during Israel's history. Amos has arranged them in climactic form.

COMMENT

v. 6 . . . I . . . HAVE GIVEN YOU CLEANNES OF TEETH . . . AND WANT OF BREAD . . . The phrase "cleanness of teeth," means lack of food as is evident from the parallel "want of bread." This is what God told the people through Moses in Deut. 28:47-57. This is fulfilled in II Kings 6:24-31. A mother eating the flesh of her own child is recorded also by Josephus in his account of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans. God's judgments are sure! Not one word of His will fall to the ground unfulfilled! Yet Israel did not repent!

v. 7-8 . . . I . . . HAVE WITHHOLDEN RAIN FROM YOU . . . AND CAUSED IT TO RAIN UPON ONE CITY . . . AND . . . NOT UPON ANOTHER . . . TWO OR THREE CITIES WANDERED UNTO ONE CITY TO DRINK . . . AND WERE NOT SATISFIED . . . At times God withheld rain as a call for the people of Israel to repent (cf. Lev. 26:19-20; Deut. 28:23). The rains which were withheld in this particular case were the so-called "latter rains" (three months before harvest). These rains fall in the latter half of February and the first half of March and are of the greatest importance to the development of the grain crops. Thus when the drought came, the crops failed. This is a matter of record in I Kings 8:35-36; II Kings 17-18; Isa. 5-6; Jer. 14, etc. But in order to show man even more clearly that He uses natural forces and that their sending and withholding belong to Him, God caused it to rain on one village and another village, while at the same time other villages received no rain at all. Rivers and wells dried up in these latter areas and the people had to travel long distances for their water supply and even then could not get enough to satisfy their needs. The word "wander" comes from an original word which means literally "to stagger, to totter," and pictures the people staggering, almost fainting with thirst, as they go from village to village in search of water! Yet Israel did not see the hand of God in these tribulations—they felt no chastening—they heard no call to repentance!

v. 9 . . . SMITTEN YOU WITH BLASTING AND MILDEW . . . YOUR . . . VINEYARDS . . . HATH THE PALMERWORM DEVoured . . . Their grain fields were either burned up by the "blasting" hot and dry winds or they were rotted by mildew (cf. Gen. 41:6, 27; Deut. 28:22). Their gardens and orchards were gnawed and stripped bare by the locusts (cf. Joel 1:4; 2:25; Deut. 28:39).

v. 10 . . . SENT AMONG YOU THE PESTILENCE AFTER THE MANNER OF EGYPT . . . I HAVE MADE THE STENCH OF YOUR CAMP TO COME UP . . . INTO YOUR NOSTRILS . . . God sent among the people of Israel many diseases in epidemic form "after the manner" that He had done in the days of Moses to Egypt (cf. Lev. 26:25; Deut. 28:60; Isa. 10:24; Ezek. 20:30). The Roman historian Pliny has called Egypt, "the mother of contagious diseases," because of the many epidemics arising there even in his day. God sent wars upon Israel. Often times, in crowded, unsanitary military camps epidemics took their toll along with the slain of the battlefields so that sword and sickness decimated the ranks of Israel's young, virile men who were the hope of the nation. The slain warriors and the slain battle-horses sometimes filled the air with that sickening stench of rotting flesh which is at times unbearable. But even this horrible stench did not remind them of their sins! For a record of Israel's decimation in war see II Kings 8:12; 13:3, 7.

v. 11 I HAVE OVERTHROWN CITIES AMONG YOU, AS . . . SODOM AND GOMORRAH . . . YE WERE AS A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE BURNING . . . Amos mentions this last judgment of God, not because it is last chronologically, but because it furnishes the prophet with a literary vehicle called "climax." Amos' list of five judgments of the Lord are given in an emotional ascension whereby a climax is reached at the last. The Lord has also called Israel to repentance by sending destructions upon her cities similar to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Israel was brought to the verge of utter ruin and overthrow more than once and was only saved like a firebrand snatched at the last moment from the consuming flames of the fire (cf. Zech. 3:2). See II Kings 13:4, 7 for the devastation of the land (cf. Isa. 1:9 also).

Predicting the future was not, as many suppose it to have been, the primary function of the prophet. The supreme task of the prophet was to interpret the events of history in the light of the will and purpose of God. The prophets saw the hand of God in the events of daily life and this they saw by the divine leading of the Holy Spirit within them (I Pet. 1:10-12; II Pet. 1:16-21). They sought to answer the pressing questions confronted in man's struggle with the totality of life. How was God related to the turbulent events of the world in the time of Amos? What was the relationship between the calamities, the crises, and the disappointments in life to the will of God? These same questions are asked today and may be answered by the same principles proclaimed by these Spirit-filled prophets! A correlation of

history and the divine will is a crying, personal problem in every age. How does one relate the divine will and the wars, epidemics, tragedies, famines and other like calamities in the twentieth century? The prophets of Israel would give little support to the modern protest that "the church ought to preach the gospel and leave everything else alone." For the prophets, the message of God was so interwoven into the fabric of daily life that the two could not be separated.

The underlying principle of all prophetic literature is the fact that judgment in history has a redemptive purpose. It is intended to cause man to see his desperate need for God, and subsequently to turn to His fellowship and communion. In the use of these disasters as a form of judgment, one is confronted with the most important aspect of the entire problem of God's will and natural calamity. The most significant point to consider is not the ultimate or secondary source, a full explanation of the justice of such deeds, or even an attempt to exonerate God. The most important consideration is that of man's response to such catastrophe. Do acts of this kind lead to a new awareness of God's sovereignty? Do they result in a new committal on the part of man to God. This is the significant element! Such calamities serve to cause man to recognize his finitude in the face of an overwhelming disaster, thereby opening the way for repentance and communion with God. Let all men know that the point of emphasis should be placed ultimately, not upon reason, but upon response. As Amos did, so must modern man consider as of primary significance the nature of his response to catastrophe. The moral reason behind such events, while important, must remain inexplicable. We cannot explain them perfectly but we can act in the light of them.

In view of this, history should serve to make man aware of his own dependence. Catastrophe should draw man near to the heart of God in an ever deepening communion. May it never be said that the catastrophes of history failed to draw this generation nearer to God. May it never be said, "Yet you did not return to me."

For further study on this subject we refer you to our Special Study, "The Prophetic Philosophy of History," and comments on similar passages from the five prophetic books treated in this commentary. See also our notes on Joel 2:1-11 in this commentary.

Naturally, the question will be asked, what of the righteous who must suffer at the same time God's catastrophic natural disasters are occurring? There are at least three biblical principles by which we may understand the so-called "suffering of the righteous." In the first place,

all the righteousness of the righteous is purely relative. That is, all our righteousness is as filthy rags relative to God's perfect righteousness, therefore we deserve *more* suffering than we endure here on earth no matter how good we are. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and we are only accounted as righteous by the grace of God which we appreciate by faith. If God were only just—if He paid us in kind for our behaviour—we would suffer worse than we do! Secondly, for the true saint of God, in both O.T. and New Testament times, suffering, trial, tribulation all serve to strengthen and purify. The Hebrew epistle has a great deal to say about this second principle. One of the most significant passages is: "For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" Heb. 10:36. Then, there is the passage in Hebrews 12:3-11, of course. (Consider also these passages: II Cor. 1:3-11; 12-7; James 1:2-4; I Pet. 4:12-19, etc.). Thirdly, if the innocent be caused to suffer and die with the guilty remember these words, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them" Rev. 14:13; and, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" Psa. 116:15. Compare also II Cor. 4:16-18; II Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 1:21-24. We cannot understand, perhaps, but God has revealed enough of His governing principles that we should be able by faith to accept His sovereign will and look forward in hope to the consummation of all things. Why should the innocent baby of David and Bathsheba die because of their sin? Why should the man be born blind in order that the glory of God might be shown through him (Jn. 9)? Why should the faithful Jews be taken into captivity with the unfaithful ones? God has not told us all the "whys" but He has told us some of them—enough for us to make a response, a commitment in faith.

QUIZ

1. When did Israel suffer from famine and to what extent did they suffer?
2. When did Israel suffer from drought?
3. Why did God, even in drought times, cause it to rain in some places?
4. Why send pestilences "after the manner of Egypt?"
5. How was Israel "plucked out of the burning . . . ?"
6. How did Amos interpret or relate these disasters to the will of God?
7. What three principles explain, in part, the suffering of the righteous along with the wicked?

REVELATION CALLS FOR REPENTANCE— GOD'S CHARACTER AND WILL REVEALED

TEXT: 4:12-13

- 12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.
- 13 For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought; that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; Jehovah, the God of hosts, is his name.

QUERIES

- a. How is Israel to "prepare to meet" its God?
- b. Whose "thought" does Jehovah declare to man?

PARAPHRASE

On account of your impenitence, O Israel, I am about to visit you with great and terrible judgment. Therefore, now, while there is time, prepare to avert your doom by repenting when you meet your God in judgment. Remember, the One you are going to meet in judgment is Lord of all the universe; He is the One who created the mountains and the winds; He is the one who, through His prophets, reveals to men the thoughts and intents of their hearts and He judges by the secret thoughts of the heart as well as by the outward actions. He is the one who created, who sustains and who controls the universe. Jehovah, the Omnipotent and Omniscient One, is His name!

SUMMARY

Israel, in light of her past hard-heartedness, is warned to prepare to meet the Lord of the universe in judgment.

COMMENT

v. 12 . . . PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL . . . This is one of those electrifying phrases so characteristic of the prophets. It has been repeated over and over through the centuries by preachers, who, like Amos, and Paul the apostle after him, "knowing the terror of the Lord, would fain persuade men!" Due to Israel's past impenitence when called to repent by national disasters, the coming judgment, if impenitence persists, will be so terrible God does not even choose to delineate it. But this blunt, piercing statement is a last call of God to His "called

REVELATION CALLS FOR REPENTANCE 4:12, 13

out ones" to perfect themselves in holiness. He does not say to them "prepare to meet your doom" as if their doom were irrevocably sealed, but, "prepare (that is, get yourself ready by repenting) to avert your doom." We are reminded of Jesus' warnings (Mark 13:32-37, etc.). We are also reminded of the perverted, ignorant bliss of these people of Israel who said they were actually looking forward to the Day of Jehovah (cf. Amos 5:18ff). They were wilfully ignorant of their sin and thus blissfully ignorant of what the Day of Jehovah would mean when it came. For them, if they did not repent, they would meet their God in darkness, not light!

v. 13 . . . JEHOVAH, THE GOD OF HOSTS, IS HIS NAME . . . Israel is reminded that they are not dealing with one of the impotent gods of the nations of whom they had grown so fond. Idolatry (ancient or modern) is convenient! When one creates his own gods he may manipulate his god to serve his own purposes. One may shelve it, gag it, blindfold it and even destroy it at will. One need not fear it nor feel any responsibility to it. But with Jehovah it is as different as light is from dark! He is the omnipotent Creator; He is the omniscient Revealer; He is the beneficent Sustainer. God is the searcher of the heart (Jer. 17:10; Psa. 139:2). Israel is reminded that when they meet their God, and meet Him they surely will for He is not a weak, man-made god, unable to bring His word to pass, He will judge their innermost secret thoughts and intentions (cf. Heb. 4:12; I Sam. 16:7). He is Lord of the universe; He commands all the heavenly and earthly hosts (Psa. 103:20ff) and every creature and creation must reckon with Him! Let the nature of God call you to repentance, O Israel, both then and now!

QUIZ

1. What did Amos intend to say to Israel by "prepare to meet thy God . . ."?
2. What did the people of Israel think about the coming Day of Jehovah?
3. Why did Amos elaborate on the nature of God in this context?

REVELATION CALLS FOR REPENTANCE— GOD'S WORD AGAINST ISRAEL

TEXT: 5:1-5

- 1 Hear ye this word which I take up for a lamentation over you, O house of Israel.