

Kings and Prophets 15-02-20b

We resume our study now in the book of Amos. We're looking at the structure and content of this great prophecy that was delivered in the 750s BC. There is less than a generation to go before what we know from our vantage point to be the judgment of the Northern Kingdom with the Assyrians coming down and taking them into captivity.

We're in chapter two now where we have seen the pronouncement of judgment on Damascus, on Gaza, on Tyre, on Edom, on Ammon, and on Moab. So just when they're expecting there to be some other surrounding nation that's gonna get the pronouncement of impending judgment, thus says the Lord in chapter two, verse four, for three transgressions of Judah and for four, I will not turn away because they have despised the law of the Lord, because they have not kept his commandments, their lies lead them astray, lies which their fathers followed, but I will send a fire upon Judah and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. This is the same judgment that was pronounced on every other nation.

Do you remember what God said to Israel when they first went into the land? And God said, if you follow the practices of the Canaanites, if you worship their gods and follow their immoral and heinous practices, what did God tell Israel would happen? I will bring on you the same judgments I have pronounced on them. The iniquity of the Amorites is full. They have had hundreds of years, literally, from the time of Abraham down to the time of the conquest to turn, to look to the Lord, and they have not.

And God uses the new nation of Israel to be the scourge and the implement of judgment on Canaan. And he says, if you do not utterly destroy them, if you allow them to survive, if you amalgamate with them, if you compromise with them, if you begin to follow the ways that I have condemned and the destruction of which I sent you in to accomplish, then you will share in their judgment. Well, here are the existing surrounding nations that don't have a covenant relationship with God coming in for judgment.

And now Judah is lumped right in with them. The very same judgment, I will burn their walls with fire and devour their palaces. And Judah is just another nation.

And this has to be a huge shock and insult. These people have been cheering each new victim, each new target, and now it's them. And before they can recover in Judah, in verse six, Amos continues, thus says the Lord for three transgressions of Israel and for four, by the way, how many transgressions were listed for Judah? There was basically one for each one of the previous nations.

How about how many for Judah? They have despised the law of the Lord. They have not kept his commandments. Their lies have led them astray.

And these are lies that their fathers followed and they haven't corrected it. Now, is there an issue of authority when you look at the fathers? Well, I'm just doing what my father taught me.

My father followed lies.

And so I'm just, you know, I can't help it. I was raised by him just to chip off the old block. We have seen in both of our studies now how important it is to recognize when authority goes astray, when you can no longer follow authority and subject yourself to authority in the Lord.

The ultimate criteria is in the Lord. Children obey your parents in the Lord. Wives submit to your husbands in the fear of the Lord.

The qualifier is all important. And if your fathers are following lies, if you inherit a country that is driven by lies from your fathers, you have a responsibility to seek out the truth, to adhere to the truth, to live by the truth, to speak the truth to one another in love, to put away lying and deceit. We saw God's attitude toward lying and deceit with Ananias and Sapphira.

Partial obedience, partial acknowledgement, partial truth. God doesn't tolerate it. He's got a very judgmental attitude toward it.

Well, they're saying they've given short shrift to the law of the Lord, which is the highest authority. They have not kept his commandments. Their lies lead them astray.

Now this is in Judah. This is in the place where Jehoshaphat had sent teachers out and had taught and inculcated people in the law. And they were taught in the law a few generations earlier.

And what's happening now? They despise it. There's still a lot of religiosity. There's still a lot of sacrifice bringing, but it's polluted, it's corrupted, it is compromised.

It is lip service and for show. And in their hearts, they despise it. They've got other priorities.

They've got other interests. They are just as bad as those surrounding nations. Now, let me ask you something.

We've seen, let's count them off. Number one was Damascus. Number two was Gaza.

Number three was Tyre. Number four was Edom. Number five was Ammon.

Number six was Moab, right? And God has pronounced judgment on them. How many copies of the book of Amos do you think left Judah and went to these towns, these nations, these capitals? Did God send Amos to Damascus like he sent Jonah to Nineveh? Did he send Amos to Tyre? Did he send him down to Gaza? Did he send him over to Ashkelon and Ashdod and the cities of the Philistines? Did he send him down to Edom or Moab or Ammon? Where are these prophecies being delivered? In Judah, in Israel, right? Now, if the content describing the crime and the judgment is only being announced to God's people in Israel, in Judah, who is it really for? Who is it designed to instruct and to teach? Is this to give the Tyrians and the Damascans and the Philistines and the rest of these Moabites and Ammonites and Edomites the chance to repent? Is that the purpose of the prophecy? What's the purpose of these six previous

indictments? Think again about the pattern in Romans 1 and then into Romans 2. You are the man. Who are you, oh man, to be pointing your finger at these when you yourself are doing the very same thing.

These descriptions of plowing up people's stuff with an implement of iron, of trying to aggrandize themselves with territory, of raiding and taking, of ripping open the pregnant women. What happens when you rip open pregnant women beyond the immediate physical violence? What is this a picture of? If pregnancies do not come to term, if you don't have your next generation being born, that's the end of your line. That takes away your future.

This, by the way, is a pretty graphic picture of abortion for people that get involved in that issue and want to look at it, want to know what the Bible says about it. Here's God's attitude toward attacking what is in a woman's womb. Judgment comes on it.

And that's just, I'm just objectively saying, you can have whatever attitude you want to have about abortion. I'm just saying the word of God says there's judgment coming on people who rip open pregnant women. And what is the result of that? The pregnancy does not come to term.

The baby is not born. Is God happy with that? Oh, well, it wasn't born yet, so no harm done. Sorry, no.

It is a fact of the word of God that he has a very dim view of interfering with pregnancy. That's just a biblical fact. So in Judah, now these other people have done these crimes, these border transgressing, these line crossing crimes, right? We saw what Pesha means.

And it is for selfish gain, for the satisfaction of personal anger, for the taking of territory, for the aggrandizing of self. What is the crime? What is the Pesha when you get to Judah? They have despised the law of the Lord and have not kept his commandments. This isn't plowing up Gilead, is it? This isn't ripping open pregnant women, is it? This isn't selling people into captivity in Edom, is it? And yet God puts it at the same level.

Judah is lumped in at the same level. God is going to bring the same judgment on his own people for these insubstantial crimes, these non-physical violations. This is a shock.

This is a wake-up call. And as I mentioned in the first session, notice the ingenious way that God slips this under the audience's guard. They're not expecting themselves to be named in this list of those coming in for judgment.

And Amos is going to remind them later on. We saw when Amos, the three different ways he identifies himself, he says, I'm not a prophet and I'm not the son of a prophet. What have these people done? They have built a defense.

They have got a little bubble shield, a force field around anything that smacks of divine authority. If a prophet comes and speaks, they throw up a wall, they shut the door. They won't

even listen.

Oh, you're a prophet? No, thanks. This is the salesman coming to the door. Fuller brush, man.

Don't need no brushes. Shut the door, right? And so not only does God sort of bring this in under the radar, it flies at a low altitude. It comes in under their guard.

It's an uppercut that comes under the guard of the boxer, but they're willing to listen to Amos because he's not a professional man of God. Why are they even listening to him? Well, he's some sort of fig picker down there in Carmel. He's a sheep guy and a cow guy.

He's a businessman. We don't know exactly what business. If he's in Tekoa, maybe he's taking advantage of those people down at the temple.

Well, good. They need to be taken advantage of. A bunch of crooks and self-aggrandizers down there.

Of course, they are of the same cloth, but yeah, he's okay. We'll listen to him because he's not a professional man. And in these last days before judgment, especially in the Northern Kingdom, God uses alternate means of communication.

Remember how there are times in history where God will use people that aren't supposed to be talking. They're not supposed to be God's messengers, and yet they are. And that's the way the message gets through.

It's an unorthodox, unexpected path. This is the unguarded flank. This is the water course.

You drain out the water and come in under the wall. This is what God is using. Look at the lengths to which God is going to warn his people, to wake them up, to call them.

He knows that they are inured to any professional prophet's message. They are sick and tired of hearing the harangues that judgment is coming. So they'll turn that off without even listening.

But here's Amos, who's not threatening. He doesn't come wrapped in a prophet's garb. He doesn't come with his prophetic credentials.

He's not a prophet. He's not the son of a prophet. He's safe.

We can listen to him. He's all right. And he's talking about judgment on these surrounding nations.

This is God's really final appeal, especially to the Northern Kingdom. It's a wake-up call. And the only reason Judah doesn't go out at the same time is that there is still a response.

There's a remnant down there sufficient to preserve Judah, cultivated by Jehoshaphat and all of those unnamed, unknown teachers that taught the word of God and built a foundation and a reservoir, a remnant exists in Judah that is going to hear this appeal and will have enough of a

response. Remember King Hezekiah? Remember how the king is a picture of the people? You remember Hezekiah? God says, you're gonna die. We'll get to it.

Remember in Isaiah, Hezekiah, your life is over. Your time is up. And what does he do? Turns his face to the wall, cries tears.

And there's enough repentance that God says, okay, I give you 15 more years or 150 more years. What's the distance between 721 and 586? It's about 150 years. The 15 years granted to Hezekiah stand in for the 150 years God's going to give Judah.

But Hezekiah is a mirror. He's an image. He's a reflection.

He's an icon for the people in Judah. And it is going to happen at the end of this prophetic period. So you have not ripped up pregnant women or gone in and burned up Gilead and raided and pillaged and sold people into captivity and done all these other acts of violence and border transgression.

You have despised the law of the Lord. You've not kept His commandment. You've been led astray by lies.

Notice, now, is it your fault if somebody lies to you and you act on that lie? Somebody says, oh, drink this Kool-Aid. It's good for you. And it's actually laced with poison.

God holds them to account for following lies. Why? Because the truth is accessible and they should know better. They have ignored the truth and accepted the lie.

Keep your finger here and turn over to Romans chapter one. What is the indictment that Paul delivers? The wrath of God, Romans 1:18, is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth. The truth is available and they push it away.

What may be known of God is manifest in them. God has shown it to them. You go to Ecclesiastes, God has put eternity in their hearts.

The old King James says He's put the world in their hearts, but it's eternity. Since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. Creation is a witness.

DNA is a witness. The more they dig in to the structure and the fabric of the universe, they think they're so wise, they think they're so smart. What gets me about science, what really annoys me is they'll discover a thing and then they try to, it is as though they're taking credit for it.

They find this incredible wisdom, this incredible design, this incredible sophistication in creation, and by discovering it, it's as though they thought it up. You should be humbled. You should be down on your knees, acknowledging the glory of the one who did design it, who did put it all together, who sent His subordinates to put it into operation.

The grand designer, the one who is over all and above all, God only wise. His invisible attributes are seen in His works. The incredible sophistication, they say, well, you know, it was just inevitable from the Big Bang.

Who created the Big Bang? Who created this universe with all of its parameters and all of its constants and all of its properties, the nature of physics, all of the things that we organize in our puny, imperfect equations and laws of physics. We say laws of physics and chemistry like we invented them. It's an observation.

This all preceded us. It defines us. And what may be known of God, it ought to put people on their knees.

And for many of us, it does, but for others, it doesn't. They suppress the truth. And although they knew Him as God, in verse 21, they don't glorify Him as God.

They're not thankful. They become empty in their thoughts and their foolish hearts are darkened. Professing to be wise, they become fools.

They exchange the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. Birds, four-footed animals, and creeping things. And this is what modern science with all of its sophistication says, is that birds and four-footed animals and creeping things basically invented themselves.

They just invented themselves. I was pointing out to somebody earlier this week, his premise is that descent with modification, Darwinian evolution, is what brought about the non-random complexity, the sophisticated code of DNA. And he says, well, you know, DNA can do this because it reproduces and it mutates and then it gets selected.

You know, the environment says, this is good DNA. And I said, excuse me, DNA does not reproduce. You can't just take a DNA molecule, hang it on a hanger here and wait, and pretty soon there's gonna be two of them.

DNA does not reproduce, it is copied. What is it copied by? A sophisticated mechanism which has to pre-exist. If you don't have the mechanisms in the cell to do the unzipping and the RNA and all of these proteins and these incredible sophisticated things, there is no duplication of DNA.

Well, where do those machines come from? DNA has the plan for their construction and their sophisticated processes of operation. DNA defines all of that. So, you know, this is circular argument.

The DNA comes from the machinery. The machinery comes from the DNA. The sophistication of DNA came from the machinery, which of course isn't there unless DNA creates it.

And so, well, you just go back and regress. It was simpler and simpler. Well, where's the point at

which there was no machinery and DNA just came into existence and DNA created the first machinery that would then grab the DNA and make copies of it? It's just absurd.

But professing to be wise, they become fools. And they're forced into this foolishness and they can't choose anything else because to admit anything else is to admit a designer from the design, which is then to put you on your knees before a wise and holy God. Can't have that.

Therefore, God gives them up to uncleanness, to the lust of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchange, verse 25, this is our verse, Romans 1.25, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, worship and serve the creature rather than the creator, the creation rather than the creator. Isn't nature wonderful? Isn't the marvel of evolution wonderful? These carbon-based molecules and these nucleotides and isn't it just wonderful how they just sort of fell together and started, it's amazing, you know, you just put enough nucleotides in a grand soup and they'll just randomly chain and then pretty soon there'll be some happy combinations and some kind of way they'll just start copying themselves. I had a guy, actually, I made him write this down for me and when you read it, it's like reading about Rapunzel spinning gold out of straw.

Now, tell me again, how did that happen, that the spinning wheel, she spun the straw, tell me again, how did that exactly happen? Somewhere in the story, I missed the magic, you know, it just, she worked all night, you know, the Rumpelstiltskin guy comes in and makes it happen. Well, he's just a deus ex machina, he comes in and you don't know how it actually happened. Well, there is no Rumpelstiltskin in evolution, the straw just turns to gold and, you know, it's not there.

And I had a guy write, I couldn't even figure out how to respond, it was just such a stunningly, well, it's not inconceivable, he uses this phrase like four or five times, well, it's not inconceivable as these molecules floated around, you know, some of them just sort of were selected. By what? For what? Why is life selected for rather than randomness? Why isn't randomness selected for, why life? You know, if you're selecting, why do I not select for Jackson Pollock instead of Norman Rockwell? Why isn't Jackson Pollock great art and Norman Rockwell is trash? Funnily enough, they put Rockwell on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post and they put Jackson Pollock down for, you know, a tarp to paint over, which is all he ever did anyway. But this is the exchanging the glory and exchanging the truth.

Notice in verse 23, they exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for corruptible stuff made in man's image. They exchange in verse 25, the truth of God for the lie. This is the indictment in Amos chapter two for Judah.

They have despised the law of the Lord, have not kept his commandment. Their lies lead them astray, which their fathers followed. These lies are visible and they're known and they are chosen.

They choose the lie instead of the truth. This is why throughout Ephesians, especially in the

middle section we're in now, we've seen this strong emphasis on truth. Put away the lie, put away the deceit, put away the human short-term corruptible image and acknowledge and bow before and live in the light of God who dwells in unapproachable light, who has spanned the mighty gulf with the Lord Jesus Christ and has made it possible for us to live and to serve.

Their lies lead them astray, which their fathers followed. I will send a fire upon Judah and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. Why is it devouring the palaces and not the pastures? Who's out in the pastures of Tekoa and Carmel? The remnant who still understands.

Who is propagating and promulgating and living off the proceeds of the lie? Those in power, those who are abusing their authority. Verse six, three transgressions of Israel and for four God says, I will not turn away because they sell the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals. They will sell out their brother for the smallest material gain, the slightest advantage, the meanest percentage profit.

They will happily betray their fellow Israelite. They pant after the dust of the earth and you see a text note there, trample on. Either way, it's an occupation with or a use of the dust of the earth, which is on the head of the poor and they pervert the way of the humble.

A man and his father go into the same girl to defile my holy name. Now, how many transgressions did he say he was gonna list? Who is this prophecy really aimed at? Amos has been sent from the South to the North and God says for three crimes and for four, I'm gonna indict you, oh Israel, count the crimes. They sell the righteous for silver.

They sell the poor, that's a different category in some cases, for a pair of sandals. They either trample or pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor. They pervert the way of the humble.

They are entangling them in these perverse ways. That's four already. A man and his father go into the same girl.

This is gross immorality, that's five, to defile my holy name. This means that it is part of ritual worship observances. This is the high places.

This is the Canaanite idolatry, immorality, temple priestesses, that this is going into them in the name of holiness, in the name of worship. That's six. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge.

That's seven. They drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their God. That's eight.

It was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was as strong as the oaks. Remember what the spies originally said? They're too big, they're too tall, we can never do it. God went in and wiped them out before them.

Yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath. It was I who brought you up from the

land of Egypt and led you 40 years through the world. Do you see a difference in the length of this condemnation? Have we found the actual target now? Now that it's under the guard, now that they're listening to the man who is no prophet, he is laying it on thick and fast.

I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I led you 40 years through the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets, some of your young men as Nazarites.

Is it not so, O you children of Israel, says the Lord? But you gave the Nazarites wine to drink. You corrupted them. That's what they're not supposed to do, right? And commanded the prophets saying, do not prophesy.

That's why this message is coming from a nonprofit, a nonprofit organization. Behold, I am weighed down by you as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down. Therefore, flight shall perish from the swift.

The strong shall not strengthen his power nor shall the mighty deliver himself. He shall not stand who handles the bow. The swift of foot shall not escape nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself.

The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, says the Lord. I will strip you literally of everything that you depend upon. Everything that you think is going to deliver you, gone.

I made a nation out of you and as a nation, I can destroy you. We're in the 750 range, 721. This prophecy will be literally fulfilled.

Well, we see this. It's shocking. It is profound.

It is very clear and evident. And in the same way that the prophecies pronounced on Damascus and on Tyre and on Edom and on Moab and on Ammon and on Gaza, those prophecies were actually indictments targeted at the Northern kingdom, even the condemnation of Judah. And you can imagine in the Northern kingdom that even that would probably play pretty well.

Yeah, those hypocrites down there. Now it has, the arrow has hit the target. It has hit the bullseye.

It has pierced the very heart of these people and it is all for them. Well, in a larger sense, as you step back, this is all for us. It's still here in the word of God and God, the Holy Spirit is still ministering it because it is for us.

And we have to ask ourselves, am I as blind in some area or areas of my life as these people were? Am I as inured to the truth? Am I as ready to deflect and dismiss and discard the point that the word of God makes as these people were? Is God having to use this subterfuge, this indirect method to get the message into my heart as he did for these people? We can easily

look at them and say, you blind, you fool, you shallow. God had given you so much. You have the promises, you have the miracles, you have the prophets, you have these incredible presences and acts of God to convince you and to show you.

And yet in our own lives in this present day, we have the promises, we have the presence, we have the power of God that has been manifest in so many ways in our lives. And are we just as insensate, just as ready to dismiss and to redefine and to reassign? Well, that happened because of this. That wasn't the power of God.

That wasn't the mercy of God. That wasn't the grace of God. That was because I went in and lay with the temple priestess for Dagon, the temple priestess of Ashdod.

It was my sacrificing my child to Molech. That's why this went so well. And God says, you are taking my glory and shoving it aside, shoving the truth aside and swallowing the lie, living in the lie.

This is a lie that has been around for a while. Other people have fallen for it and you're falling for it yourself. Look at the length of the indictment on the people of God in the Northern Kingdom for whom judgment is just a few years away.

God has, this is his last best measure. The prophet Amos, not a professional prophet is coming up and saying, look people, the Lord God is in his heaven. Whether you believe it or not, whether you like it or not, whether you acknowledge it or not, he is there.

And you can be in denial all you choose. You can assign it all of the different reasons and causes and successions and relations that you want. But in 721 BC, these people are carried away into captivity, those that are not slain outright.

And all of their hardheadedness and hardheartedness does them no good when their bodies are lying rotting in the sun. And when the rest of them are dragged away, naked, penniless, propertyless, heritage-less into Assyria to serve as slaves to pagans. They've served and chosen pagan ways and pagan gods.

You get to be the slave in the house of pagan people for the foreseeable future. It is the judgment of God on those who will not listen. We have to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, recognize that he is the creator, that his glory is without compromise.

He is a jealous God. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. And he doesn't take kindly to us wandering beyond the borders and the authority that he has established for us.

Well, this is a powerful reminder. We'll survey the rest of this book next Friday night and complete our study of these first three prophets, Jonah, Hosea, and Amos. And we'll move to the last two that prophesy in this period.

Each one of them, you remember Hosea approaches it from the standpoint of relationship.

Amos has a completely different take, a completely different angle, completely different approach, trying, God is using every different method to reach his people in this day of impending judgment. And we'll see that the next two prophets are going to do the same, each in their own way, each exploiting a different possible avenue of contact, of communication, of appeal, of call to repentance and a change of mind.

And it is a call as much to us today as it was to them. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word, the variety of ways that you appeal to us, whether it is the form of literature, whether it is didactic, whether it is narrative, whether it is poetry, whether it is wisdom, whether it is prophecy, whether it is apocalyptic.

In so many different ways, do you package and convey divine truth to us and in the work of your Holy Spirit, make the appeal and the call to us. And when we respond, we are so blessed, we are so provided with opportunities and with challenges and with areas of service and of growth and of preparation so that beyond this life, we can serve and we can experience the manifest grace and mercy that you have communicated to us through the Lord Jesus. We pray that these things will weigh on our minds and on our hearts in a productive way, in a way that motivates us to reach the potential and exploit the opportunity that you've given us through the communication of these truths.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.