

AMOS THE PROPHET AND HIS PROGRAM

Amos 7:7-15; 8:1-3.

We are impressed with the fact that God selects and prepares men for His work whom we would not select if the choice was left to us. It is not surprising, therefore, that He chose a man like Amos to be the bearer of His messages to Israel and the adjacent countries.

Amos was one of the first writing prophets, but it is not difficult for us to understand him because his character was transparent as the light of day. His moral conceptions were of the very highest. He hated sin with an intensity that burned.

I. God's Standard. Amos 7:7-9.

In order to show the prophet how far Israel had departed from the path of uprightness, God used the figure of a plumbline. A plumbline is a line with a weight at the end of it, which a builder drops from the top of a wall to determine whether the wall is strictly perpendicular, at right angles with the foundation. It stands for rectitude and is the symbol of judgment according to righteousness.

Man is tested by an unerring plumbline. Today God uses a plumbline in the form of His Word which reveals His holiness and man's sinfulness. In applying the plumbline of His Word to us God means to make us morally and spiritually straight-up-and-down people. His judgment is exact and without error.

With this figure of the plumbline God revealed to Amos the unanswerable inconsistency, half-heartedness and rebellion of His people. This revelation showed their actual condition, as truly as a plumbline determines the condition of a wall against which it is laid.

II. God's Servant. Amos 7:10-15.

1. His name.

Amos signifies "burden". The name was prophetic of his work. He was called upon to carry a heavy load on his heart as God's representative, when he went forth with his great message of denunciation and warning of divine judgment.

2. His background.

Amos was reared on the edge of the desert. He resided at a little village in Judah named Tekoa, about six miles from Bethlehem. He lived close to nature. Before he became a prophet, he was a shepherd who raised a peculiar breed of small, ugly sheep, but they were highly esteemed on account of their fine wool. He was also a gatherer of sycomors fruit (7-14). As a herdsman his income was not sufficient, so he supplemented it by gathering and selling sycamore fruit -- fig-mulberries. And one of the strange things about this fruit was that it did not ripen properly unless a tree-dresser made a small slit in the end of it.

3. His call.

One day, during the reign of Jeroboam II, God called Amos from his work in the field and commissioned him to warn the people of the punishment which He was about to send upon them because of their gross wickedness.

As a prophet Amos was to be both a forth-teller and a foreteller. He was expected to proclaim God's message to his generation and through the Holy Spirit to make predictions concerning the future.

4. His obedience.

Inasmuch as it was customary for prophets to appear where they were needed most, Amos went to Bethel, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, which had reached its culmination of wealth and power with the attendant results of pride, luxury, self-indulgence, excess, corruption and idolatry. In obedience to God's command, he faithfully delivered to the people of Israel the message of solemn warning which he had received from the Lord. God had given Amos the courage to tell them the truth about their sins and how He wanted them to live. Amos refused to change God's message in order to please the king and the people or to save himself from persecution.

5. His opposition.

It was not to be expected that a plain message such as Amos delivered would be received gladly. Amaziah, the priest in charge of the idol worship at Bethel, deliberately and falsely accused Amos before Jeroboam II, charging him with conspiracy against the king and insinuating that he was working in the Northern Kingdom for personal gain. Nothing was farther from the truth, but this is simply another illustration of how men often try to evade their responsibility to God by blaming His messenger for something.

Ungodly men are quick to point out anything in the life of a servant of God which might tend to decrease his effectiveness.

Jeroboam II was not disturbed in the least by Amaziah's false charges and insinuations. Neither did they daunt nor dishearten Amos. They simply made him more courageous and more determined to speak for God. So Amaziah decided that he would get rid of Amos by ordering him to go back to his own country and to prophesy to his own people.

Fearlessness of character always excites admiration. In his encounter with Amaziah, Amos revealed the utter fearlessness of his heart and his absolute dependence upon God Who had called him to bear His Word of Israel. He was determined to perform the task to which God had called him regardless of the consequences. He was perfectly willing to suffer, if need be, in order to deliver the message which God had imparted to him. In the light of present-day condition, how we do need more people who are like Amos!

6. His reply.

Amos did not flee at the command of Amaziah. Unashamed of his ancestry or his occupation, and conscious of a divine call, Amos repudiated the charge that he was a professional prophet. He had not been influenced by any personal ambition to become a prophet, but God had told him to take up that tremendous task. So, after denouncing Amaziah, Amos predicted what would befall him when God's inevitable judgment came to Israel.

III. God's Sentence. Amos 8:1-3.

Amos saw a basket of ripe fruit. It was attractive and appetizing, but there wasn't any possibility that it would last. It had taken months to produce this fruit. The fruit had reached a stage in which improvement was impossible. Time alone would cause it to perish.

This basket of ripe fruit was a symbol of the end of the national existence of Israel. Just as fruit is gathered when it is ripe, so the Israelites were about to be plucked from their land. By disregarding God's will and persisting in her evil ways, Israel had become ripe for judgment and her ruin was inevitable. God said, "The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them."