

## **MAJORING IN A MINOR-AMOS PART ONE**

Over the years, I have found the so called minor prophets to be a treasure trove for Bible study. There is much to be learned from a careful reading of these inspired words. With this in mind, I begin this new series exploring some of the major themes to be found in these short books. I have chosen to begin with the book of Amos, surely a prophet for our own day.

Amos 2:

4 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked:

5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes;

7 That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

8 And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

9 Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.

10 Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.

11 And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD.

12 But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.

13 Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.

14 Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself:

15 Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself.

16 And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

Before we can begin a meaningful study of this passage of scripture, it is necessary to present a little historical perspective. At the time of Amos, the land was blessed with great political and economic prosperity. The people were at peace, they were well ruled and the economy was booming. In fact, the times were much like our own.

However, also like our society, the people were far more interested in seeking pleasure than they were in seeking God. They were not only self-indulgent, but their greed led to great exploitation and what today we would call 'social injustice'. This in turn produced blatant idolatry both in the natural and the spiritual. How familiar this sounds.

God had blessed His people, giving them wonderful rewards and privileges. See how they repaid Him. Therefore, great as the blessings had been, even greater was to be their accountability. Amos came to give warning; let him speak to us today, for I believe we stand in the same position as did the people of Israel. The parallels are far too great for this to be just a coincidence.

I'd like to begin with verses 4 and 5 of chapter 2. These deal with the northern kingdom of Judah, which at this time had been mingling with the surrounding nations, much as the church today seems to be mingling with the world. In verse 4, the prophet lists the four transgressions brought by God against the people.

1. They have despised and rejected the Law of the Lord.
2. They have not kept His commandments.
3. They have walked after Lies.
4. They have erred and gone astray like their fathers.

In verse 5 God's judgement is given. It will be the same today as it was then, so let us examine these transgressions and see how our society measures up.

The word translated 'despised', is the Hebrew word *ma'ac* which means to abhor, cast away, despise, disdain, or loathe. It is something utterly vile, like pus in a sore. When you despise and reject the Law of the Lord, you are despising and rejecting the maker and the giver of that Law also. This has nothing to do with the question of being 'under' the Law, and everything to do with our relationship with God. When we reject Him, we reject His Law and vice versa. Remember too, the unregenerate world IS still under the Law. They are not under Grace, as we are. Much of the

world then, falls into the first transgression. They have despised God, His laws and His ways. They want nothing to do with God, especially if it interferes with their pleasure and self-indulgence. Their motto seems to be, 'who needs God when everything is going so well.' Like the people of Judah, an accounting will one day be made.

Similarly, the way they show their attitude to the Law, is by breaking it. They not only despised it, they rejected it, by breaking it. I may not like certain laws, I may even despise them, but that doesn't mean I will not keep them. By not keeping His commandments, the people of Judah showed themselves to be lawless and in rebellion. So too are the people of our society, who flout God's Holy ordinances. They don't believe they apply to them. Nobody is going to tell them what they can and cannot do! Judgement will be theirs.

So far, the first two transgressions apply mainly to the world, though I'm certain they also apply to people within the church. It's when we consider the next two, that the church comes under closer scrutiny. 'They have walked after lies'. God is all Truth, Satan is the father of all lies. There are two likely possibilities here, which both apply then and now.

Lies quite clearly refers either to the words of false prophets and teachers, or it is linked to idolatry, to following and worshipping the lie, rather than the Truth which is God manifested for us through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I believe that both were equally valid interpretations then and now.

Oh how much we see of this today, not only in the world with its New Age ideologies and crass materialism, where money and power are the ultimate gods of our generation, but we see these worldly attributes taking over large sections of the so called church. Instead of the church going into the world and having an impact out there, we find that the ways of the world are impacting on the church. The Great Commission says 'Go', but we tend to say 'Come'. Instead of looking to the Word for our answers, we look either to men, so called experts, or we import the methods the world teaches into our churches in order to become successful in the eyes of the world. This is contrary to everything Jesus taught.

Today, we have high profile preachers telling us we need more money, when what's really needed is more holiness and more God. Unfortunately, most people prefer to hear these lies rather than the Truth. They are caught up in the things of the flesh and listen to the lies that feed the flesh, rather than the Truth which will feed their spirit. They are guilty of the third transgression.

The fourth transgression, is linked to the third. 'They have erred and gone astray like their fathers.' There are two important Hebrew words to be examined here, *ta'ah* and *halak*.

Ta'ah means to err, to go astray, to wander from the path or the way. In a sense, it can refer to sin which involves the same things. It can mean to stagger around drunk, to be lost, or to move about with no sense of direction or purpose. Sometimes, this can be unintentional, but at other times, it can be a deliberate choice For me, this too describes much of the

world and the church. They have lost their way and are staggering about like a drunk, with no sense of direction or purpose in their lives.

The second word, *halak*, means at its simplest level ‘to walk’. However, in the OT, it is the verb most frequently used to describe the process of living. It is often used in conjunction with the terms for obedience and disobedience to the covenant standards of God. Deut 8:6 and 11:22 are good examples of this.

*Deut 8:*

*6 Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.*

*Deut 11:*

*22 For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him;*

Christianity, is often described as a walk, or way of life in the Bible.

Perhaps an even clearer and more powerful example that pertains to this entire passage, is found in Leviticus chapter 26. Let’s consider a few verses.

*Lev 26:*

*3 If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;*  
(refer to the 4 transgressions.)

*4 Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.*

*5 And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.*

*6 And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.*

Note all the blessings. Now drop down to verse 14 to see the other side of the coin.

*14 But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;*

*15 And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: (again, the 4 transgressions.)*

*16 I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.*

*17 And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.*

*18 And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.*

*19 And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:*

*20 And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.*

*21 And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.*

*22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate.*

*23 And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;*

*24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.*

Amos was saying nothing new. What God had earlier declared was coming to pass. Our Lord doesn't change. His blessings and His curses are just as true today as they ever were. Walking according to the world, is walking contrary to God. It is the fourth transgression. Two more verses which emphasise this theme.

*Jer 18:*

*15 Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up;*

*Ezek 11:*

*21 But as for them whose heart walketh after the heart of their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord GOD.*

The result of these four transgressions, is judgement by God. He judges them, not for what they have done in the world, but for what they have done to Him. On that criteria, I feel like saying woe unto the church which has made the name of our Lord a laughing stock in many parts of the world. Those who have brought the true church into disrepute will have a great deal to answer for when they come before the throne of judgement.

Consider the implications inherent in verse 5. Note where God is prepared to execute His judgement on a lawless and sinful nation; in the capital Jerusalem where His Holy temple was located, where He was not only known, but known to have set up a refuge.

*Ps 48:*

*2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*

*3 God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

God will execute His judgement. He is not a man that He should lie. Amos Chapters one and two clearly show us that no nation will escape this, whether they acknowledge God or not. He has promised His fire and it will come. Nowhere will be safe, if unrighteousness is present. How will we know it's coming? Scripture always provides the answer. Judgement will begin in the House of the Lord. Perhaps it already has.