

Kings and Prophets 15-02-20a

This is Friday, the 20th of February, 2015. We're continuing our study in Kings and Prophets, and we've been happily looking at some of the Prophets after spending a dreary long time looking at the ever-descending spiral of the Kings. And having looked at Jonah, having looked at Hosea, we are now investigating the book of Amos, the prophecy of Amos, the prophet from Tekoa in Judah.

Let's take a moment as we resume our study tonight to go to the Lord in prayer, ask His blessing on our fellowship and on our study. Father, what a blessing it is to spend this time looking into the truth of Your Word, being refreshed and edified and renewed, having a fresh vision of all of the wonderful blessings that You have given us in Christ, the bright expectation we have at His return and our gathering to Him. When we move into the next phase of Your plan for us, we appreciate so much the challenges and the opportunities that You present to us here to put the things we see in Your Word into practice, to incorporate them into our thinking, to have them change us and renew us and restore us and regenerate us into spiritual beings qualified to serve in Your presence.

We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word tonight, that God the Holy Spirit will superintend both the delivery and the receiving of it, that each one of us will receive a personal blessing and a personal sense of motivation and expectation that these things will remain with us in the days ahead to influence our thinking, to help us to conform our goals and our values, our priorities to those that we see reflected in Your Word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

The book of Amos, the words of Amos, who was among the sheep breeders, and we saw that this is very likely, in my opinion, a connection to that special set of sheep herders, those who were responsible for preparing the animals that were used in sacrificial ritual in Israel. This was a special calling. It was a unique set of requirements that had to be met, special handling, special feeding, special care, to ensure that these animals would be without spot and without blemish.

And you could imagine that those particular shepherds, all the way down to the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus, would have a sensitivity and an appreciation for the truths that lay behind the symbol and the pictures with those animals as they foreshadowed and reflected the nature and the future work of the Messiah Himself. Amos, in my humble opinion, is one of them. Not just because of this initial notice, but as you move into the book itself, and we looked at kind of just a beginning last time, and we saw the three different ways that he identifies himself.

He handles both types of the sacrificial animals, sheep, probably also goats, and then the cattle, and then also figs, the sycamore figs. And we remember how intimately tied to Israel that symbol is, again, to and through the use of it by the Lord Jesus Christ, in going to the fig tree

expecting to find fruit that isn't there. It is an untended tree, it is unseasonable, and yet the Lord Jesus expects there to be figs because this is a special tree, but it has not been properly tended, and this is an indictment of the religious leadership in Israel.

When you think about this, how many times have we seen and sort of looked down on, as one would, the scribes and the Pharisees, the chief priests and the elders in Israel in the time of Christ? The Lord Jesus roundly charges them with error. He pronounces the woes on the Pharisees, woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. And we say, yep, you know, those religious leaders, and I can look around today and I see religious leaders that I think would qualify for the same indictment.

Here's the thing, if you remember what we have been seeing in our Sunday study in Ephesians, as we have been looking at the issue of authority and submission to authority, anytime you see authorities being challenged and being held to account for abuse of that authority, such as the scribes, Pharisees, chief priests and elders in Israel in the days of Jesus Christ, as they are held to account by the prophets in previous days, remember, remember, when you are looking at the dissection and the condemnation of any authority, those charges and those challenges to righteousness apply in every other area of authority as well. And when the Lord Jesus is calling the Pharisees to account and He is calling the scribes and the elders to account, we ask ourselves, well, are there areas where I have authority? And sometimes the younger ones think, well, no problem there, I don't have any authority, everybody is over me, my teacher is my authority, my parents are my authority, I don't have to worry. Au contraire, we are all the captain of our own ship and the master of our own soul, in the sense that we owe obeisance, we owe allegiance, we owe the responsibility for the operation of our soul, our thinking, our hearts, our minds, those goals and values and priorities I mentioned a minute ago, we are responsible for that, we have authority to decide those.

And as authorities, if no other place, we are authorities in our own soul. We are the king of that country, we are the sovereign of that land, and just as the king serves in the fear of the Lord, whether he is in Israel or in any other nation where God has granted him that authority, God has granted us authority over our souls. So, anytime you see authorities being indicted, anytime you see people in power being indicted, just remember, there is a reflection back to us.

And we are going to see that so clearly reflected in this book. This is what the book of Amos really emphasizes. You wouldn't think it when you come to the book and you say, oh, well he's a sheep herder in Tekoa and he's going to talk about these nations, and he's going to talk about Judah, he's going to talk about Israel, that's all of those folks in the long dusty past, that's over there a long time ago, this will be fun because it's not going to impinge on me.

It isn't going to make me responsible for anything. Well, we're in for a surprise if that's what we're expecting, because this book is the sharp pointed sword of the word of God, and it is going to cleave asunder the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow of you and of me. That's why it's here, and so watch for this as we go through.

Notice the words of Amos who was among the sheep breeders of Tekoa, and you think, he could have been a sheep breeder anywhere. Why isn't he a sheep guy up in Galilee? Why isn't he a sheep breeder up somewhere in Ephraim? There's lots of pasturage up there. He could have been from anywhere.

Why is he from Tekoa? Because Tekoa is just south of Bethlehem. It is in Judah, and this is where the sacrificial animals were raised. We know this.

We know it from archaeology. We know it from rabbinic tradition. We have lots of information.

Read, as I mentioned a couple of Christmases ago, read Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, and go to the section on the shepherds. He covers some of what we covered, and we augmented and enhanced that in our Christmas special about the shepherds to whom God sent the angels of all of the people in the land to whom was the birth of the Lord Jesus announced. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, and His arrival was announced to the tenders of those sacrificial lambs, those shepherds, and it was announced to the Gentiles, to the men in the east.

We have seen His star way off in the east, and we have come from outside the land to worship Him. Nobody in the land, with the exception of that small remnant, that small group like Simeon and Anna and those shepherds, but in officialdom, in the land of power and in the land of influence and in the land of authority, nobody was looking for the Lord Jesus. The Pharisees, the scribes, the experts in the law, should have known that this was the time, and they didn't.

It takes Gentiles coming in to ask, where is He that is born King of the Jews? So, anytime you see this allusion to sheep and to shepherds and to those who tend those sheep, it immediately has messianic significance. You just can't help it. Why is He called a sheep breeder, if not for this reason? What other significance would it have? In the days of Uzziah, King of Judah, in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, this, as we've already seen, helps us place this in the context of the spiritual disintegration in both kingdoms.

We have seen what's going on in the days of Jeroboam II in the north. We know what's happening with Uzziah and the leprosy breaking out in his forehead in the south. And we know that the kings, just as Herod does in the days of John the Baptist and in the days of Jesus, the kings in the Bible are often a reflection of the heart of the people.

They either reflect it or they are an antitype pulling against it. They're trying to call the people back. And you have that conflict.

But most often, you find that the king is just a personification of the heart and the attitude and the spiritual status of the people. And so, Jeroboam II in the north, Uzziah in the south, they reflect this. And you see Jeroboam harking back to the sins of his namesake.

You see Uzziah getting proud. And he's proud within the religious tradition. He's not setting up idols in the temple courtyard.

He's trying to take over temple worship. He's issuing an executive order that he gets to do the sacrifices. And there's a time when people start pushing back against the unwanted use of authority.

That's wanted with an O, unwanted use. So this is Amos, two years before the earthquake. More about the earthquake when we get there.

And he said, now here's the beginning of the form of prophecy. After the introduction, now we're ready to rock and roll. We've put it in drive and we're pressing the accelerator.

Here it is. The Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem. What animal roars? It's the lion.

You say, well, David is the king. He's the lion. The Lord Jesus is going to be the son of David, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

This speaks of rulership. The king of the jungle, not so much here, but the king of the domain. He is the predator.

Everything else is subservient to him. So if the Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the pastures of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers, what are we talking about here? There is dissatisfaction. There is threat.

You can think about Malachi when they start bringing imperfect sacrifices and they say, well, in what way have we polluted your altar? In what way have we failed? Well, look, we're going through all of the right motions. We're saying all the right things. And God indicts them.

He charges them. He brings a wreath, a case against them. Well, if the Lord is roaring from Zion and uttering His voice from Jerusalem, something is wrong.

And the shepherds are mourning. And this withering that is taking place is a harbinger of judgment. Then it says, Thus says the Lord, For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment.

Now, let me ask you something. The Lord is roaring and uttering His loud voice from Zion, from Jerusalem. And the shepherds are mourning.

And those who tend the fruit of the fig trees in Carmel are alarmed. Right? They're the ones who take notice. This is the Amos types.

These are those who know and understand what should be happening in the nation and are not. This is the faithful remnant. These are those who know what the sacrifices and offerings should look like.

They're the ones who know what the fruit of the land should look like. And you say, okay, well, God's going to lower the boom on Israel and on Judah. But look at the next verse.

What the Lord pronounces as He roars is a threat and a charge and a prediction of judgment on Damascus. What? Damascus? That's not in Judah. That's not even in Israel.

That's way up there, up in the north. What's going on? The shepherds are alarmed. The tenders of fruit on Carmel are alarmed.

This is the Carmel down in southern Judah that we talked about, where the fruit trees, the sycamore figs are grown. Those guys are alarmed. But the message that comes from the voice of the Lord that Amos pronounces here, all of the people who said, what, should we be alarmed? Should we be concerned? And God's pronouncing judgment on Syria, on Damascus.

So what do all the people say? All right. Yeah, that's the enemy up there. That's the big threat.

We're concerned about Damascus. We remember Ben-Hadad, and we remember all of these other threats that have come down from the north, and God is going to judge them. All right.

So what's happening among the people? Are they ready to turn off the message and go into denial, or are they ready to listen to the message and put their fists in the air and say, right on, go, Lord God in heaven. Yes, judge those mean old Syrians. The audience is immediately attentive and on board with Amos here because this is judgment on the other guy.

They're expecting the prophet of God to come in and put a big guilt trip on them. And instead, and remember, we talked about last week or two, this is a time of great prosperity. God has eased off the judgment on the northern kingdom.

He's eased off on judgment in the south. There's this vacuum of power while Syria and Assyria fall back and regroup in the north. They've got some internal problems.

They've got some strife one way or the other, and it leaves this sort of calm in the middle of the hurricane for both northern and southern Israel, northern Israel and Judah. So they're prospering. They're rebuilding.

They're fortifying. They think everything is great. The economy is sound.

The state of the union is solid. Right? And this is the big message. And so now when God pronounces judgment on Syria, well, this is just more good news.

Everybody's on board. Now, it says for three transgressions of Damascus and for four. So how many sins do you expect to be, how many, by the way, this word transgressions is pesha, P-E-S-H-A, with an ion, the evil ion at the end.

This isn't the good aleph or an aleph and a hay. That's kind of a nice ending for a word. This is the ion.

It's always got kind of a bad connotation in so many Hebrew words. Pesha. For three, pesha, and for four, God says, I am coming after Damascus.

I will not turn away. Why? Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron. Remember where Gilead is? That's that initial part that the Israelites said, this looks so good, we don't even want to cross the Jordan.

Let's just stay here and settle. But it's still Israel, and God gives them permission to live over there. You want to be on the outskirts.

You want to be in the darkness, which is outside. Fine, you can stay there. You can enjoy the emoluments and the greener grass on this side of the Jordan.

You don't want to go in. You've still got to come in and help fight, but you can settle over on that side. But they're the first ones to get lost.

They're the first ones to be trimmed away and go the way of the surrounding nations because they're so far from their people. They're in the darkness, which is outside. And now they've been threshed.

They're easy pickings. The Syrians have already picked them off. They've threshed them with implements of iron.

But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad. And you can just hear the cheers rising from Israel. Oh, the Lord God is going to go give those Syrians what for.

I will also break the gate bar of Damascus and cut off the inhabitants from the valley of Awain and the one who holds the scepter from Beth-Adon. The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir, says the Lord. All right.

Can I hear an amen from all of the people in the northern kingdom? They're loving this. Now, how many transgressions did you see in that pronouncement of judgment on Damascus? He said for three crimes and for four. Pesha means an offense.

And this is a crime. You know how we often define if you threaten property or personal bodily harm. There's property crimes, breaking and entering, and then there's assault and assault with a deadly weapon, and they go up from there.

But you basically have attacked somebody's property or attacked their person. These are sort of standard crimes on the books, right? Malicious mischief, that kind of thing. Well, that's kind of what Pesha means.

It's an offense concerning property. This goes all the way back to Exodus 22, verse 8. For any kind of Pesha, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges, and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. Pesha.

It's a crime against property, often. It can be crime or criminal action in general. You can even

translate it misdemeanor in some cases.

It's sort of wanton wrongdoing. You're going over the borders. You're going outside the lines.

You're transgressing someone else's right of ownership. And this, of course, is reinforced by authority. It is authority that establishes these boundaries.

In the law of Moses, it's the authority of God. In civil cases, it is the authority of the authorities. Your city ordinances, your county ordinances, your state laws, your federal laws, these are established by God-ordained authorities.

Well, you preach that. And these Syrians, these people from Damascus, led by their king, have been crossing the borders, have been sacking and ruining and pillaging and plundering and raiding and taking. They've been threshing with implements of iron.

They've been going in there and just taking these things that don't belong to them. But he said for three crimes and for four. And he only listed the one.

He threshed Gilead with an implement of iron, and then he quits. What's that about? If you go to any sort of standard commentary or whatever and look this up, they either don't say anything about it at all, or they'll say, well, three is sort of a number of completeness like the Trinity, and the divine perfection is three. And so they've filled up transgression with three, and then they've overflowed.

The fourth is just one too many. For three transgressions and for four. And there is merit in that idea.

This was kind of a standard thing. When we say, I've had it up to here with your nonsense, I've had it up to here with this thing that frustrates me, well, that's just a euphemism for I've had as much as I can take, or the straw that broke the camel's back. Most people don't even remember the story.

Ken mentioned the Billy Goat's Gruff. And I was thinking, I don't even remember that story. I remember that name, but I've forgotten.

It seems like there was maybe a troll and a Brit. I just don't remember the story at all, because we use these things as aphorisms to the point that we don't even remember where they came from. And the straw that broke the camel's back, you can kind of get a rough picture, but there's a whole story that goes with that.

Or cut the Gordian knot. Nobody knows what the Gordian knot was or who cut it or why. Well, this is kind of the same thing.

For three transgressions and for four. For three crimes and for four. This is sort of the idea.

God says, I've had enough. You've crossed the line, and that's enough. So He doesn't detail

what they are.

But the people listening don't care. God is going to drop the hammer on Damascus, and that's all they care about. They don't even really care about what the indictment is.

If God's going to drop the hammer, that's okay. Something about Gilead, good. Hammer them down.

Break the bars of the gates of Damascus. Turn them into a glass parking lot. That's great.

And then He moves on in verse 6, and He says, for three transgressions of Gaza and for four. Where's Gaza? Remember the Gaza Strip? Where is that? That's the southwest. That's the border with Egypt.

And Gaza, these are the nearest Egyptians. Three transgressions of the Egyptians. So He's kind of boxing the compass here.

He's done the guys up in the north. Now He's going down to the southwest. So Gaza, I will not turn away.

And you notice punishment is in italics, because if God's facing you with a bad attitude, it means judgment. They took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom. Where's Edom? Southeast, right? Around the corner from the Dead Sea.

And around the other corner. You can go either way around the Dead Sea, and you end up in Edom. They took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom, but I will send fire upon the wall of Gaza, which shall devour its palaces.

I will cut off the inhabitants from Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon. Now where's Ashdod and Ashkelon? What are these? These are the Philistine cities. What this means is that there is apparently some sort of alliance or league between those areas, and the Egyptians have come up along the coast and have been exerting influence as far north as these Philistine cities that were conquered in the days of David.

But they've tried to come in and attack from the west. I will cut off the inhabitants and the one who holds the scepter. I will turn my hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, says the Lord God.

So all of this, starting with those who are impinging on Egypt and coming all around ancient Philistia, God's going to drop the hammer on them. How many crimes are listed here out of the three and then the four? How many crimes? Well, they delivered the captivity to Edom. They grabbed some people and maybe sold them into slavery over in Edom.

And that's it. That's the only crime. And God says, I've just had enough.

They did this one thing, but God says it was three and then four. Kind of strange. Verse 9, Thus

says the Lord.

And you see the ringing bell here. And we have several ringing bells throughout the prophecy of Amos. We're going to see this, Thus says the Lord for three transgressions and for four about eight times through the book.

We've just seen the first three here. Three transgressions of Tyre and for four. I will not turn away its punishment.

What direction is that? Northwest. Tyre and Sidon up there in what is now Lebanon. Tyre and Sidon.

For three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not turn away, because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. And that's it. Remember Hiram, king of Tyre, was like a brother to Solomon and helped him out, helped him build the temple.

There was a warm relationship between David and later Solomon and the Tyrian throne up there for decades. But Tyre has forgotten. They've turned against and now they've conspired in this same sort of capturing and selling into some kind of captivity over in Edom.

I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces and that's it. Now we're done. Verse 11.

Thus says the Lord for three transgressions of Edom. Edom has been implicated in the past two or three of these. Here's Edom itself.

Three transgressions of Edom and for four I will not turn away, because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity. His anger tore perpetually and he kept his wrath forever. So this is, remember when Jesus says, the one who says to his brother, Thou fool, raka, is in danger of the judgment and so on.

So this brotherly animosity is really just one crime. He pursued his brother with the sword in a pitiless manner, in an angry manner perpetually and would not release the wrath. He got mad and stayed mad and kept on pursuing his brother with the sword.

I will send fire upon Teman which shall devour the palaces of Basra. These are the two prominent places in Edom. We've seen these before.

Remember Eliphaz the whatite? Temanite. Thus says the Lord for three transgressions of the people of Ammon and for four I will not turn away its punishment, because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead. We're back to the offense in Gilead, the threshing with iron in Gilead.

They ripped up women with child in Gilead that they might enlarge their territory. Again, that's why this is Peshah, because these are crimes of border crossing, of aggrandizement, of

impinging and imposing harm on people for personal gain or personal anger. I'm going to write it wrong here.

That they might enlarge the territory. I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah and it shall devour its palaces amidst shouting in the day of battle and a tempest in the day of whirlwind. Their king will go into captivity.

He and his princes together, says the Lord. In chapter 2, thus says the Lord, three transgressions of Moab and for four I will not turn away because he burned the house of the king of Edom to lime. What? I thought he just pronounced judgment on Edom.

And Moab is going to get in trouble for burning the palaces of Edom. I will send fire upon Moab and it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth. Moab shall die with tumult, with shouting and trumpet sound.

I will cut off the judge from its midst and slay all its princes with him, says the Lord. Now in all of these up to this point, and I would have not put chapter 2 division until between 3 and 4 and you'll see why. We've got all of these surrounding nations that are addressed and now we come in chapter 2, verse 4 to Judah.

Do you remember the structure of the book of Romans? All of these ungodly men and their ungodly ways, all of these that suppress the truth and unrighteousness, what they know of God, they don't glorify, they're not thankful, they're vain. And they choose the images of animals and four-footed beasts. They do not like to retain God in their knowledge.

And everybody's saying, right? Yes, absolutely. We are the holy people. We are the chosen ones.

We've got Jerusalem. We've got the temple. We've got the priests and the offerings and the sacrifices.

We've got the oracles of God. And Paul in Romans 1 says, look at all of these and what happens in chapter 2? You, oh man, have got three fingers pointing back at you. As soon as you recognize all of the errors, you are doing the very same thing.

Well, this is the Old Testament, Romans chapter 1, in my opinion. He invades them. He draws them in.

They're on his side. You can imagine when this prophecy is announced, when it's read to the people, there are cheers. Hooray for judgment on Damascus.

Hooray for judgment on Gaza. Hooray for judgment on Tyre. Hooray for judgment on Edom.

Hooray for judgment on Moab. Hooray for judgment on Ammon. And so they're getting ready to hooray the next one and it's going to be Judah.

Whoops. You mean we're lumped in? And we don't even get to go first. God's judging all these

other nations and Judah followed by the northern kingdom, Israel, down in verse 6. What's going on here? Well, this is a common tactic that the Lord Jesus uses when he tells a parable.

This is the tactic that God used with David when he sent Nathan to tell the story of the poor man that had the lamb that was taken and served as a dinner by the rich man that had all kinds of flocks of his own. You are the man. What you're busy looking at and condemning and able to see in others, you are guilty of.

And he only lists one crime for each of these surrounding nations. Wait till we see what he does when he gets to Judah and Israel. But the principle here, if we had to stop right now, and this is all we could hear for our daily ration of divine manna, what's the conclusion? Anytime you and I begin to look over the fence and note rightly the failures, the crimes, the peshah that we see elsewhere, we want to get there ahead of the Lord in terms of turning that laser beam perception on ourselves.

I don't want the Lord to have to say, See what these nations are doing? That's what you're doing. I want to look and remember that when I see failure, when I see shortcoming, when I see outright error and sin and crime and abuse of authority or refusal to submit to authority, I want to turn around and ask myself, Wow, I wonder if that's an area I need to look at in my own life. I need to check my own borders and make sure that I'm not transgressing and raiding the territory of others.

I need to be sure that I'm not threshing with an implement of iron, that I'm not taking what doesn't belong to me, that I'm not assuming and arrogating to myself things that I shouldn't, that I'm not imposing and impinging wrongly on others to enlarge my territory. That's why these things are in the Word of God, to show us the way to clarity. It's so difficult to be objective about ourselves.

Eyes on self is inherently subjective. How can you turn your eyes on yourself and be objective? This is one of the keys. Start with the premise, I am made of the very same flesh as these that I am condemning, these that I am rightly judging to be in error.

I see clearly the shortcoming of my brother. I see the beam in his eye. I think it's a beam.

God says that's just a moat. You've got a board in your own eye. If you're looking at eyes, get a mirror and look in your own eye.

Get the board out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to decide how to react and how to respond, and what sort of relationship to establish or not establish with these around you that have got a speck in their eye. You need to take care of business at home first. That's what this is.

But notice how God, in this time of prosperity in the Northern Kingdom, they're not obdurate, they're not under their shell, they haven't put on their helmet and said, I don't care what God does to me, I'm not going to turn his way. God has taken off the pressure. He's no longer

spanking.

He's no longer chasing with the rod. He has backed off. He has allowed prosperity to enter.

He has allowed economic boom to take place. They're in a calm. How can you say wise or genius or cleverness when you're talking about the Lord God? But he uses this wonderful drawing-in tactic to get them looking at nations that are malfunctioning and saying they rightly deserve the judgment of God.

Oh yes, they rightly deserve the judgment of God. As I sit here in my prosperity and in my calm and my lack of judgment myself, I can see that they are ripe for judgment, ripe for judgment, ripe for judgment. Now God is going to turn the camera around to those he's talking to.

We're going to pause here and take a break. When we come back, we'll pick up in chapter 2, verse 4, and see now what is God going to say when he does address Judah and in verse 6 when he does address Israel. And we're just in the second chapter of the book.

Let's pause here and take our break.