

DECEMBER 12

You can celebrate today. You will finish Amos and in Revelation you will read the last letter that Jesus ever wrote to a church. This is a big day of big truths and amazing messages for disciples who have been left to follow Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Amos 7-9

Amos 7

Vs. 1-9 God gave Amos three visions.

What do you notice that is the same in the first two visions? The third vision provides a measure or standard of judgment.

God was willing to "repent" of His actions in the first two visions. That was mercy, and it showed His willingness to listen and to save. Yet He gave them a standard by which to measure the people. That was mercy too. They could have obeyed.

Vs. 10-17 This is an example of why God would judge the northern kingdom and why the plumb line wouldn't work to rescue them. In spite of God's willingness to show mercy, the leaders, as personified in this priest, would not listen. This looks like an example of what God said in Amos 2:11-12. Amos was a little guy compared to Elijah and Elisha, yet even those two great prophets were ignored by the leaders and people.

Often, the only thing that prophecy and miracles do is to show that God's actions of judgment are just.

Amos 8

Vs. 1-2 The vision was *a basket of summer fruit*, that is, the final fruit of the summer. This signified that the time of the end for the northern kingdom was coming. What is interesting to me, even as Amos told of these visions, there was grace mixed in. The final day of the northern kingdom would not come for another 60 years. For those with faith, they took this to heart, picked up and moved south. For those without faith, they stayed and died. What a God of patience and forgiveness.

The rest of this chapter is a description of God's judgment. I think that the upcoming earthquake from Amos 1:1 was about to happen. I don't know how you would break down the themes in this chapter, but I'd do it like this.

Vs. 3-8 Notice the two mentions of their oppression of the poor. Also, I think v. 9 is a reference to the upcoming earthquake. The imagery of this section makes you think of an earthquake.

Vs. 9-10 This might be the physical and the emotional state of things after the earthquake. It will certainly be the emotional mood of the country when it is overrun by the Assyrians.

Vs. 11-14 What is surprising here is the mention of God's silence. After everything that Elijah and Elisha did and said, then came Amos, Jonah and Hosea. The people were fed up with prophets. They would get their wish. God would stop talking. That might sound great for them, but in their need, it would be like turning out a light in a cave. Total darkness and loss of identity.

If you want to see a biblical, personal example of this, look at King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:6. After chasing David for ten years, after killing the priests of God and acting against God in every honest way, the still religious King Saul sought God in his need and God wouldn't answer. So where did Saul go to contact God? He went to a medium. Saul was totally confused and corrupt

in his heart and God was tired of throwing His pearls before swine. That is the same as what happened over the century God tried to help these people.

Amos 9

V. 1 This vision shows God standing beside the altar at Bethel, not Jerusalem. Notice again the earthquake imagery. It appears that God was about to destroy their buildings of worship in Bethel. It would still be 100 years before King Josiah would come and destroy the altar at Bethel.

Vs. 2-4 Just as there is no place to hide in an earthquake, there will be no place to hide from God. That is an obvious truth, and scary too. When God finally is moved to judgment, it is with focused determination.

Vs. 5-6 The God of creation can cause an earthquake. They should have believed that God could and would do this.

Vs. 7-8 The people should have been sons to God, but instead they made themselves foreigners to God.

Vs. 9-10 God would literally *shake the house of Israel*.

Vs. 11-15 So, Amos ends on a happy future note.

Vs. 11-12 We have seen references to David. Raising up *the booth of David* is to raise up his lineage and fulfill God's promise that a son of David will reign. That Son is the Messiah, who we are reading about in Revelation. The reference to *nations* gives me the sense that this is for the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 13-15 Verse 15 shows that the fulfillment of this will be when Jesus returns.

Revelation 3:7-22

Vs. 7-13 *To the church in Philadelphia.*

V. 7 Note how Jesus introduces Himself. The *key of David* seems to refer to Isaiah 22:22, referring to Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah receiving the stewardship and authority of David's house and possessions. In short, there were two men in authority under King Hezekiah. Shebna (Isaiah 22:15-19), who abused his position, misused Hezekiah's property and did not help the people or honor God as the Assyrians came against the city. Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah (Isaiah 22:20-25) was the opposite. Eliakim honored God, was faithful in his service to Hezekiah and he strengthened the people. Both looked good from the outside; in fact, without this passage from Isaiah, both of the men look like fine religious men, standing together to represent the king in the face of the arrogance of Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18:18-19. But one of these men was not faithful and the other was. This church in Philadelphia was fully faithful to Christ like Eliakim was to Hezekiah, to God and to His people.

Vs. 8-11 Notice that this was also a suffering church. They acknowledged the name of Christ and stood against the persecution of the *synagogue of Satan*. Apparently these synagogues of Satan were a franchise operation. There was also one in Smyrna which is extremely coincidental. You'll see why in a minute.

V. 10 Notice that they kept the Lord's Word. Keeping Jesus' Word is also mentioned in v. 8. The repetition is very significant. Keeping His Word is a mark of a disciple, as is acknowledging Jesus' name in the face of persecution. Also notice that Jesus says He loves them. I think this is what the fulfilling of John 14:21-23 looks like. In fact, keeping Jesus' Word and the world knowing Jesus has loved His disciples is woven throughout all of John 14-17. This is the first time I have ever fully noticed these verses in Revelation. Thank you Lord. (2014)

Now there is an aspect of this special church that goes beyond them and the first century. In saying they will be kept from the *hour of trial that is coming on the whole world*, it is saying

they will be kept out of the Tribulation. The Tribulation didn't happen during the time this church existed. So, this promise must be applied beyond them to give hope to faithful believers who are going through similar circumstances in the future.

But I have a couple of questions. First, what is important about this promise, since all believers, even disobedient ones, will be taken at the rapture before the Tribulation? Also, even if this promise is applied to that generation that lives just before the Tribulation, they would never know it because no one knows the hour the Tribulation will begin. And, we're not encouraged to guess. So how is this a promise that we can use?

I would say this is an assurance of truth for those who are suffering and enduring. I think this promise means more to those who are pursuing Christ in the harvest and paying the price. We have a lot of truth rattling around in our heads, but it doesn't become assurance for us until it is meaningful and helping us daily in our lives. In their suffering, Jesus tells them that judgment is coming, but they will be saved from it, never to enter into it. It is the daily reminder that they are the Lord's own. For those who are focused on Christ and the harvest, this truth holds them fast and helps them endure with a heart of hope and a perspective of God's purpose. Truth is meant to live in our hearts and inform our thoughts and actions every minute of every day. Jesus said, *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* (John 13:17) The blessing of knowing truth only comes from using it.

V. 11 That crown is awarded for endurance in suffering for Christ and His gospel. Again, the *coming soon* could be looked at from the perspective that a thousand years is as a day with God. Or, the word itself means that when the event begins, it happens very quickly, with focused determination. (Amos 9:2-4) This is an encouragement for this church and its people to hold on to their endurance. The ability to endure in Christ becomes a reward in itself. According to 2 Timothy 2:11-12, those who know Christ will live forever with Him, but those who endure suffering and persevere will reign with Him, probably during the Millennial Kingdom.

V. 12 So what is the reward here? How special would it be to be to receive a special commendation from the Lord? I think of what Gabriel said to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, in Luke 1:19, *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God."* Would that be important to us, to be one of those who stands in His presence? David's prayer in Psalm 27:4 was, *that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.* Would we desire that? Or are we fine with God when He's gone and we can do our thing with relative privacy, not always under His scrutiny? Obviously, in reality, what I just said is theologically impossible because God is always present, but we do not normally think being in God's presence would be the high point of our lives. For those who suffer, like David did, their desires are so focused on the love and compassion of God that He and His presence is all they want.

When the Twelve finally asked Jesus to teach them to pray, they could see that suffering was on the horizon. This time when Jesus told them about asking, seeking and knocking, He said the reward or answer in each of those actions would be the Holy Spirit, that is, the peace, joy and power of His presence. More than a specific answer to prayer, this is what His suffering disciples working in the harvest need.

Like the church in Smyrna, this was a suffering church that faced deadly persecution, that lived out the gospel in the harvest, testifying to the name of Jesus, and like Smyrna, "coincidentally" did not receive a rebuke from its Lord. The suffering purified their desires, hearts and vision.

Vs. 14-22 *The church in Laodicea.*

This church usually gets most of the attention when people think of the churches in Revelation.

V. 14 In a way this is a very unusual introduction. Jesus is everything this church wasn't.

Vs. 15-20 Notice here, there is no commendation. Like Sardis, they looked alive, but were dead. They, and everyone else, thought they could see, but were blind. They thought they looked good, but Jesus said they were naked. Many people see this church as representing this present age of the church. I don't think that ages are being talked about here, but we do have an abundance of churches today that look alive and are neither hot nor cold. Jesus' threat to spit them out of His mouth should be something that makes every church leader very humble and alert. But like these churches, they thought everything was fine. Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters.

V. 18 Jesus actually gives them counsel, to seek Him.

V. 19 Jesus wants them to humbly submit to His discipline, and to repent.

V. 20 Jesus wants them to hear His knocking and to open to Him. And you notice that this very famous verse is written to Christians. Notice too, that just like at Sardis, although the church is dead, Jesus is appealing here to individuals. So many Christians lament their church, but Jesus doesn't tell them to complain about the church or stage a mutiny. Rather, they are individually to hear His voice and to respond. That's how church renewal begins - people listening to Jesus and doing what He says rather than raising an unholy ruckus.

V. 21 Jesus came to the earth and went to a dead people. Yet, He was the only one who was truly alive, and heard and followed His Father. Some followed Him. In this respect, everyone who is in a place of death, whether a dead church, or among dead and lost in the harvest, yet, who hears Christ's voice and follows Him and His Word, is like Him.

I find it incredibly interesting that those who respond to Him, to renew the church in this context, will receive such an amazing reward. Imagine sitting with Jesus on His throne. Jesus loves His church. What a wonder it is to think that we would be conquerors, like He was a conqueror, that we would sit on His throne with Him. If I'm in the shop of "Jesus' Rewards," this is the one I'm looking at and putting everything I have on the counter, so that I can receive this from Him. In all of these church situations, Jesus gave the faithful something to strive after to help that particular church become healthy and re-enter the harvest, following Christ.

These are Jesus' final words to the church as it comes to the time of finishing its work in the harvest. Now, the church exits and the time comes for Israel to fulfill its mission to the world. Now the Son of God, the Messiah, the human ruler of mankind, the second Adam, the Son of Man, takes His seat at the right hand of God the Father and begins the judgment of the world. Only Christ, of all men, is worthy to rule and judge mankind, *...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.* (Isaiah 53:12)

Psalm 131

Vs. 1-3 In preparation for worship, David wrote this song for those walking up to Jerusalem. The song was for them to prepare their hearts, but what is cool is how God prepared David's heart to write this. Maybe the "key of David" was the hardship that "opened the door" and drove David to love the Lord and desire Him only.

Proverbs 29:23

Doesn't this sound like something that could flow right out of Psalm 131? So, how does God make us *lowly in spirit*? I think it comes from needing Him so badly that we finally see that we only really need Him.