

DECEMBER 11

Although I know that it is a little wearisome to read of continual pronouncements of judgment against Israel, it is still instructive. We learn something about God. God never wanted these people to have to be punished. Even in our reading today, God will make several pleas for the people to repent. After Elijah and Elisha, there were three other prophets God sent to give Israel a final chance. We've read Hosea. Here is Amos sent from God, from Judah to Bethel, to appeal to individuals to turn to God. Finally we will have Jonah. Yes, Jonah and his adventures were written and sent to Israel to show them that they needed to repent. If God would save Assyrians (and cows) if they repented, He would certainly have saved His people. Yet it was the Assyrians, ironically, who repented, and who later took the northern kingdom into exile. There are lots of interesting lessons in what took place and in how God worked. The chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," is at the end of this document.

Amos 4-6

Amos 4

Vs. 1-3 God has just rebuked Israel for their ivory houses and affluence. These women apparently lived in those houses. While neglecting the poor and the oppressed, these women lived for the affluence of their times. Bashan was the lush area around the Sea of Galilee. The Hebrew word for *husbands* isn't actually husband, but "master." The joke is that these men were like slaves to these women. Some might think that God's title for these women isn't "politically correct," but then, let them be the ones to tell Him that.

When the Assyrians led captives into exile, they literally hooked them together like fish on a stringer.

Cast out means that the ones who died in the march would be thrown out and left on this mountain.

Vs. 4-5 God challenges them to worship their idols, to see if they can alter the "bad luck" they've had.

Vs. 6-11 Highlight or underline all of the ways the Lord tried to break through to these people. God couldn't do this today, could He? Notice the recurring line that concludes each section here.

If you want to read something that is like what you've just read, look at Revelation 16:9-21.

Vs. 12-13 The people really don't know God. Verse 12 is ominous, *prepare to meet your God*. That was not an invitation, it was a warning. I have met so many religious people who think they know God. Sadly, they will have the most tragic shock when they stand before Him and He says, "*I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*" (Matt. 7:23) This is reality.

Amos 5

Vs. 1-3 God promises this awful destruction and judgment.

Vs. 4-9 So God exhorts and urges them to seek Him. While there is no hope for the northern kingdom, individuals could still come to Him. Neither God nor Amos is shy about telling the people what the result will be for ignoring Him.

Vs. 10-13 Because they got rid of the prophets and hated the truth, oppression of the poor flourished and they built their own *houses* and *vineyards*. Notice again that the result of their actions was that the righteous became *silent*.

Vs. 14-15 Another plea by God for them to seek Him.

Vs. 16-17 For ignoring God, He will judge them and strike their crops.

Vs. 18-20 There must have been some ignorant people who were wishing for the Lord to come. They didn't realize that if He came, it would be in judgment and they would be the targets of His justice and rebuke. When I hear unbelieving people wish that God would return to the earth, I know that even with the best of intentions, they really don't know what they are wishing for.

Vs. 21-27 God is saying that their devotion to Him was always half-hearted at best. According to v. 25, even *in the wilderness* there were people who didn't give up worshiping false gods. The present situation is just a continuation of that. Notice in v. 26 God says He will send them *into exile* and they will carry their helpless gods with them.

Amos 6

Vs. 1-3 What is this *woe* about?

Vs. 4-7 What is this *woe* about?

Vs. 8-10 Apparently the people will know it is the Lord working against them. They will try to make it better by not talking about the Lord.

V. 11 The rich and the poor alike would be judged.

V. 12 Although it made no sense, Israel gave up justice and thereby poisoned itself as a nation. Even animals know not to hurt themselves.

V. 13 This was a delusion.

V. 14 And God would *raise up* the Assyrians to humble them.

When you read v. 12, it seems so simple. There are some things people will not do in one area, like not letting their valuable horses run on rocks; yet at the same time people destroy their own lives and foolishly choose not to think about life itself. No one would assume they were alone in the woods if they found a car with the lights on. God has put us in this amazing world and given us unexplainable bodies and minds, yet it makes more sense to our rebellious hearts to ignore that evidence of His presence and His existence and not to think about life or a Creator. These people in Amos foolishly thought they could make a religious effort to appease God, but they really didn't want to worship God in truth, because they really didn't want to obey Him. This is what Jesus said in John 3:19-20. It is far easier to worship your own conception of God and do what you want. Over the centuries, man has not changed.

Revelation 2:18-3:6

Revelation 2:18-29

This is the *church in Thyatira*.

V. 18 Notice how Jesus describes Himself. I wonder what this will mean.

V. 19 Only one short verse of commendation. It really sounds good.

Vs. 20-23 But this really sounds bad and is very hard to imagine. It appears that the real problem was with the leaders who allowed this to go on, thereby infecting the church. What is interesting here is the woman referred to as *Jezebel*. According to 1 Kings 16:31 and many other references, it was through Ahab marrying Jezebel that Baal worship became a cultural norm in the northern kingdom. There in the OT, as in this reference in Thyatira, this worship was very sexually oriented. Again, we have seen a church in immorality in 1 Corinthians, with each of the three chapters, 5-7, addressing some issue of sexual misconduct among believers.

Vs. 24-29 So what is the reward here, and is this a general reward that everyone will receive? And does Jesus' description of Himself have any connection here? Since the reward has to do with authority, ruling, judgment and discernment, that is probably what is meant by these aspects of Jesus' description.

My first instinct in reading this is to see Jesus' description of Himself as having ruling and judging authority from the Father. His eyes of fire probably have to do with the kind of piercing discernment needed to judge the hearts and intents of people. The bronze feet (2:18) are solid and unmovable.

It seems that this promise for those who conquer in this situation is that they will be given discernment and authority now as they struggle to hold this church together and reform it so it will honor Christ. In the future, God will give these people more authority, possibly leading a city as a mayor or something during the Millennium. The *morning star* (v. 28) seems to be for guidance and discerning location and direction. Since Jesus is called the morning star, it would mean guidance from Him. Jesus told His disciples more than once that He was giving them the keys to the kingdom of heaven and whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven because He was in their midst. This is present authority. In the parable of the talents, Jesus talked about the faithful receiving cities to rule. Maybe this future expansion of responsibility and service is also being referred to here.

Revelation 3:1-6

Vs. 1-4 Notice Jesus' description of Himself. Wow, there isn't a commendation here for Sardis. You might have thought Laodicea was bad, but this church is pronounced dead. Isn't it interesting that they had a reputation for being alive, outwardly, but that it was only a sham? The Lord saw past the outward show.

Now this is interesting, because Jesus is actually repeating Himself here. Late in His ministry and just months before His sacrifice, Jesus was again teaching His disciples. Peter even asked if this applied to them and Jesus' implied answer was "yes." To get an idea of what Jesus is saying here, read Luke 12:35-50.

³⁵ "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." ⁴¹ Peter said, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" ⁴² And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. ⁴⁹ "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"

Notice that in this text there is punishment, but not damnation. The fact that believers will be chastened on earth is seen in Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 11. The fact that believers will be rebuked as they enter heaven and stand at the judgment seat of Christ can be found in 1 Corinthians 3:15.

This church outwardly was doing business, but was no longer in the harvest. Everyone thought they were a happening place and God was present, but Jesus said they were dead, that they had

fallen asleep. If you read the passage in Luke, you have this intense sense of readiness on the part of the church. That section ends with Jesus casting fire on the earth, giving Himself as the sacrifice for mankind and then bringing division because of His name. This readiness in awaiting our Lord's return means living for Christ in this harvest.

V. 5 Before you focus on the blotting out part, notice the part about Jesus confessing the name of that disciple before His Father and His angels. Jesus said this to His disciples more than once. It was never a threat to them of losing their salvation, but rather that they wouldn't receive divine help and commendation for their present trials and endeavors in the harvest. This reference is also from Luke 12:8-9, *And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.* Rather than Jesus potentially blotting anyone's name out of the *book of life*, this seems more like Him highlighting that name as an acknowledgment. He is really assuring them that in spite of their trials and fears, their names would never, ever, ever be blotted out. That should give the present-day disciple great assurance.

Notice the *white garments*. These garments are a symbol of forgiveness, having been cleansed by Jesus. If you do a search in Revelation on the white robes, you'll find Revelation 7:13-14. They are made white by the blood of the Lamb.

It seems to me that the description of Jesus having *the seven spirits of God and the seven stars* (3:1) has to do with the seven churches being sent out to all the world. Again, if you do a search on the seven spirits, they are sent into all the world. That seems like witness to the world. So, in one hand Jesus has the seven stars, representing the churches or their pastors, and in the other the seven spirits that go out into the world. It seems that the church is to be out in the world proclaiming Christ and making disciples. That apparently was not being done by this church.

I think all of this has to do with salvation. The fact that Jesus uses what He said to his disciples from Luke 12 is pretty cool. I think the reward Jesus is talking about is spiritual enablement in carrying the gospel to the lost. The robes are white from the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14), and Jesus is constantly sending angelic help to us as we are awake and working in the light, in the harvest, expectant of His return. Look at what the angel said to Daniel in Daniel 12:3, *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

You could do a lot of sermonizing here regarding churches that look alive but are dead; because they have lost their first, "salvation," love for the Lord. They are no longer reaching out. But the message is for each of us, in our personal love and pursuit of Christ in the harvest. Verse 4 says there were still some people who had not lost the love of their Lord and the joy and wonder of their salvation. Jesus personally appeals to them. It only takes one person on fire for Christ, in love with Him, following in the harvest, to start a fire and make disciples, who make disciples, who reach the lost and make of them disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 130

I guess it would have been nice to go to Jerusalem to worship and to have had everything in life running fine. But when you read this psalm, you sense a closeness and need for God that we don't often sense when everything is going smoothly. I think the deeper sincerity and deepest longing for God came from these people who were worshipping from the "depths." I think of the church of Smyrna, the church that suffered, being the only one that was whole before Jesus. I think I'm beginning to understand spiritually, the connection between suffering and need, and closeness to Christ. I think I'm beginning to rejoice in the needs the Lord allows in my life to keep my heart longing for Him. He deserves deep and sincere worship and praise.

Vs. 1-2 This is the cry for the Lord that made this worship very close and personal.

Vs. 3-4 This reminds me of Jesus' constant mentions to His disciples that as they prayed, they needed to forgive others. Here the psalmist is saying that he knows his own frailty and guilt before God.

Vs. 5-6 Waiting for the Lord is a very difficult show of trust and dependence on God. It is what God really wants.

Vs. 7-8 Now it is not just individual waiting, but the entire nation is to look to God and wait. Notice that there is a mention of *steadfast love* here. God keeps His covenant. Keeping His covenant with Abraham means that someday God will redeem the entire nation and save them. That is what we are reading in both Amos and Revelation. In the end, God will save and redeem. So, for now, we wait and hope.

Proverbs 29:21-22

There is a wide range of meaning for v. 21. Some translations say that if you pamper the slave, he will become rebellious. Given that v. 22 has a man of wrath who creates destruction, I would say that v. 21 is the opposite. Because of the kind treatment of the master, not only is the slave not rebellious, he becomes like a son. This is a good picture of Abraham and Eliezer of Damascus who was Abe's best servant and would have become the heir of all he had. It was this same godly Eliezer whom Abe sent to find a bride for Isaac.

He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length. Proverbs 29:21, KJV