

## **DECEMBER 10**

### **Amos 1-3**

Amos wasn't a prophet in terms of being in the groups of prophets who existed during the time of Elijah and Elisha. Amos was a sheep breeder, a herder and a cultivator of mulberry trees. Apparently this is to say that Amos was a respected man and had leadership within his trade. Amos was preaching during the time of Hosea and Jonah. Though he was from Judah, he was sent to preach to Israel, the northern kingdom. The ministries of these three prophets (Hosea, Jonah and Amos) came right after the death of Elisha, and though the judgment against Israel had been pronounced, God still worked with these people for another hundred years to show grace and bring people to repentance. Anyone who did respond to God through these prophets probably headed south to live in Judah where there was still a godly influence.

Unfortunately, this was a time of prosperity for both kingdoms and so the messages of these prophets went unheard, except for those who had ears to hear and hearts of faith.

#### **Amos 1**

Vs. 1-2 You might want to refer to the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," at the end of this document to see where Amos fits. Notice that the Lord is speaking from Zion, in Judah. Since the northern kingdom had abandoned worship at the temple and disowned Jerusalem as the Lord's city, this would be a very pointed statement in their ears.

What follows are pronouncements of judgment on the surrounding nations for violence they committed against all of Israel, both north and south. The tool of judgment would be the rising power of Assyria.

Vs. 3-5 Damascus, representing all of Syria, was the major power in that region, until the Assyrians came. For years they had been very destructive to Israel.

Vs. 6-8 The Philistines had always been arch enemies of Israel, and during the times of the northern kings, they had been capturing Jews and selling them as slaves.

Vs. 9-10 Although Tyre had a treaty with Israel, they worked with Israel's enemies in selling Jewish slaves to Edom.

Vs. 11-12 The Edomites were arch enemies of the Jews.

Vs. 13-15 The Ammonites came from Lot and one of his daughters. Their sin was evident and their acts were brutal. They did this to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies.

#### **Amos 2**

Vs. 1-3 The Moabites came from Lot and his other daughter. Now this is interesting because their wrong was not against Israel but against Edom. But it could be that among the bones they burned were the bones of Esau, the son of Isaac and the brother of Jacob (Israel).

Vs. 4-5 Now we have Judah. Some of the kings of Judah were godly, but there were ungodly kings and the people were not always obedient. Notice that they will be irrevocably judged because of rejecting the statutes of the Lord. This is a long time before judgment came. God was patient and we've read the story of what God did with Judah.

Vs. 6-8 This is the judgment of Israel, the northern kingdom. What a list of sins.

Vs. 9-12 Although it was God who had saved them, they got rid of those who were devoted to God or would speak for Him. Whereas there were still godly people and godly kings in Judah, in Israel they had taken care of any godly influence so they could enjoy themselves. Verse 12 is interesting regarding the Nazirites drinking wine. The people of Israel corrupted them. It makes me think of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1. They resisted eating the food and wine offered to

the gods of Babylon, to keep themselves devoted to the Lord. Even that small compromise would have hurt them.

Vs. 13-16 God Himself would humble Israel, and no amount of effort or strength on their part would save them.

Amos 3

Vs. 1-8 What do you think the Lord is saying here? In some respect this might look back to 2:11-12. It seems that God is saying that just like there is a cause-effect relationship in these other things, the people should have responded when they saw the prophets, realizing that God had spoken and was trying to save them. The long years of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha were full of signs and offers to the kings and people to repent. No one listened. I was reading about Jesus asking the people how they knew how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why they were not able to interpret the present time, that is, the time of His visitation. God seems to be asking the same thing here through Amos.

Vs. 9-10 This appears to be God calling the ungodly to look at Samaria and be witnesses to its godlessness.

Vs. 11-12 Only a small remnant of the northern kingdom would survive. Talk about graphic imagery.

Vs. 13-15 Notice the two things mentioned here: the worship in Bethel (to keep people believing a lie and not going to Jerusalem) and the luxury of the rich. These were among the gods of the northern kingdom.

As disciples it is easy for us to slip into the mode of assuming there is lots of time and God will always be patient. His patience is amazing, but when it is time to judge, His judgment comes and rolls and is relentless. We are working in the harvest because He is coming. The offer for forgiveness stands now; but it will expire, and then comes judgment beyond our comprehension.

All of Revelation, and the Bible itself for that matter, is a call for us to stay awake and get the Word out. The more you read this, the more you understand why we've been left here to work in the harvest. We need to stay awake and keep sharing the gospel of Christ and let people know that the kingdom of Heaven is coming.

### **Revelation 2:1-17**

Many people have posed different schemes for understanding these churches, and I'd suggest taking a very natural approach. All of these churches existed at the same time, not during different ages, so we don't need to see the churches representing different ages in the history of the church. Also, these churches were selected by Jesus because of particular elements that He wanted to comment on, and wanted us to learn from. In fact, all of the letters we have from Paul that were addressed to churches were designed to address challenges in each church, but were also written down for our instruction. Although all of these churches were near one another geographically, there were also big-name, nearby churches, like in Colossae, that are not mentioned here by Jesus.

As you read through these letters to the churches, you will notice a certain pattern that repeats, yet the message for each church is very individual. Also, just think about this: These are the only letters in the Bible from Jesus Himself to churches.

Vs. 1-7 The *church in Ephesus*.

V. 1 Notice that the letter is to the *angel of the church*. The word "angel" means messenger. In Matthew 11:10, Jesus uses the same word for John the Baptist and it is translated messenger. In this case, angel must be referring to one of the elders or the pastor. A real angel didn't need

correspondence. Also, five of these seven "angels" receive a warning about judgment. I don't think God's holy angels need warnings. We "angels" do.

Notice how Jesus introduces Himself. This will be different for each church and will be significant for His message to them. Usually, the *right hand* means authority. The stars, as we've seen, are leaders/pastors of these seven churches. This might mean something like, "Jesus holds this authority, not the men, and the churches are led or held by His authority."

Vs. 2-3 First the positive. The *endurance* is not from suffering, but from maintaining a constant fight against error. That will wear you out.

V. 4 Just so you know, five of the seven churches have a charge against them. How do you think this rebuke relates to vs. 2-3? Losing this first love is a very serious thing. As believers and as churches, our joy in our salvation and Savior cannot be superseded by any other thing. When the church engages in wars, doctrinal, social or political, it begins to rob people of the remembrance of being saved, of receiving mercy and unmerited love. A disciple is to live in that love and remembrance of mercy and to be empowered by that joy daily. Our remembrance of our need and the mercy we received is what the Lord uses in us to share His message in the harvest with tenderness, patience and compassion.

V. 5 This warning is very serious. To have the *lampstand* removed is to close down the church. The church in Ephesus no longer exists.

V. 6 No one knows exactly what the Nicolaitans taught, but it seems to have been excessive freedom that led believers into moral sin and caused others to stumble because of foods. We saw this mentioned in 1 Corinthians and in Romans. John, Peter and Jude made references to Christians and teachers who were leading believers into immorality and following their passions.

V. 7 So, Jesus is delivering a message from the Spirit.

One of the issues in these letters is the promise made at the end. This promise, *to eat of the tree of life*, is offered to all believers, regardless of whether they fail or endure. Whether a Christian is obedient or disobedient, they will still eat of the fruit. So what is the promise? I think, in all of these promises, the reward is living closely with Christ on earth with the confidence of the reward, and therefore, knowing God's joy and peace as we walk on earth. It would be like two sons who are guaranteed an inheritance. If one of those sons was very close to his father, the reward of the coming inheritance would be present in his life every day. For the other son, he would miss the daily blessing of his father and would give no thought to what that inheritance meant for his life now and for his future. Living in this promise leads to a deeper relationship with Christ and joy, peace, purpose and all those fruits of the Spirit. We live with an expectation of welcome when we come into Christ's presence. If a Christian doesn't live obediently, they still get eternal life. But living now with eternity in view affects us now and has to do with relationship and communion here. What we benefit from Jesus now is up to us. A lot of what Jesus said to His disciples made the blessings of following Him on earth totally up to them, whether or not they would follow. There will also be benefits in heaven, but we are not told a lot about those.

So I wonder, what did Jesus holding the stars have to do with the warning or with the promise at the end?

Vs. 8-11 The *church in Smyrna*.

V. 8 Notice how Jesus introduces Himself.

V. 9 This is their current situation and their commendation. The *tribulation* and *poverty* were real. It is interesting how Jesus names this synagogue.

V. 10 We've seen this before, that often the purpose of prophecy is to help people going through a hard time to hold on, having been told in advance what would happen. Remember those detailed prophecies at the end of Daniel? Because of this word, these people can be sure that they, and the situation, are in God's hands.

The *crown of life* seems to be a special reward for those who suffer for Christ. We'll see these crowns being cast down at the feet of the Lamb in a couple of chapters.

V. 11 The promise to those who conquer is again something that all believers can be assured that they will receive. So then, the difference is that those believers who are close to Christ live with this assurance and confidence. I've met quite a few believers who will live forever in heaven, but on earth they live in fear of death.

Notice here that there was no rebuke or warning. We've seen that God uses suffering to teach us and cleanse us. I think their suffering is the reason they were healthy. Do you see how Jesus' introduction might have been important to what He said to this church? The church in Smyrna is still there today.

Vs. 12-17 The *church in Pergamum*.

So, you've noted Jesus' introduction and His commendation of the church.

Vs. 14-15 What is the real issue here? Look at 1 Corinthians 5. Paul accused the elders in Corinth of arrogance because they did not remove people from fellowship. Again, read 1 Corinthians 5 and you'll see the issue. The church in Pergamum had grown too tolerant, maybe out of noble reasons, but they allowed these people to remain in the church. I think of Eli and his sons. Eli couldn't help that his sons were awful men, but the fact that he didn't remove them as priests was the sin for which he was punished.

V. 16 This is a very clear connection to Jesus' introduction in v. 12. Hebrews 4:12, I think, gives the idea of what would happen here. The intent of hearts would be judged and possibly the church would split.

V. 17 So, what is this reward? Actually, it looks like two rewards. Both of these seem to be allusions back to the people in the wilderness as God was forming the nation of Israel. *Manna* has to do with food from God, possibly some spiritual nourishment as a reward for dealing with this situation. The only place I can think of where there is a *name written on the stone* has to do with the priests. When the priests served, they wore clothing that had twelve stones, each with the name of a different tribe. This was to have reminded the priest that they were to represent, bless, and protect the people by their service. It could be that those who were willing to protect the church like this would be drawn closer to Christ and given "hidden" nourishment and a special empowerment for service. I'm just guessing, but serving in the church, especially when there are these kinds of problems, takes a deep strength and a real commitment and empowerment to lead and serve well.

And of course, after you deal with all of this stuff, there is still the task of moving the church to follow Jesus into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples.

### **Psalm 129**

Vs. 1-8 This would have brought the worshipers approaching Jerusalem into the remembrance of the hardships they had endured and how the Lord had saved them. God's people and that city are His possession. Let God judge His own people, but if anyone else lifts their hand against His people or His city, God will eventually punish them.

In all we are reading about the judgment of the Lord on Israel, we should remember that God has used this nation to show all of us what the heart of man is like. In Israel we see failure and faith, but God shows Himself to us in His dealings with them. In a way, Israel has paid a price for this

service, and God will yet reward them and fulfill His purpose. He won't forget their labor or their suffering for the redemption of the world. As Paul says, we owe them respect.

**Proverbs 29:19-20**

*Words* seem to be the theme of these two verses. Words without substance do nothing. Even in following the Lord, there are words; and then as James said, there is doing. Jesus always associated words with doing, for those following Him.