

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.

- 2 The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is cast down upon her land; there is none to raise her up.
- 3 For thus saith the Lord Jehovah: The city that went forth a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went forth a hundred shall have ten left, to the house of Israel.
- 4 For thus saith Jehovah unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live;
- 5 but seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought.

QUERIES

- a. Who is "the virgin of Israel?"
- b. Why only 1/10th left in each city?
- c. Why is "Beer-sheba" mentioned in company with Bethel and Gilgal?

PARAPHRASE

Listen, O house of Israel, to this mournful funeral dirge which I have begun to chant over you! You were destined from the beginning to be kept inviolate from heathen invaders like a virgin is kept chaste, but you shall be ravaged and die a violent death and there will be none to save you. For the Lord God says, Every city of Israel which marches out to war will be so utterly destroyed that only a small remnant of people will survive in each city. Again, the Lord says unto Israel, There is still time—Seek Me and live; seek the idolatrous places and ways of Bethel and Gilgal, or make a pilgrimage to the idols at Beersheba, and you will go into captivity and become nothingness just as these idolatrous cities are to become!

SUMMARY

Amos wants to impress even more dramatically before Israel her headlong rush into ruin, destruction and captivity. He does so by setting before Israel Jehovah God as the Fountain head of life and the destiny of the centers of idolatry.

COMMENT

v. 1-2 . . . A LAMENTATION OVER YOU . . . THE VIRGIN OF ISRAEL IS FALLEN . . . Amos the prophet, on behalf of God, begins chanting Israel's funeral dirge. And this at the very apex of her prosperity! One

can surely visualize with what unpopularity Amos' preaching would be greeted in Israel! He is mocked, ridiculed and slandered as a preacher of "doom" and a pessimist. The phrase "virgin of Israel," is a "poetical personification of the population of a city or of a kingdom, as a daughter," with a further idea of being unconquerable expressed by the term "virgin." God had intended Israel's destiny to be one of separateness from the heathen world and as a result He would keep her inviolate from foreign invaders. Israel was to be pure, chaste, protected, untouched—but now she has played the harlot and she will be attacked, ravaged and brought to a violent end! For other figurative uses of "virgin" in this same sense see Isa. 47:1-2, etc. When God gives her up to be spoiled by foreign invaders there will be none to help her!

v. 3-5 . . . THE CITY THAT WENT FORTH A THOUSAND SHALL HAVE A HUNDRED LEFT . . . SEEK YE ME, AND YE SHALL LIVE . . . BUT SEEK NOT BETH-EL, NOR . . . GILGAL . . . BEER-SHEBA . . . Amos is not attempting to be mathematically precise when he predicts that only ten per cent of each city will be saved from total destruction, he is merely speaking figuratively (cf. Isa. 6:13) to say that only a very small remnant of the whole nation will be saved from utterly perishing. This was fulfilled exactly (cf. II Kings 17). Such total ruin would, of course, be the farthest thing from the minds of most of the people of Israel in these days of peace, luxury, prosperity and influence. Much like the people of the Roman empire just before its fall was the attitude of the people of Israel. We are fearful that there are many Americans who cannot see the danger signs in our generation—crime, government corruption, lewdness, selfishness, anarchy, and perversion of standards in almost every avenue of life from sex to art and music to law and order!

Yet God pleads with Israel once more. Seek Me, and live! Jehovah is the Spring of Life (cf. Jer. 2:13; Psa. 36: 10); He is longsuffering and does not take pleasure in the death of any of His creatures (cf. Ezek. 18:31-32; II Pet. 3:9). But Jehovah can only be sought and found through His revelation! They will not find Him at Bethel or Gilgal or Beersheba. These are centers of idolatry, false teaching, false worship; they will find there only ruin, destruction and captivity for that is what God has planned for these places! Beersheba, although in Judah the southern kingdom, is mentioned evidently because, being sacred to Jewish history (Gen. 21:33; 26:24; 46:1) it had been made into a place of idolatrous worship, to which people of the northern kingdom went on pilgrimages frequently.

Irresponsible conduct, whether within or without the religious structures of the day, cannot continue unabated without experiencing inevitable retribution. This is a moral law of the universe just as inevitable as any physical "law of nature!" If man will not hear the word of God warning of judgment in His revelation, it is only left for man to experience that judgment in history. Amos proclaimed that Israel was dead! The people did not know it, nor did they want to know it (7:10ff)! Although Israel continued to flourish for almost forty years after Amos' prophecy before national extinction came, yet, for all practical purposes, she was dead when Amos was preaching; thus he speaks of her future as if it were already present. Is it only extreme pessimism to say, "America is dead?" Could there be any parallel between Israel's condition and America's? If so, there must be a parallel looked for in their destinies! Perhaps it is not yet too late for America, even as it was not too late for Israel. Perhaps if America will seek Jehovah in His revelation—His word—she will find Him and live. Only let her not seek life in the many idols her people have made for there she will find only false teaching, false worship and death!

QUIZ

1. What is a "lamentation" and why did Amos begin one over Israel?
2. Why did he refer to Israel as a "fallen virgin?"
3. Why make a contrast between seeking Jehovah and Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba?
4. Could there be a parallel between Israel's condition and America's?

REVELATION CALLS FOR REPENTANCE— GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE AND OMNISCIENCE

TEXT: 5:6-13

- 6 Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour and there be none to quench it in Beth-el.
- 7 Ye who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth,
- 8 seek him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; (Jehovah is his name;)
- 9 that bringeth sudden destruction upon the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress.

- 10 They hate him that reproveth in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.
- 11 Forasmuch therefore as ye trample upon the poor, and take exactions from him of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink the wine thereof.
- 12 For I know how manifold are your transgressions, and how mighty are your sins; ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and that turn aside the needy in the gate from their *right*.
- 13 Therefore he that is prudent shall keep silence in such a time; for it is an evil time.

QUERIES

- a. What is turning justice to "wormwood"?
- b. What is turning the "shadow of death into the morning?"
- c. Why shall the prudent keep silence?

PARAPHRASE

Again I say to you, Israel, Seek the Lord and live or else He will leap like devouring fire through your nation and consume her, and none of the false gods of Bethel will be able to stop Him. You evil men who turn justice into a bitter pill for the poor and oppressed, righteousness is trampled into the dust by you; you had better seek the Great Creator, the Omnipotent One, who created the Seven Stars and the constellation Orion; He is omnipotent also in His government of the universe for He turns the deepest misery into prosperity and light or turns the bright day of prosperity into the dark night of adversity; He calls to the waters of the sea to pour themselves over the earth in terrible floods to judge the wicked and no strong man and no fortress can defy Him for He is the Omnipotent God, Jehovah! Any man who dares to stand for righteousness and justice is hated. You may have built great houses but you will not live in them; you may have planted pleasant vineyards but you will never enjoy even the first wine that is produced by them; all because you have oppressed the poor and unjustly extorted measurements of wheat from them as bribes for the evil judges. I am the Omniscient One and I know the multitude of your transgressions and the magnitude of your sins; you make war on those who want to be just, you pervert justice by taking bribes and you refuse to help those who are needy and seek redress of wrong. On account of this time of wide-spread moral corruption, the man who plays it smart will be silent since all speaking and warning brings persecution.

SUMMARY

God, through the prophet Amos, reveals the corruption of the Israelites thus displaying His omniscience and contrasts that with His omnipotence in creation and government. This adds force to the warning and the predictions of judgment.

COMMENT

v. 6 SEEK JEHOVAH, AND YE SHALL LIVE; LEST HE BREAK OUT LIKE FIRE . . . The prophet repeats his call to the people that Jehovah (which includes His Word for this is where He has revealed His person and His will) is their source of life. To turn to Him is the only alternative to inevitable destruction. If they do not seek Him (where He is supposed to be sought) He will "break out" like a fire, He will become a roaring inferno which will consume the whole nation of Israel (house of Joseph) and none of their false gods and false religious practices at Bethel will be able to stop the judgment; they are powerless, they are dumb (cf. Isa. 41:21-29; 44:6-20). He is omnipotent; He has the authority and power to grant life or He has the authority and power to take it away. Israel must choose the alternative course from the one she is now following if she would have life.

v. 7-9 YE . . . TURN JUSTICE TO WORMWOOD . . . SEEK HIM THAT MAKETH THE PLEIADES . . . AND . . . SHADOW OF DEATH INTO . . . MORNING . . . AND MAKETH THE DAY DARK WITH NIGHT . . . THAT CALLETH FOR THE WATERS OF THE SEA . . . THAT BRINGETH SUDDEN DESTRUCTION . . . Wormwood is a species of plant related to our western sagebrush. It was the oriental source of a much used oil obtained from the dried leaves and tops of the plant. Absinthe, a liqueur, the continuous use of which leads to mental deterioration and even death, derives its flavor from this oil (cf. Lam. 3:15, 19). The plant is a symbol of bitterness. The rich and powerful of Israel had perverted justice (that which is supposed to be sweet, pure, refreshing and vital) into bitterness and rotteness. They were wiping their feet on every semblance of right—they had trampled it down to the ground. It is difficult to imagine a society so corrupt. Yet history records other eras just as corrupt (e.g. last days of Roman empire; Dark Ages). In certain areas of our big cities justice is just as severely perverted. But again, the Lord appeals to the people on the basis of His omnipotence. Contrasted with their present condition of being in the darkness of sin, He, who made the starry heavens is able to turn their deepest misery into the glorious light of morning. He is also able to take what may appear to their sin-seared consciences as prosperity and turn it into a dark night

of adversity. This calls to our mind the sublime statement of God's sovereignty in Isaiah 45:5-7: "I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who do all these things." This passage is in a context where God, through Isaiah, is foretelling (by approximately 200 years before his birth) of the service Cyrus, future king of Persia, is going to render to God and His people! Blessing and curse both come from the Lord to serve His sovereign purposes—it is up to man to choose which he will have! Yes, He even commands the seas and the rivers and brings about the catastrophic floods with sudden destruction upon wickedness. Man will never build a fortress, a bomb shelter, or an underground command complex strong enough to withstand the hand of the Omnipotent God!

V. 10-12 THEY HATE HIM THAT REPROVETH IN THE GATE . . . YE HAVE BUILT HOUSES OF HEWN STONE, BUT YE SHALL NOT DWELL IN THEM . . . FOR I KNOW HOW MANIFOLD ARE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS . . . Now the omniscience of the Lord is revealed. He is not blind and deaf! He knows both the multitude and the magnitude of their sins. They despise anyone who takes a stand for righteousness and justice. The only persons they like are those who trample and oppress the poor and demand bribes for judgments. This reminds us of the words of Jesus, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world . . . therefore the world hates you" (Jn. 15:19). "Birds of a feather, flock together!" From their "blood money" they have built magnificent plantations—great houses and rich vineyards. How many tears and moans of the starving went into the ill-gotten gain of the rich and influential one can only guess! They have built them, but they shall not dwell in them—they shall not enjoy the harvest of their vineyards. The Lord will fulfill His threat (Deut. 28:30; Micah 6:15; Zeph. 1:13), for He *knows* the arrogance and evil of the rich and He hears the groans and supplications of the oppressed.

There are two false concepts the people had of Jehovah God. First, they believed He could be worshiped apart from His own revelation of Himself. Second, they believed that their conduct toward their fellow man had no bearing on their relationship to God. These are *exactly* the two main concepts John the apostle deals with in his First epistle, (cf. I Jn. 2:3-4; 2:9-11; 3:11-18; 3:19-24; 4:1-6; 4:7-12; 4:20-21, etc.). We must seek God, that is we must learn about Him,

obey Him and worship Him, only as we are guided by His revelation of Himself in His delivered Word. At the same time we must love men as He loves them. To turn aside the needy manifests a hatred of God regardless of how many worship rituals we may observe!

v. 13 THEREFORE HE THAT IS PRUDENT SHALL KEEP SILENCE IN SUCH A TIME . . . It is difficult for us to understand this as a divine injunction. In the light of Amos' actions in not remaining silent and the many exhortations in both Old and New Testaments toward speaking the Word of God against social injustices, we prefer to understand this as another of Amos' rebukes couched in irony and sarcasm. Some men may never know the reality of the suffering of the oppressed and poor because of their failure to take time to consider it as a real problem. Others do not know of it because they have forced themselves to ignore it, not wanting to be troubled with "the other fellow's problem." Humanity can be sure of this: God knows it, and in the long stretch of history will act to bring it to an end. A society built on injustice and fed on the sufferings of the oppressed can never stand.

The social and political situation had so deteriorated in the day of Amos that the "smart" man would either join the "establishment" or keep quiet. The same situation prevails in every generation. It even drifts into the religious society. The advice comes constantly, "Don't get excited, don't get carried away, don't become a fanatic or preacher of doom. Keep your nose out of it. Play it cool—be wise—keep your mouth shut. It's just best not to get mixed up in any way with things going on in these evil times!" But there is one who will not keep silent. God will not keep silent, for He has spoken once for all in the New Testament on such injustice and He has warned His people to speak out against it also. He will continue to speak if voices will rise up in this generation who are wise enough that they will not keep silent like Amos (cf. also Ezek. 33:1-16). Human personality cannot be abused for personal gain without Divine retribution. Let us pray that our generation learns this lesson from God's Book before it has to experience God's judgment!

QUIZ

1. What two alternatives are offered to the people of Israel by Amos?
2. What was the omnipotent God able to do with their wretched condition, if they repented? If they did not repent, what then?
3. How does God use "weal and woe"? Quote scripture proof!
4. Why does the world hate those who stand for righteousness?
5. What two false concepts did Israel have concerning Jehovah God?
6. What did Amos mean by ". . . the prudent will keep silent"?

RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS REPENTANCE— HATE EVIL AND LOVE GOD

TEXT: 5:14-20

- 14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be with you, as ye say.
- 15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice in the gate: it may be that Jehovah, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.
- 16 Therefore thus saith Jehovah, the God of hosts, the Lord: Wailing shall be in all the broad ways; and they shall say in all the streets, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful in lamentation to wailing.
- 17 And in all vineyards shall be wailing; for I will pass through the midst of thee, saith Jehovah.
- 18 Woe unto you that desire the day of Jehovah! Wherefore would ye have the day of Jehovah? It is darkness, and not light.
- 19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.
- 20 Shall not the day of Jehovah be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

QUERIES

- a. How is "seek good," parallel with "seek Jehovah?"
- b. What is the meaning of "wailing shall be in all the broad ways?"
- c. Why "Woe" unto all those who "desire the day of Jehovah?"

PARAPHRASE

Search after and do that which is good and refrain from doing evil in order that you may live. Then the Lord God of Hosts will truly be your Helper, as you claim He is. Outward religious formality is not enough, you must have a heart that abhors evil and loves good which brings about the establishment of what is right and just in social relationships. Perhaps even yet the Lord God of Hosts will have mercy on the small remnant which remains after the great chastening takes place upon Israel. As I have said before, says the Lord God of Hosts, All admonition to return to Me appears to be useless, therefore, there will be weeping and moaning for the dead up and down the streets of every village and city, every farmer will also be wailing for the dead

and there will be so much death and destruction lamentations will be chanted to those who are professional wailers themselves. And in the vineyards, where one would expect to see rejoicing, there shall be wailing. Jehovah no longer "passes-over" Israel but will have passed through the land in judgment just as He did in Egypt in the days of Moses. Alas for you who rest your hope of deliverance from the heathen upon what you think the Great Day of Jehovah will be! You do not know what you are asking for when you pray for the Day of Jehovah to come for it will not be a day of deliverance for you for you are no better than the heathen. It will be for you as it is for the heathen, a day of misery, darkness and doom. There will be no escape from it. In that day every place is full of danger and death; neither in-doors nor out-of-doors is anyone safe. God will not let you escape! How can you expect the Righteous Jehovah to bring upon those who seek evil and not good any kind of a Day but inevitable and absolute destruction and darkness?

SUMMARY

For a small remnant, godly living may avert the destruction that is surely coming. But for the majority, whose conception of the Day of Jehovah is perverted, God's judgment is inevitable and absolute.

COMMENT

v. 14-15 SEEK GOD, AND NOT EVIL, THAT YE MAY LIVE . . . HATE THE EVIL, AND LOVE THE GOOD, AND ESTABLISH JUSTICE IN THE GATE . . . Social injustice and the abuse of human personality ultimately stems from the concept that religion and morality are separate. This is a Satanic dichotomy! God has never authorized such a division! But man has, ever since Eden, been deceived into thinking that religion and everyday living are two separate compartments of life. True God-revealed and God-centered religion is Life. Practically all the prophets had to deal with this false concept (cf. Isa. 1:1-20; Micah 6:1-6, etc.). In this realm man makes either one of two errors—he either substitutes religion for morals or he substitutes morals for religion. God teaches through the prophets that all morality finds its roots, its spiritual source and its compelling power over the consciences of men in the character of God Himself, and that is true religion (cf. James 1:27). To seek God is to seek good; to love God is to love good and, conversely, to hate evil because God hates evil. Elton Trueblood has described our modern predicament as a "cut-flower society." That is, we are attempting to maintain an ethic without a religion. The

solution in Amos' day was, even as in our day, restoration of the "old paths" (cf. Jer. 6:16-21) and regeneration, *not* revolution. Social injustice cannot be corrected by simply renovation and reorganization of the social structure. Social injustice can only be overcome by upgrading the ethics of all men and this can be done only by regeneration, recreating men in the image of God, and this is accomplished by true religion which in turn involves submission to the authority of God as revealed exclusively in the written word of God!

The people of Amos' day were claiming that Jehovah was with them and that they were with Jehovah, but Amos knew that as long as they continued in their present evil deeds and thoughts their claims on God were vain and false. Their only hope was to turn to God and righteousness. Many of the Israelites had already gone too far and had set their minds against God. Amos was speaking to those few who would still listen. God's mercy was still available for the few who would "hate evil and love good."

The prophets did not preach reformation, but restoration and regeneration! They were not political revolutionaries or civil rights advocates, *per se*. They were preaching to change individuals, to call each man to repent and turn to God's revealed will for their lives. Society will never be changed except as men are changed! And men will never be changed until they are united with God through His revelation which has now been made in His Incarnate Son!

v. 16-17 . . . WAILING SHALL BE IN ALL . . . THE STREETS . . . AND IN ALL VINEYARDS . . . FOR I WILL PASS THROUGH THE MIDST OF THEE, SAITH JEHOVAH, Unless the sin of Israel was corrected, and Amos seems to feel the situation is almost hopeless for the largest segment of the nation, national destruction would be inevitable. Amos portrays the coming time as one of nation-wide mourning. There will be mourning in the squares and plaza's, in every street of every city, in the fields of the farmers and lamentations will be changed to those who are professional wailers themselves. Alas! Israel is no longer God's special people—she has become as heathen and as rebellious as Egypt in the days of Moses. God will no longer "pass-over" Israel, but will "pass through her midst" as He did Egypt with the plagues!

v. 18-20 . . . THE DAY OF JEHOVAH . . . IT IS DARKNESS, AND NOT LIGHT . . . On the Day of Jehovah, see our Special Study seven, pages 84 to 90, "The Day of The Lord." The Jews, from the Messianic prophecies of the Torah (Law of Moses), had interpreted the destiny of their theocracy to be that of eventual world rulers. On some

great Day of the Lord they believed God would deliver his people from all heathen oppression and bondage and elevate them to the supreme place of power and influence among the nations. They looked forward to this great Day (Malachi 2:17—3:5) when the Lord would come suddenly to His temple, the Messiah would be a warrior king who would appear as a political champion and military hero to rally to his standard the Jews from every nation and lead them in a victorious onslaught against their enemies. Heathen oppressors would be annihilated and God's elect race would become the world's conquerors.

H. E. Dana, in *The New Testament World*, pages 128-139 describes in full the Messianic Hope of the Jews (or what the prophets call "the Day of the Lord"). The divine choice of Israel was to the end that Jehovah might have a people who would establish his name in all the earth and make his Law supreme. Therefore the national interests of Israel were one with the cause of Jehovah. To oppose or oppress the chosen people meant to defy Jehovah and to disdain his righteous demands. They were God's specially chosen representatives among the nations, and considered that they should be treated as such. But, on the contrary, they were despised by the Gentiles, ruthlessly seized and consigned to bondage by one despotic conqueror after another, to be buffeted and maltreated in the most humiliating fashion. To the devout Jewish religionist this could only mean that Jehovah was keenly incensed at the heathen nations and regarded them as his own defiant enemies. The coming Day of the Lord (Messianic age) must in the very nature of the case bring the consummate destruction of the incorrigible and the humble submission of those who yielded to the Jewish state.

The truth of the matter was, the Day of the Lord would be a day of deliverance—but only for the true Israel, those who were Jews inwardly and not Jews only outwardly—for the Day of the Lord of which Amos speaks is typical and prophetic of the climactic Day of the Lord, the coming of the Messiah. When the Day of the Lord came of which Amos was speaking, God delivered the faithful remnant through which He could someday present the Messiah, while at the same time He judged those who were unfaithful and had therefore cut themselves off from covenant relationship with Him. For the most of the people of Israel, then, the Day of the Lord was "darkness and not light." It was a time of inescapable crisis, a time of inevitable judgment, a time when man would be abandoned by every known source of aid. Amos uses an almost humorous figure of speech in verse 19 to describe the inescapability of God's judgment!

RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS REPENTANCE 5:18-20

Having known oppression during practically all of her existence it seems only natural that Israel would have longed for a time of deliverance. No doubt, people passionately spoke of the way in which life would be vindicated, once the day of the Lord was manifested. But they did not realize what they were hoping for. The Righteous God does not change! He must judge every man who sins! He must execute every rebel!

Has not every individual and generation been guilty of reliance upon national and religious heritages instead of personal relationship to God? Should we not have some second thoughts about how ready we are for the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord to come? If God were to come in the consummation of all the ages today would we be ready? "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is . . . And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mark 13:31-37)

QUIZ

1. What did Isaiah and Micah have to say about the connection of religion and morality?
2. Why cannot the two be separated?
3. What is necessary in order to bring about true social justice?
4. What is the meaning of God "passing through the midst" of Israel?
5. What did Israel think the Day of Jehovah was?
6. What does Malachi say the Day of the Lord will be like?
7. How extensive may the Day of the Lord be?

RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS REPENTANCE— RID RELIGION OF HYPOCRISY

TEXT: 5:21-27

- 21 I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- 22 Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts.
- 23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
- 24 But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream,

- 25 Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?
- 26 Yea, ye have borne the tabernacle of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of god, which ye made to yourselves.
- 27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts.

QUERIES

- a. How can God hate feasts He commanded in the Law?
- b. Why the command to "take away . . . the noise of thy songs"?
- c. What are the "shrines of their images"? the "star of their god"?

PARAPHRASE

I thoroughly hate and despise your hypocritical observations of My feasts and I abhor your fake solemn assemblies. Furthermore, all the burnt-offerings and meal-offerings you offer are unacceptable and I will pay no attention to all the peace-offerings you make. You may as well stop all your noisy psalm-singing because I am not listening to the religious music you are playing. Because your worship is mere hypocrisy My righteous judgment will pour out and roll over the land like a flood. Just as in the wilderness when you hypocritically made sacrifices and songs and worship to heathen idols and heavenly bodies and called it worship to Me, so you are doing now! Because of this I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

SUMMARY

God's threatened judgment will not be averted by all their worship because even their worship is hypocritical.

COMMENT

v. 21-23 I HATE, I DESPISE YOUR FEASTS . . . TAKE THOU AWAY FROM ME THE NOISE OF THY SONGS . . . Amos is not denouncing Mosaic revelation and legislation any more than any other prophet did. The prophets emphatically advocated that the people of their day return to purified practice of Law of Moses. The prophets commanded that the Law be observed! Just two examples should be sufficient here to show this (cf. Jer. 26:4-5; Malachi 4:4). For further information on this, see Special Study No. eight, pages 91, 92. The prophets did *not*

institute some "revolutionary or evolutionary" new religion devoid of the Mosaic legislation! They came to call the people back to keeping the pure Law of Moses from the heart. What Amos *is* denouncing, as is plain from the context, is the perverted, hypocritical, idolatrous forms of religious ceremony these Israelites were then practicing. He is merely denouncing what practically all the prophets before him and after him denounced (cf. Isa. 1:11ff; Jer. 7:1ff; 6:20ff; Mal. 1:8ff). God is not only not pleased with this syncretistic (mixture of heathen and Jewish worship) religion, He hates it—it is an abomination to Him and vain and useless as far as the worshipper is concerned! Every sacrifice or offering made aroused in the heart of the All-Righteous and Perfectly-Holy God a divine hatred. The chanting of their religious psalms and the playing upon the harps was a weariness to God which He commands to be stopped. So, it was not that God hated the very feasts, offerings and songs He Himself had commanded in the Law—these ceremonies in themselves were not wrong. It was the perverse and rebellious nature of the people performing them that made them offensive to God. The people were hypocrites ("play actors"). They were worshipping Jehovah only in pretense while their real affections were centered on their idols and images. They were neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith (cf. Matt: 23:16-36). This same principle is true of those who claim to be covenant people of God today! Religious ritual, no matter how scripturally accurate it may be, will not substitute for loving God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength, and loving one's neighbor as one's self. If this principle is truly adhered to one will certainly make every effort to be scripturally accurate in ritual.

v. 24 BUT LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN AS WATERS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS AS A MIGHTY STREAM. This passage is usually interpreted, "Let an overflowing justice and righteousness between men take the place of your hypocritical dealings and sacrifices and flood the land." K & D say, "Because the Lord has no pleasure in this hypocritical worship, the judgment shall pour like a flood over the land . . . *Mishpat* (justice) is not the justice to be practiced by men; for although Jehovah might promise that he would create righteousness in the nation, so that it would fill the land as it were like a flood, He only demands righteousness generally, and not actually in floods." They further state, "The verse is to be explained according to Isaiah 10:22, and threatens the flooding of the land with judgment and the punitive righteous of God." Lange says, "Such worship, instead of averting the judgment, rather provokes its full execution. It should pour over the land, like a flowing stream. It

is wrong to interpret the verse as an exhortation to the people to practice judgment and righteousness. The image of a flood of waters is much too strong for such a thought; it points rather to an act of God." In spite of the weight of this scholarship there are those who interpret this passage as a command to the people, e.g. Laetsch, ". . . let judgment, God's norm, His Law . . . run down as water, spreading throughout the country, and righteousness, good works demanded by the Law . . . fill the nation like a mighty stream . . ." We believe the view of K & D and Lange best represent a correct contextual interpretation.

v. 25-27 DID YE BRING UNTO ME SACRIFICES . . . IN THE WILDERNESS . . . YEA, YE HAVE BORNE THE TABERNACLE OF YOUR KING AND THE SHRINE OF YOUR IMAGES . . . THEREFORE WILL I CAUSE YOU TO GO INTO CAPTIVITY BEYOND DAMASCUS . . . Amos asks a rhetorical question, that is, he asks a question for which he is going to supply the answer and which answer is already well known by his audience. Did the nation bring God sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years? Indeed they did, and just like in Amos' day they were, for the most part, hypocritical sacrifices to heathen idols while they called it worship to Jehovah! The Northern Kingdom had from its very origin adopted the idolatrous worship of calves as its national religion (1 Kings 12:26-28), a device of Jeroboam's own heart, and the history of the twelve tribes is a record of ever-repeated idolatry and rebellion against God. This tendency dated back to the early days of Israel's acceptance as God's covenant nation. It was only forty days after the solemn declaration of this covenant when Israel asked Aaron to make gods for them to go before them, and worshipped the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6). She did not cease to worship idols even after God's longsuffering and the intercession of Moses kept them from being exterminated (Ex. 32:7—34:11). Forty years later Moses warns them (Deut. 9:6-24) against idolatry, and twice in particular against that special form of idolatry with which Amos charges them here: the worship of the host of heaven, of sun, moon, and stars (Deut. 4:19; 17:2-3). Star worship was one of the earliest and most widespread forms of idolatry in Israel. The false gods worshiped by Abraham's ancestors in Ur of the Chaldees (Joshua 24:2) were astral deities. The "images" which Rachel had taken from her father (Gen. 31:30ff), and which were later buried by Jacob (Gen. 35:2ff) were teraphim, small statuettes of Ishtar. In Egypt, Israel was exposed to the danger of various forms of idolatry, among them worship of the sun-god Ra (also called Amon). So, by ancestry, by environment in Egypt, by the proximity of the Amorites and other nations addicted

to star worship during the wilderness wandering, and by their rebellious spirit (Ex. 32:9; Deut. 9:6; Ps. 95:10-11), the Israelites were inclined to star worship.

In the wilderness Israel carried the tabernacle ("tent") wherein they had Sakkuth, the Assyrian-Babylonian god identified with Saturn. Him they regarded as their "Moloch" (their "king or god"). This has no reference to the tabernacle of God legislated by Moses. Israel aped the heathen festival processions in which their star gods were carried about. The names used by Amos in verse 26 (Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god) may be an ancient as the idols, or he may be calling these ancient idols by the names current at his time. The sin remains the same, star worship. Stephen, in his famous defense (Acts 7:41ff), quotes from Amos here and states that because Israel refused to acknowledge and serve the true God as He had revealed Himself to them, God surrendered them in divine judgment to their self-chosen ways which could end only in ruin and damnation. The generation of Amos' day, in mixing idolatry with sacrifices done in the name of Jehovah, was just like the contemporaries of Moses, practicing idolatry and all the while claiming to be worshippers of Jehovah.

But the judgment of God shall overwhelm them like a flood and carry them off into slavery and bondage to a land far beyond Damascus. The precise location of their captivity is not yet revealed—it is reserved for Hosea to be the first to mention Assyria as the exact location (Hos. 9:3; 10:6; 11:5). Hosea also has a great deal to say about Israel's worship of idols (3:1; 4:12-13; 4:17; 6:10; 7:16; 8:4-5; 10:5-6; etc.). Hosea paints an even worse picture of degradation in the land as a result of its idolatry than was painted by Amos! The terrible consequences of rebellion against God grew steadily worse—injustice, crime, immorality of all degrees soon led to complete anarchy in the land. In 722-721 B.C. the ten tribes of the Northern kingdom were subjugated by the Assyrian king and the people were deported to Assyria never to return as a nation (II Kings 17:1-6).

QUIZ

1. Did the prophets seek to abolish the law and institute a new type of religion?
2. Why were their feasts and sacrifices and worship services offensive to God?
3. What is the meaning of "let justice roll down as waters . . .?"
4. Did Israel worship idols in the wilderness? Explain!