

MAJORING IN A MINOR-AMOS PART FOUR

There is a great deal of so called Christian activity abounding in the world today. Many great things are claimed in the Name of the Lord. Christian music and worship has become so popular, it's now the focus for many church services. We see both men and women preaching new revelations that they have supposedly received from God, usually in some type of vision, while thousands of people flock to their meetings looking for the latest 'Christian' experience. The question is, however, what does God think about all of this. For part four of this study, let us turn to Amos Chapter 5. Remember, Amos was writing/prophesying to a nation very much like ours.

Amos 5:

21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.

27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

We can divide these few verses into four headings:

1. The Problem Perceived
2. The Solution Suggested
3. The Focus Favoured
4. The Punishment Promised

What then was the problem with the worship being offered? What is the problem with most of the so called worship being offered today? What is worship? It's certainly a lot more than singing a few songs. Perhaps the simplest answer to this question, is to say that worship is the essence of our relationship with God. In everything we do, we should worship Him. If our thoughts and actions are not predicated on worship, then there is something wrong with that relationship. He is the almighty creator of everything, and by His very nature, He is deserving of our worship; Him and none other. Therefore, God will not allow anything to supplant or replace Him in our worship. This was at the heart of Amos' message, here in Chapter 5.

Perhaps the over-riding concept presented here, is God's attitude to hypocrisy. It is clear that in God's sight, the actions of His people were hypocritical and He would judge that hypocrisy. Remember also, that this is one continuous book we are studying, so the attitude presented here has developed from what has gone before. In part two of this series, I outlined the four transgressions God charged Israel with.

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.

It was while still practising this sin, that they came to offer worship and sacrifices to their God. Thus were their actions judged hypocritical in the sight of an almighty God.

In our previous study, we considered the problem associated with their bread offering; they included leaven, which symbolises sin, yet they expected God to accept it. Here in verse 22 we read about three other offerings, the burnt offering, the meat offering, and the peace offering.

22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

It's interesting to note, that some translations render meat offering as cereal, or grain offering, linking it to the earlier reference. Both are acceptable versions of the original Hebrew. Either way, here are three more offerings which were unacceptable to God because of the hypocritical works of the people making them. Let's examine the significance of each.

The 'burnt offering', is the Hebrew word *Olah*. It was the offering for sin that was totally consumed on the altar; nothing was to be spared. It involved the sacrifice of a pure and spotless lamb, which is always a symbol of Christ. This lamb, had the sin of the person who brought it, imputed to it by the laying on of hands. Note, the lamb bore the sin, it did not become sin; it remained a pure, sinless and therefore totally acceptable offering, just as Christ was Himself.

The blood of this offering was sprinkled by the priest in accordance with the rituals outlined in the book of Leviticus. Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sin. This offering, signified the total surrender of the worshipper's heart and life to God. It had to come first, for no other offering or sacrifice was acceptable if sin hadn't already been dealt with. It is no different today. Jesus is our perfect offering for sin and without Him, nothing we do will be acceptable to God. Our lives are to be totally surrendered to Him. It's a prerequisite for everything else.

However, while the people of Israel were making an outward show with their burnt offering, there was no equivalent inner change in their heart. As we have already seen in previous studies, they were still enjoying their sin and there was no true repentance. God could therefore not accept this hypocritical offering, thus making all further ones, a waste of time.

This offering for sin, the burnt offering, parallels the free offering made by our Lord, of Himself on the Cross at Calvary and therefore, should have been as central to the lives of the people of Israel, as the Cross should be to us. If the Cross is not central, then everything else we say and do is also a hypocritical waste of time and is unacceptable to God.

The second offering, is the Hebrew word *Minchah* which is used to signify both meat and grain offerings and is translated both ways, often depending on the context in which it is being used. Therefore, we can probably assume that either could be used for this offering.

The key to this sacrifice, is that it involved no blood. It was a gift, or an oblation that could take several forms. Not all was consumed by fire, as certain parts of this offering were reserved for the priests, as their portion. In a sense, this offering was a *tribute*, something owed. When the Romans, for example, conquered a nation, then those people owed and paid tribute to Rome. In return, Rome protected and administered their government. It was often something you paid for having your life spared, (by a conqueror). I think the Christian parallels are obvious.

The third offering, is in some ways, the most interesting. It is the Hebrew word *Shelem*, which means a thank offering, usually for peace. This voluntary sacrifice, did not entail burning the offering, rather, the animal was first consecrated and presented to God, then most of the flesh was eaten in a fellowship meal. It was the OT equivalent of our Holy Communion. People were having fellowship and communion with God, sharing an offering dedicated to Him, to give thanks in remembrance of His goodness and provision in their lives.

However, at the time of Amos, this offering too, was no longer acceptable. We can see the parallels for today, in the warnings about eating and drinking the Lord's Supper unworthily. Doing this had caused many to become sick, or die. Today this can apply not only physically, but also spiritually. There are a lot of spiritually sick and dead 'Christians' out in the world today, who mirror the people to whom Amos' warning came unheeded.

Just how applicable is verse 23 to the modern church.

23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

In my opinion, most of the so called contemporary Christian music being produced today, is rubbish. It's worldly noise given a religious facade. It certainly doesn't glorify God and is more about the worship of worship, than the worship of our Saviour. Its focus seems to be more on 'I' and less on Him. It is frequently unscriptural. I firmly believe that God is once again speaking to us through Amos in the area of music.

Verses 22 and 23, have presented to us the Problem Perceived. What then is the Solution Suggested? This is to be found in verse 24.

24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Judgement and righteousness, justice and mercy flowing through the land like pure, unpolluted, freely running water. This is what God wanted, not the bribery, corruption, injustice and perversion we have seen abounding in the land in our previous studies. Do you comprehend the similarities with our own society? Consider these verses:

Zech. 7:9

9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgement, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

Hos. 6:6

6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Or the following well known passage.

1 Sam. 15:22

22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Righteousness, mercy, obedience, repentance, compassion and a knowledge of Him. In other words, to know Him and His nature. This is what God desires. One final verse on this issue:

Micah 6. 8

8 He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

That friends, is the Solution Suggested. Let us now turn our attention to the Focus Favoured. We find that in verses 25 and 26.

25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.

Their focus, and our focus was/is to be on God alone. God will not tolerate idolatry; the Bible repeatedly tells us that He is a jealous God. The people of Israel, while they wandered for forty years, did not give sacrifices and offerings unto God. In fact, the only sacrifices and offerings recorded during this time, are made to idols. Yet, God watched over them, and protected them. He was ever faithful, while they were not.

Steven in Acts 7:23 quotes this passage in his final sermon as he castigates those who are about to stone him. Moloch, you will remember, is the god who demands child sacrifices by fire as part of his worship. Chiun, is variously represented as Saturn, reflecting the worship of the stars and planets so loved by the New Ager, and is even linked in some writings to the fertility gods such as the later Roman god Priapus, the god of debauchery. All in all, not a pretty picture.

While God may excuse the absence of outward, physical sacrifices as being mere ritual, He can never excuse the absence of the inner spiritual sacrifice involved in prayer, praise and worship. God never changes, and His Word tells us that He looks on the Heart, not on the outward show. That is where His focus lies.

Finally, in verse 27, we come to the Punishment Promised for this idolatry.

27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

The greater the privileges, the greater the responsibility. The greater the sin, the greater the punishment. God's wrath and judgement on the surrounding nations, was as nothing to His indignation over Israel. There's was to be a captivity worse than that handed out to Damascus and they were to be taken into exile further

from their homeland than any other nation also. Since they loved their idolatry, they were to be taken captive by the Assyrians, an idolatrous people themselves. Great was to be their destruction.

The message here is simple. If we follow the path of the people of Israel, then a similar judgement will be ours. We know what God demands and it is our responsibility to fulfil His requests. We are to grow into the likeness of His Son; that's what being a Christian is all about. We are to show forth His Love, and His nature and His character, not our own. We are to have mercy and compassion, judge fairly and righteously, with the righteousness that can come from Him alone. Finally, we are to worship Him alone, with all our strength and with all our might and with all our power.

We have perceived the problem with not only Amos' generation, but also our own. We know what God's suggested solution is. We are aware where His favoured focus lies, and we recognise the inevitability of His promised punishment for disobedience and idolatry. What then is our response?

Will we continue as did the people of Israel, to their eventual destruction, or will we repent, turn to the Lord and follow Him. That has always been His call; 'Come and follow Me; Learn of Me; My yoke is easy and my burden is light'. Now is the time to check out your relationship, your standing, with our Holy God. One day soon, everyone is going to come under one of His two outstretched hands. Which one will it be for you; the hand of mercy and grace, or the hand of eternal judgement. Chose this day whom you will serve, saith the Lord, the God of Hosts. Amen.