

WHY DID GOD JUDGE ISRAEL?

TEXT: AMOS 3:9-15

Introduction:

1. Amos 1 & 2 deal with God's judgment upon the nations, including Israel and Judah. From 2:6 till the end of the book of Amos, the focus is on Israel.
2. We noted last week that Israel sinned against great light and privilege. Therefore her punishment would be certain because God's special favor aggravated rather than exempted her from impending judgment (3:1, 2).
3. The Bible teaches that greater light brings greater responsibility.
4. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matt. 11:23).
5. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47, 48).
6. God judged Israel more severely than the other nations because of her privileged position – "therefore..." (3:2).
7. In Amos 3:1-8, the LORD asks Israel several questions, meant to awaken conviction. Now beginning at verse 9, the Lord continues to warn Israel of impending judgment, specifically the invasion from the north by the Assyrians (cf. 3:11).

I. ISRAEL'S SIN WAS SO BLATANT THAT EVEN THE HEATHEN WERE INVITED TO WATCH HER PUNISHMENT (3:9).

1. God wanted Israel's neighbors, Philistia and Egypt, to watch His wrath come down upon Israel (3:9).
2. Ashdod (3:9) is representative of all of Philistia. (Just as "Washington" represents the USA.)
3. Ashdod was the most important (cf. 1:8) of the five cities of the Philistines (the others were Ekron, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Gath). Ashdod housed the Temple of the Philistines dedicated to the idol Dagon.
4. Israel's idolatry was so bad (3:14) that even the idolatrous Philistines and Egyptians were notified that her time of judgment would soon arrive.
5. These nations were instructed to assemble themselves "upon the mountains of Samaria," and to "behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and the oppressed in the midst thereof" (3:9).

6. “The great tumults” were occasioned by Israel’s oppression of the poor (cf. 2:6-8).
7. Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, was built on a mountain. In I Kings 16:24, we are told that wicked King Omri bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.
8. Omri’s son, King Ahab, was even more wicked than his father. First Kings 16:32 says, “And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.”
9. Samaria was built on a mountain, and there were other mountains surrounding the city as well. From these mountains, people could watch and see how wicked the people of Israel had become and why God had to judge them.
10. One preacher said God “intended to turn the whole area into an amphitheater,” and He “invited the pagan nations to behold the spectacle of Israel’s punishment” (John Phillips, *Exploring the Minor Prophets*).

II. SIN BLINDED THEIR ABILITY TO DISCERN RIGHT FROM WRONG (3:10).

1. “Do right” (3:10) means to walk straight, not crooked (cf. 2:11, 12). Israel had been doing wrong for so long they could no longer tell right from wrong.
2. Isaiah 5:20, 21 says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”
3. This describes the situation here in America today. Homosexuality is called good, but opposition to homosexuality is called evil. Abortion is called good, but opposition to abortion is called evil.
4. President Obama recently signed an executive order lifting the ban on federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research. The news media and worldly scientists and doctors and politicians say this is great news. Now our tax money will be used for this research.
5. However, the problem is not necessarily with the research, but with the method by which the researchers obtain the stem cells from embryos. The only way to harvest these cells is by killing the embryo.
6. An embryo is simply a baby in its early stages of development. Pro-abortion people (most liberals) have no problem with killing babies before they are born. But those of us who consider abortion murder do have a problem with it. It is wicked.

7. But most news reports overlook these moral and ethical problems, and focus on the alleged benefits of the research (3:10). They will invariably quote some ungodly movie star or Nancy Reagan, or some other celebrity who supports embryonic stem-cell research, as if that is all that matters.
8. Jeremiah 4:22 says, “For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish (silly) children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

III. THE PEOPLE WERE SELF-INDULGENT

1. All they cared about were their own appetites and selfish desires (cf. 6:1). Amos was a herdman (cf. 7:14), and he was appalled at their self-indulgence.
2. The palaces of Samaria were full of things gained by violence and robbery (3:10b). But God is not mocked. The Bible says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).
3. The very palaces which stored up plunder would in turn be plundered (3:11). “An adversary” (3:11), i.e., Assyria would come and plunder Samaria, and take the ten northern tribes into captivity (cf. II Kings 17). Soon it would be all over for Israel.
4. The reference to “the corner of a bed” and “a couch” (3:12) indicates their careless ease and luxury. They were living selfishly in extravagance and self-indulgence.
5. The reference to Damascus (3:12) might mean that at the time of the Assyrian invasion, Damascus was under the control of Israel. Second Kings 14:28 says, “Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered Damascus, and Hamath, which belonged to Judah, for Israel, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?”
6. God’s judgment was directed at Israel’s self-indulgence, materialism, and idolatry (3:13, 14). In Bethel, backslidden Israelites were worshipping golden calves (cf. I Kings 12:28-33).
7. “The horns of the altar” (3:14) symbolized power, and were sacred to the Israelites. Leviticus 4:30 says, “And the priest shall take of the blood thereof with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering” (cf. I Kings 1:50, 51; 2:28).
8. Amos, chapter 3 concludes with God promising to “smite the winter house with the summer house.” Wealthy, pampered Israelites owned both winter houses and summer houses. They were very materialistic and had no time for God.

9. Doesn't this sound like many Americans today? During the presidential race last fall, a reporter asked Senator McCain how many houses he owned and he said he owned so many he didn't even know.
10. That is true of many politicians and professional athletes and movie stars and business tycoons, etc.
11. People acquire many homes and great wealth, but they do not support the work of God (cf. Haggai 1:2-5).
12. "And the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD" (3:15b).
13. First Kings 22:39 says wicked King Ahab built himself an ivory house.

CONCLUSION:

1. Amos' strong preaching was not popular. Israel was prosperous. They seemed to be very well and they resented his message of repentance.
2. Israel had a big army. Their walls were fortified and had big iron gates. The people thought their country was invincible but within 40 years (40 represents judgment) Israel was invaded by the Assyrians. Then it was all over for Israel.
3. The area was populated by foreigners from far-off captive regions. This intermarriage policy produced the Samaritan people, who were a mixture of both Jewish and heathen.
4. Today proud Samaria is desolate and in ruins
5. Amos said, "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (3:8).