

threatened into silence at the very time when a prophetic voice is needed most. Here is to be found the acid test of preaching: Will a preacher speak for God in the face of adversity and hardship, even the threat of both job and life? Knudson has well observed: "Someone has said that there are two classes of preachers—the good preachers who have something to say, and the poor preachers who have to say something. But there is yet another and higher class. It consists of those who both have something to say, and who have to say it. Such are the prophets. Such a one was Amos." A poet has said it this way:

God give us men. The time demands
 Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and willing hands;
 Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
 Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
 Men who possess opinions and a will;
 Men who have honor; men who will not lie;
 Men who can stand before a demagogue
 And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking;

 Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
 In public duty and in private thinking!
 For while the rabble with their thumb-worn creeds,
 Their large professions and their little deeds
 Mingle in selfish strife; lo! Freedom weeps!
 Wrong rules the land, and waiting Justice sleeps.

by J. G. Holland

QUIZ

1. Why was Amaziah so excited about Amos' preaching?
2. Why would Amos' preaching at Bethel be particularly threatening to Israel?
3. What is a "son of the prophets?"
4. Name the specific judgments of God upon Amaziah and his family?
5. How does Amos furnish an example for preachers today?

CAUSES OF JUDGMENT PROPHESED— GOD'S LONGSUFFERING HAS EXPIRED

TEXT: 8:1-6

- 1 Thus the Lord Jehovah showed me: and, behold, a basket of summer fruit.

- 2 And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said Jehovah unto me, The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more.
- 3 And the songs of the temple shall be wailings in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah: the dead bodies shall be many; in every place shall they cast them forth with silence.
- 4 Hear this, O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail,
- 5 saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit;
- 6 that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat?

QUERIES

- a. How does a "basket of summer fruit" symbolize the end of Israel?
- b. What is the meaning of "casting them forth with silence?"
- c. How will the ephah be made small and the shekel great?

PARAPHRASE

Then the Lord showed me a vision a basket full of ripe fruit. He asked me, What do you see, Amos? And I replied, I see a basket of summer-ripe fruit. Then the Lord God said to me, So are my people Israel ripe for destruction. I will not defer their punishment again. The songs of joy which the people sing at their riotous feasts in their temple will be turned into weeping and wailing. There will be dead bodies by the thousands where God has cast them down in many places; there will be a deathly silence as those living are overwhelmed at the terrible judgment of God. Listen to this, you who greedily plan to devour the poor man's possessions. You who sigh with impatience for the legal holidays and days of religious worship to be over and done with so you can get on with cheating the poor. You cheat and rob the poor by using short measures and raising prices; you cheat by weighing merchandise on rigged scales; you cheat by selling for grain the sweepings from the floor of your graneries. All this you do to make the poor man so poor he cannot even pay for a pair of shoes and then he is forced to become a slave to his creditors.

SUMMARY

Israel is ripe for destruction. Why? Because of her rebellion against Jehovah and His Law and all that is righteous and just. God's judgment will terrify!

COMMENT

v. 1-2 . . . BEHOLD, A BASKET OF SUMMER FRUIT . . . THE END IS COME UPON MY PEOPLE . . . The prophet is given another vision. What he sees is symbolic of Israel's future. He sees a basket filled with summer fruit. There can be no doubt as to what it symbolizes for God Himself has given the interpretation. Just as a basket of summer fruit indicates the reaper has gone through the vineyard and that the time for growing and developing has ended so God the reaper has passed through Israel and her time has ended (cf. Isa. 18:5; Jer. 24; Hosea 9:10; Joel 3:13; Micah 7:1; Nahum 3:12; Rev. 14:15, 18). "The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20), could be written over the palaces and homes of Israel! Their last opportunity has come and gone according to the vision given to Amos. Most certainly there comes a time (known only to God, of course) when God's longsuffering runs out. His Spirit will not always strive with man (Gen. 6:3). It was revealed to Amos that this terrible moment was about to come to Israel.

v. 3 . . . THE SONGS OF THE TEMPLE SHALL BE WAILINGS IN THAT DAY . . . DEAD BODIES SHALL BE MANY . . . THEY CAST THEM FORTH WITH SILENCE. When that terrible day of the Lord shall come the songs of frivolous joy and merriment sung in their temples (plural in Israel) will be turned into howling shrieks of mourning; they will be weeping and wailing instead of laughing and singing. There will be cries of terror, fear; tears of mourning for the multitudes of dead bodies cast out in many places. Then after the first expressions of mourning there will come the awed silence born of the overwhelming severity of the judgment of God they experience (cf. Zeph. 1:7; Hab. 2:20; Zech. 2:17). There will be the furtive whispers and glances as they literally feel the omnipotent wrath of God in their very presence.

v. 4-6 HEAR THIS . . . YE . . . THAT . . . SWALLOW UP THE NEEDY . . . SAYING, WHEN WILL THE NEW MOON BE GONE, THAT WE MAY SELL GRAIN . . . MAKING THE EPHAH SMALL . . . AND SELL THE REFUSE OF THE WHEAT? Israel is a nation of greedy profiteers, "Swallowing up the poor." The original text pictures the rich "panting" after the poor man and his possessions like a wild beast pants for its victim. The greedy rich harassed the poor and literally "stalked" them. The rich merchants and officials could barely wait while they punctiliously performed religious holidays until they could get back to cheating the poor and powerless. As far as the rich were concerned they only went through the motions of observing religious holidays for the sake of expediency. It helped them maintain control in governmental

affairs and gave them a show of being religious. That was as far as religion went in their lives. When they got to their houses of merchandise or judgment seats it was "do the other man before he has a chance to do you."

The *Chodesh* (the new moon) was a holiday on which all trade was suspended just as it was on the Sabbath (cf. II Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13; Hos. 2:13). (For regulations concerning the Sabbath day see Exodus 20:9-10).

The *ephah* (in dry measure) is about $\frac{3}{5}$ of a bushel. The *shekel*, in Amos' day, was probably a hunk of crude, shapeless precious metal, heavy enough so as to approximate the value of the item purchased in actual weight. The buyer usually weighed his "money" to the seller. The Jewish *shekel* was such a weight (*shekel* literally means weight). Among the Jews the shekel was used for the temple tax, poll tax, and for redemption from the priesthood (Ex. 30:11-16; 13:13; Num. 3:44-51). Most historians believe that the earliest money pieces, as such, were struck about 700 B.C. in the small kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor. So in Amos' day they were probably still using *shekels* as weights. In Jesus' day, of course, the shekel was struck in coin form and the value of a shekel then was worth about a day's wages. Now we can begin to see that if the greedy merchants made the ephah basket smaller than usual and increased the weight of the shekel over what it usually was then they were robbing the poor unmercifully. Not only that but they were using scales upon which to weigh grain that were "rigged." Furthermore, they were selling the chaff for wheat. The poor were being robbed so thoroughly that they did not even have enough to pay the very smallest debt (a pair of shoes). The poor debtor would either have to sell himself to his creditor (Lev. 25:39) or wait for the courts (which were also unjust) to hand him over to his creditor for enslavement.

Honeycutt says, "One of the most frighteningly disturbing events upon which an individual can contemplate is 'the end.' Whether it be the end of human existence as known in this life, the end of the cosmos as often stressed in some eschatological forecasts, or the end of an era of vitality for an institution; 'the end' is never a pleasant topic of conversation. Consideration of its reality is intensified in its sense of dread, however, when one comes to understand that 'the end' is not just a future event . . . Amos anticipated this when he spoke of the end as having already come upon Israel. The end of the nation had been so firmly fixed that he viewed it as already achieved. The nature of her character and her reaction to God had been such that Amos could speak of the end of Israel as a present reality."

When current political and religious structures and behaviours are examined, one often has this same feeling concerning the present reality of the end. The seeds of dissolution and destruction have been sown in both political and religious life and the end seems to be upon us now! It seems as though the end has already come!

In the case of Israel social injustice as a principle of life and conduct was cited as characteristic of a nation of whom it could be said "the end has come." We firmly believe that whether it be ancient Israel embroiled in the problems of the eighth century B.C. or contemporary America, the principle is the same. Social injustice as an accepted fact of life will bring about the destruction of any society, ancient or modern. The same is true of the manifestations of superficiality in religion.

QUIZ

1. How are we to interpret the figure of the basket of summer fruit? Why?
2. How severe will be the judgment of God upon Israel?
3. How were the rich cheating the poor?
4. Could Israel's destiny be a lesson for contemporary society? Why?

DESCRIPTION OF JUDGMENTS PROPHESED—BITTER MOURNING

TEXT: 8:7-10

- 7 Jehovah hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.
- 8 Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? yea, it shall rise up wholly like the River; and it shall be troubled and sink again, like the River of Egypt.
- 9 And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.
- 10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sack cloth upon all lions; and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

QUERIES

- a. Why speak of the land "rising like the River?"
- b. Did the Lord actually cause the "sun to go down at noon?"
- c. Why and how is the Lord to bring "baldness upon every head?"

PARAPHRASE

Jehovah has sworn that just as surely as He is held up to be the pride and glory of Israel, He must punish Israel's inglorious sin. Every evil work she is guilty of will be punished for the Lord does not forget any sin not repented of. Yes, the whole nation will be shaken and there will be mourning everywhere. The judgment of the Lord will overwhelm the land like the River Nile at flood stage and the nation will rage like a flood with great trouble and destruction and then sink into nothingness. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that I will cause Israel's "sun to go down at noon," that is, I will take away the sunlight of her prosperity and bring suddenly upon her the darkness of destruction right at the midday of her existence. And I will turn this nation upside down by turning your festivals into times of mourning and all your gay, frivolous songs will be turned into wailing, despairing cries of lamentation. I will cause the whole nation to put on their mourning clothes and shave their heads bald in mourning custom. Your mourning will be very great and very bitter—like the mourning of those whose only son has died.

SUMMARY

The Lord's judgment upon the unmitigated sin and rebellion of Israel will be very severe. The Lord is going to overwhelm the land with a flood of judgment. He is going to turn everything upside down.

COMMENT

v. 7-8 JEHOVAH HATH SWORN . . . THE LAND TREMBLE . . . IT SHALL RISE UP . . . LIKE THE RIVER . . . AND . . . BE TROUBLED AND SINK AGAIN . . . The scene changes. The "worm is turned." From a description of the sinful state of Israel, we are brought abruptly to a description of the Lord's terrible judgment. Jehovah is the pride of Jacob (Israel), (cf. I Sam. 15:29). Jehovah is the One in whom Israel gloried. And, as surely as Jehovah is the glory of Israel He is also her Judge. He must judge her sins. Leaving Israel's sins unpunished would be denying His glory. Amos paints, with figurative language, a terrifying picture of God's judgment. The nation will tremble with fear as the judgment of the Lord floods over it. The nation shall be troubled and rage within like the torrents of the flooding Nile River swelling over her banks, inundating and destroying everything in its path. Then Israel, subdued, will sink down. Some commentators think Amos is likening the behaviour of the earth's surface during earthquakes which God sent in judgment upon Israel to the rising and falling of the Nile. It would seem to us that what is to happen to Israel here is to cover

the entire length and breadth, or the whole population, and thus too extensive for a literal earthquake. We take his language to be figurative.

v. 9-10 . . . I WILL CAUSE THE SUN TO GO DOWN AT NOON . . . TURN YOUR FEASTS INTO MOURNING . . . BRING . . . BALDNESS UPON EVERY HEAD . . . AS A BITTER DAY. Since this would be such an extraordinary phenomenon if it happened literally, we would expect it to be historically noted by the prophet. Inasmuch as it is not we take it to be figurative. K & D say, ". . . to any man the sun sets at noon, when he is suddenly snatched away by death, in the very midst of his life. And this also applies to a nation when it is suddenly destroyed in the midst of its earthly prosperity." Jesus said, "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (Jn. 9:4). Israel, at ease in Samaria and Bethel, riding on a wave of material and political well-being, was at the midday of her existence. It is doubtful that she enjoyed such prosperity even in the days of David and Solomon. But, when Israel thought it was noontime, God knew that her sun had set. God was about to turn this superficial brightness into what it really was, darkness, judgment, bitterness. Indeed, instead of the air of festivity and gaiety Jehovah was about to bring mourning, lamentation and bitterness. Their religious and social festivals would cease and their gay, suggestive, idle songs would be turned into doleful, sorrowful wailing. We have seen this happen in our own generation. The Great Third Reich of Adolph Hitler was turned from the bright sunlight of its midday into the blackness of utter defeat and destruction. The gay, martial songs and festivities of the early days of the Third Reich were turned into wailing and tears. Sackcloth was the dress of mourning. Baldness produced by shaving the head was done as a mark of mourning for the dead (cf. Lev. 21:5; Isa. 15:2; 22:12; Micah 1:16). Grief and mourning was to be so widespread as to be almost total. It would be very deep grief, like the grief of mother and father mourning the death of an only son. God's judgment would be long and bitter.

QUIZ

1. Why does the title, "the excellency of Jacob," mean that Jehovah must judge Israel for her sins?
2. Why is the language to be interpreted figuratively which speaks of "the land rising like the River . . . ?"
3. What is the meaning of the figure, "the sun to go down at noon . . . etc?"
4. What parallel to verse 10 have we witnessed in our own generation?

DESCRIPTION OF JUDGMENTS PROPHESIED—SPIRITUAL FAMINE

TEXT: 8:11-14

- 11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jehovah.
- 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it.
- 13 In that day shall the fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst.
- 14 They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, As thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, As the way of Beer-sheba liveth; they shall fall, and never rise up again.

QUERIES

- a. When did this "famine" of the words of Jehovah occur?
- b. Why would they "run to and fro" to seek the word of Jehovah?
- c. Who is the god of Dan?

PARAPHRASE

Listen, the time is coming very soon when I am going to send a spiritual famine upon this land. People will be starving to death for God's Word—not physical food. People will be dying of thirst for the living water. And they will stagger all over the earth, running hither and yon to find a consoling word from Jehovah but they will not find it. Even young women and young men in the vigor of youth, the strongest and best equipped to stand adversity will grow weak and pant for the living water of Jehovah's Word. Those who put their trust in the calf-gods of Israel like the one located at Dan and those who make pilgrimage to Beersheba to engage in idolatrous worship shall fall never to rise again!

SUMMARY

One aspect of God's judgment will be the spiritual famine resulting from Israel's rebellion. When the flood of judgment comes, however, the people will desperately seek for the bread of life, the word of God. Their impotent gods and worship will not supply them with the food they need.

COMMENT

v. 11-12 . . . I WILL SEND A FAMINE IN THE LAND . . . OF HEARING THE WORDS OF JEHOVAH . . . THEY SHALL WANDER FROM SEA TO SEA . . . AND SHALL NOT FIND IT. They had forbidden God's true prophets to bring to them the Word of the Lord (Amos 2:12). They refused to know His Word (cf. Isa. 1:3; II Chron. 15:3; Jer. 5:4). Hosea, a younger contemporary of Amos, describes the spiritual poverty of the nation in its death throes. He writes, ". . . the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children," (cf. Hos. 4:1, 6). This famine of the word of Jehovah began when Israel rejected the law and grew worse until God took them into captivity where they had no prophets to declare to them His word, (cf. Ezek. 3:26; 7:26). God turned away from Israel when He took them to the land of the Assyrians and caused the word of prophecy to cease. Chrysostom says, "God did not speak to them through the prophets; He breathed not upon them the Spirit through which they spake. He did not appear to them, but is silent and hidden. There was silence, enmity between God and man."

In death, destruction and in exile from the land of their fathers, crushed by their oppressors, hearing only of gods more cruel than the heathen who make them, they will "run to and fro," they will suffer a famine of truth, they will hunger and thirst for the God of Israel and some word from Him of His care for them and His fulfillment of the covenant made by Him, but they shall not find it. Hosea tells how the people of Israel, just before their downfall, sought revelation from idols, "My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God" (Hos. 4:12). Jerome writes, "Such is the present condition of the Jews. They roam in restless vagrancy about the world and seek the word of God; but they find it not, because they have killed the incarnate Word revealed in the written word."

To those of Amos' day and to those in every generation who reject the Word of God for some other philosophy, the message is the same. Inevitably, there will come the time when a word from God will be sought for like starving men seek for food. One writer warns, "Try to imagine all the influence of religion taken out of your life. In trouble, sickness, loneliness, failure, try to imagine yourself cut off from God.

This is what Amos prophesies . . ." Think of the nations, Russia—China, etc. which have rejected the word of God and remember how desperately hungry some within those enslaved lands are for the word of the Lord. In Moscow when Gene Dulin was asked to preach at the Russian Easter Sunday afternoon service, the minister said, "Give a powerful sermon on the resurrection!" Think of the ignorance, poverty and backwardness of the many nations where there has been a famine of the word of God or where His word has been kept secret by heretical priests and churches. Think of our own country where men are running to and fro preaching one panacea after another which are all doomed to failure because in large segments of this land there is a famine of the word of God!

v. 13-14 . . . FAIR VIRGINS AND THE YOUNG MEN FAINT FOR THIRST . . . THEY THAT SWEAR BY THE SIN OF SAMARIA . . . SHALL FALL, AND NEVER RISE AGAIN. Even young women and young men, in the vigor of youth, the best equipped to withstand these adverse conditions, will grow weak and hunger and thirst for some voice of authority and promise of help from Jehovah. It is true even today! Thousands and thousands of young people across our land, disillusioned and starved to death on the garbage of the contemporary intellectualism are "running to and fro" seeking a voice of authority, a sane standard of conduct, a life which consists of more than "things." But, because the "intelligentsia" of our world have, for the most part, rejected the word of the Lord, our young people "faint for thirst."

In Israel, in Amos' day, the people were swearing by (putting their trust in) the golden calf which they worshipped at Dan and Bethel. They believed that all their prosperity, like that of their heathen neighbors, was due to their worship of these idols and other idolatrous forms of worship made toward Jehovah at Beersheba. In our day, we are no better! Israel worshipped the golden calf only because she was sure her prosperity came through this. We worship science because we are sure our prosperity comes through it. Anthony Standen, in his book, *Science Is A Sacred Cow*, says, "What with scientists who are so deep in science that they cannot see it, non-scientists who are too overawed to express an opinion, hardly anyone is able to recognize science for what it is, the great Sacred Cow of our time." Yes, we have rejected the Word of God which reveals to us the True Source of both material and spiritual well-being, for our own Sacred Cow—science! We have our own Bethels, Dans, and Beershebas—our own priests and our own oracles. And if we continue to worship there and seek guidance there, WE SHALL FALL, AND NEVER RISE AGAIN!

QUIZ

1. What were the conditions of Israel in relation to spiritual knowledge of God in the days of Amos and Hosea?
2. When did God take His word away from Israel finally and completely?
3. Is the prophecy, "they shall not find it" still being fulfilled in the unconverted Jews today?
4. How does this section of Amos have relevance for our generation today?

DESCRIPTION OF JUDGMENTS
PROPHESED—THOROUGH
AND INESCAPABLE

TEXT: 9:1-6

- 1 I saw the Lord standing beside the altar: and he said, Smite the capitals, that the thresholds may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the Sword: there shall not one of them flee away, and there shall not one of them escape.
- 2 Though they dig into Sheol, thence shall my hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.
- 3 And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and it shall bite them.
- 4 And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good.
- 5 For the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts, is he that toucheth the land and it melteth, and all that dwell therein shall mourn; and it shall rise up wholly like the River, and shall sink again, like the River of Egypt;
- 9 it is he that buildeth his chambers in the heavens, and hath founded his vault upon the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Jehovah is his name.

QUERIES

- a. Why does the Lord specify the smiting of the "capitals"?
- b. How may it be said that the Lord brings evil upon anyone?
- c. What is the Lord's "vault" upon earth?