
Judgment from the Sovereign Lord

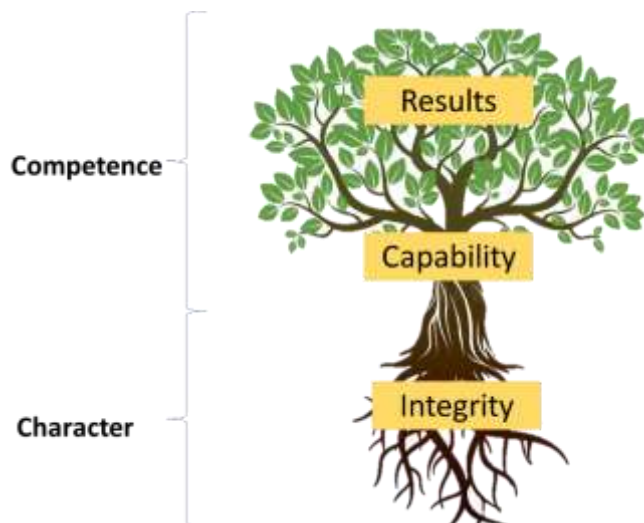
Amos 3:1-15

Karl Marx said that religion is the 'opium of the people'. Religion was significant, but essentially a psychological illusion that people created and needed to explain their lives. In his view, it had wonderfully been adapted to exploiting the masses.

Marxism, after a decline in the public space, has now arisen again through the Critical Race Theory and through movements attached to it like the woke community and BLM. These are self-proclaimed in their views that what Marx taught in principle must now be used to interpret the world. In principle, Marx taught that one group in society will always oppress another group. Since that is so, then this lens is to be held up and used to interpret history and our present situation. CRT, as the current expression, sees the conflict in society now is being the oppression of minority people, race, color, gender preference, by the majority white. Thus, the white majority have a privileged place and life in society.

God's Word knows nothing of such a viewpoint. The Scriptures denounce false religion and self-worship as a kind of 'opium' with which men and women anaesthetize themselves against the conscience-piercing claims of Jesus Christ. Scripture makes clear that the deeper meaning of the movements of history can only be found in the Word and will of God. The truth is that God is sovereign and that, in the New Testament era, the Lord Jesus Christ exercises his messianic kingship over all things.

This truth of the sovereignty of God over all things is the foundation of Amos' preaching in chapter 3. But to get there, we need to think carefully about how we ought to handle the Word of God.



Handling God's Word is not merely a matter of ability. It is not merely a skill. Biblical competency is rooted in godly character. High competency in the service of weak or poor character is dangerous. It will be persuasive towards error and false teaching.

Therefore, the Bible is always connecting the character of the teacher and preacher with the truth or error they are promoting. This is what is most disconcerting about many promoting CSJ and CRT. Even if they are deceived, they are still responsible for their character and competency in handling the Word.

God's Judgment is Certain (v.1-8)

Hear, listen. God will punish for sins.

3 Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:

² "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

Its Firm Target (v.1)

God has promised judgment for the nations. He has sent Amos to prophesy judgment against Israel, the ten northern tribes. Judah, the two southern tribes will also receive the coming judgments.

Now, who is God talking to? He is talking to both Israel and to Judah. He is talking to all the people, the nation that He rescued, He redeemed from Israel.

Its Surprising Reason (v.2)

Why is God speaking like this? God is speaking like this because He has a special relationship with them. Because of this relationship, God is going to deal with them. He will punish them for all their iniquities.

Its Penetrating Questions (v.3-6)

There is a sure and certain coming disaster.

³ "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?

⁴ Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out from his den,
if he has taken nothing?

⁵ Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth,
when there is no trap for it?

Does a snare spring up from the ground,
when it has taken nothing?

⁶ Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?
Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

Now we know who the roaring Lion is and who will be His prey.

What is the point of these questions? Each one is rhetorical. They expect an, "Of course not" response. They begin in natural things and circle in on Israel and Judah moving toward the Divine. These are leading up to the final question: Does the disaster come to the city unless the Lord has done it? The answer, "No."

But each question also confronts Israel with God's piercing resolve.

Israel has chosen not to walk with God, hasn't she (v.3)?

Israel has already been taken by God, hasn't she (v.4)?

Israel is already ensnared in the traps God has laid for her, isn't she (v.5)?

Israel has clearly been warned, hasn't she (v.6a)?

Do you think there is anyone else behind the disaster about to befall Israel? It is a sovereign God who is on the move, on the hunt, who is bringing the disaster, isn't He (v.6b)?

Its Unmistakable Warning (v.7-8)

⁷ "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

⁸ The lion has roared; who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?"

God always warns that judgment is coming. He reveals His secret plans to His prophets. God sends the preaching of His Word before He deals with the sins of His people.

When the Lord speaks, the prophet must speak. The Word from God compels the prophet. The Word of God compels the preacher.

God's Judgment is Prophesied (v.9-12)

God generally does not ambush people. He usually warns them of what He is about to do.

It is Announced to the Nations (v.9-10)

Israel's judgment is announced to the surrounding nations.

⁹ Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod
and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt,
and say, "Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria,
and see the great tumults within her,
and the oppressed in her midst."

¹⁰ "They do not know how to do right," declares the Lord,
"those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds."

In a bit of imagery, Egypt and Philistia are summoned to Samaria. There, in a gathered assembly, they will hear the preaching of Israel's prophets and will see the evils in Israel. Israel thinks of herself as morally superior to the nations around her. But God is about to expose her to all. The nations will now be witnesses against her.

But the situation is worse than that. Israel is clueless. They don't know how to do what is right. They have become so steeped in their lifestyle of violence and theft that they simply have lost all moral compass. Yet they think of themselves as living in a fortress, a place of safety from the nations and ultimately, from God Himself.

It is Asserted to Israel (v.11)

¹¹ Therefore thus says the Lord God:
"An adversary shall surround the land
and bring down your defenses from you,
and your strongholds shall be plundered."

But there is no defense against God. He will bring an enemy up against Israel. That enemy will surround her fortresses. Where Israel has gone for safety has now become a trap for them. The enemy will slowly bring down the walls and destroy the defenses.

A Remnant will be Rescued (v.12)

What a strange and curious statement this is.

¹² Thus says the Lord: "As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.

What does this grotesque picture mean? Why does the prophet compare Israel's judgment with the pieces of a sheep retrieved by the shepherd? In Exodus 22:13 there is a provision for a man who has lost an animal entrusted to his care by a neighbor (lost it, that is, to a wild animal) to 'bring the remains as evidence' so that he would not have to pay compensation to the owner. He was thereby cleared of any suspicion that he had sold the animal. (Keddie, p. 54).

So, God will save, will rescue a remnant for Himself. They will be a witness vindicating God's judgment.

The remnant that will return to the land will be a witness that God is faithful to His Word and to His people. He may chasten. But He will not forsake them.

The remnant of Jews that are saved in the New Covenant become a testimony to the sovereign plan of God. While the nation may be brought to an end, God will save Jewish people through the gospel.

The remnant of the church that is sometimes left in nations and among people groups swept away by the judgments of God are witness that God will save His people out of every tongue, and tribe and nation.

Out of all humanity, God has chosen as the Divine and sovereign shepherd to save His people. Even as judgment will overflow all the cosmos, like the remnant in Noah's ark, we will be rescued and will enter the new creation.

One author writes, "The remnant witnesses to the future completion of the work of redemption. God's people shall multiply as the sands of the sea-shore (Genesis 22:17). The final state of the church in heaven is 'a great multitude that no one could count' (Revelation 7:9). The church will be a multiplying 'remnant' — always a remnant, but constantly gathering in men and women until she becomes the 'general assembly and church of the first-born' of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22, 23, AV). Here is glorious encouragement! Here is the victory of the cross of Christ come into its own!" (Keddie p.54)

God's Judgment is Comprehensive (v.13-15)

Listen, hear what God is saying.

¹³ "Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,"
declares the Lord God, the God of hosts,

¹⁴ "that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions,
I will punish the altars of Bethel,
and the horns of the altar shall be cut off
and fall to the ground.

Hear then that God's judgment will destroy their religious and secular lives.

Against her Trusted Religions (v.13-14)

Israel had built altars at other locations. These were built in the pre-Temple era. But they were retained for convenience's sake. Over time, the altars became more and more corrupt. In some cases, they had become the center of pagan idolatry. The very place named the House of God, Beth-El, was now going to be destroyed.

God would break off the horns of the altar. The horns were what the guilty might cling to. Between the horns was where the burnt offering was sacrificed and the blood spilled for forgiveness of sins. But now, the nation was beyond that. Mercy would be withheld in favor of justice.

Against her Pursued Entertainments (v.15)

God will also strike against their heart loves and wealth pursued entertainments.

¹⁵ I will strike the winter house along with the summer house,
and the houses of ivory shall perish,
and the great houses shall come to an end,"
declares the Lord.

This rotten culture will receive the whip of God. She will be brought to a massive end. At the height of Israel's power prominence, her wealth and wonders, God promises He will destroy her utterly. No place will be safe. Wherever the wealthy and the powerful have built their houses, there will come sudden and irreversible destruction.

Reflect and Respond

As we conclude, list to Gordon J Keddie's warning...

Let the modern church – for it is to the church that the message of Amos is principally directed – face God's realities! Why should God not sweep away the nations of the West, with their churches that believe everything but the plain teaching of God's Word, and therefore believe nothing? Why should our pseudo-Christian culture, with its mindless worship of the 'standard of living' and endless obsession with sensual pleasure, be any more durable than that of Israel? What is the remedy? Israel was called to repentance, albeit in the context of a declaration of imminent destruction. Likewise, modern man is called to repentance, though it is in the context of the accomplishment of salvation for sinners by the risen Christ! (Keddie. p.56).

Is the modern church much different? No, not at all. In fact, in many circles, what ought to be our shame is held out for our praise. We have already experienced the sifting at the hand of a pandemic. Now many are defecting from the faith, including leaders. Many are adopting the errors and false teaching coming into the church through social justice. The true churches must stand and stand together. Do we have differences? Yes. But they are shades of truth and varieties of light. But we must not be overwhelmed by the darkness.

God is sovereign over the world, over people and over His church. If God decides to judge the nation in which a church exists, will the church suffer too? Yes. While it may be hard it is still the good, wise and sovereign plan of God to do so.

There are and will be God's people who will be true. Even when then Israel suffered the fulfillment of these dreadful prophecies, God has His people. Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, the three friends of Daniel, Esther... these all walked with God during the great disaster that Amos preached and predicted.

There will be coming a final day of final judgment. Make no mistake. The unbelieving world will one day stand before a sovereign God. And He will be full of righteous wrath. But His people will be saved and will be safe. Will you?