

Kings and Prophets 15-03-27a

This is Friday, the 27th of March, 2015. We are pursuing our study of Kings and Prophets, and by request we're going to do one more night and finish up the book of Amos. I sort of rushed my conclusion last week, and I had a couple of people press me to spend a little more time and do the rest of the book as much justice as we did the beginning.

So we're going to look at that tonight, and it really is important. The more I looked at it, the more I thought that was a good call, and I appreciate the suggestion and the input. So if you haven't already, you can turn to the book of Amos.

We're going to pick up at about chapter 5 and take one step backward and then push through to the end of the book this evening. But we'll take a moment, as is our custom, to go before the Lord in prayer and ask His blessing on us. It's always a challenge when we look at these Scriptures in the Old Testament especially, to bring the truth of them and the meaning of them forward into application in our lives.

Our times are so different. Our lives are so different. It's a great challenge.

It's a fun exercise to prevail upon the Holy Spirit to give us insight and wisdom in taking these things that happened so long ago and converting them into capital that we can use and spend in our lives now. I think you know this as much as I do. There's a great sense of satisfaction in digging these things out of the ground like a prospector, like it talks about in Proverbs chapter 2, where you take them and you dig and you seek and you search, and when you get them out and they are meaningful, and during the week and in situations and circumstances, you can actually think back to the days of Jeroboam II, to the days of Hezekiah, to the days of Josiah and Jehoshaphat and Judah, and make a meaningful transition from what God said to His people in those days and realize that He's saying the same thing to us.

So I hope you're enjoying it as much as I am, but that's our challenge, is to not have it be dead ink on the page but to be the living and abiding truth of God that He has preserved and brought forward to this day and to this time because it is so pertinent and so helpful to us. And it really kind of comes into our souls sideways sometimes, and we suddenly realize it's the same God with the same truth, the same standards of righteousness and justice, that lives and abides in heaven and is watching us and evaluating us and providing for us and encouraging us and exhorting us to live just as He did these people that were in the days gone by. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin.

Father, we are so thankful that we can come before You and address You as our Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of Your Holy Spirit, made aware of these wonderful truths by the things that we have learned from Your Word over the course of past days.

We thank You for this portion of Scripture, and we pray that as we wrap up our brief investigation of this great prophetic book from Amos the shepherd of Tekoa, that Your Holy Spirit will enliven it and enrich our souls with an understanding of the timeless truth that it contains so that we can be better equipped to lay hold of righteousness by faith, that we can present ourselves as living sacrifices before You and pursue righteousness before You and justice as we deal with one another in the time that remains to us in this life as we anticipate the return of the Lord Jesus, who will come and gather us to Himself and bring us before Your presence so that we can move into the next phase of Your plan and purpose for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, you remember the circumstance. You remember that Amos is from Judah. He has been sent up to the north to proclaim this message.

These are the final few years of the existence of the Northern Kingdom, and in the time of Jeroboam II, God is trying a new tactic to reach His people, to break through the callousness, the apathy and indifference, the complacency and self-sufficiency that has so cocooned those people that the normal words of a prophet, even the miraculous intervention of prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, so quickly fades from memory. The judgment and discipline of God, as He has allowed them to suffer incursions by their neighbors, to be deprived, to have their goods taken, to have the fruit of their labors negated, to have all of those negative aspects of the covenant to which they are still party. God has not broken covenant.

They have breached their agreement with God, but the covenant is still in effect, and God said, "If you are obedient and faithful, I will bless you. If you are disobedient, the provision of the covenant is I will judge you, I will discipline you, I will seek to turn you back to Myself." And that is the phase that they are in.

But God, in His mercy and in His grace, has called a halt to the unrelenting judgment and the negative eruptions from heaven with an IR at the beginning. God has called a halt, intervening to try to turn them back, and He said, "Look, I am going to give you a break." And so in this time, He has caused the nations to the north and to the east and even to the south to have internal problems, to be preoccupied with their own issues, and this has created sort of a vacuum, almost like the eye of the storm, where there is a calm, and there has been a return to prosperity and a rebuilding and a renewal and a respite from these constant judgments that we have seen in 2 Kings that God has been using to try to turn His people. And He says, kind of like we saw in the book of Isaiah some years ago in the beginning chapters, "I have beaten you black and blue, and it does not seem to be doing any good. I am weary of beating you."

And so God has stopped and said, "Maybe I can appeal to you a different way." So He has allowed them to rebuild, He has allowed them to be restored and to have a period of peace to reflect and to perhaps return. What have they done with this opportunity? As we have seen in these first chapters, they have used it to seek out material prosperity, to aggrandize themselves, to dwell in palaces and comfortable couches and beds, to oppress the poor.

They have not taken the opportunity to redress the oppression of the poor and to try to improve their condition, much like Lazarus at the gate of the rich man. They trample the dust on the heads of the poor. They just look at them as something to walk on, and they are using this period not to return to God but to return to self-gratification.

Well, we can see parallels throughout history and certainly in our own day, where there is a spiritual bankruptcy that prevails in so much of the world and especially in the United States and in our culture. But there is a respite from judgment. We are not economically oppressed yet.

We are not under the thumb of foreign influence yet. You can see the storm clouds on the horizon. You can see the red sky in the morning.

But we continue to enjoy prosperity even as we depart further and further from God as a culture. And even in the house of God, the people of God, the church, there is so much self-gratification and appeal to the emotions and desire for personal gratification, personal satisfaction, rather than seeking the things that God has always demanded of His people. So returning to the book of Amos, you will remember that there is this resounding theme. God reviews the time of judgment in the recent past.

In chapter 4, we see this refrain: "says the Lord, says the Lord." And I want you to notice two things. First of all, the repetition of that.

That phrase occurs probably more in the book of Amos in terms of density than almost anywhere else in Scripture. I just quickly went through and circled them in my Bible. And in chapter 1, you have it in verse 3, you have it in verse 5, you have it in verse 6, you have it in verse 8, you have it in verse 9. "Thus says the Lord, says the Lord, thus says the Lord, says the Lord God, thus says the Lord."

And I turned the page. "Thus says the Lord" in verse 11, "thus says the Lord" in verse 13, "says the Lord" in verse 15. Just in chapter 1, I've got 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 circled instances of "thus says the Lord."

So the frequency of that is one observation. The second one is, who's talking? Of all of the divine appellations that you find in Scripture, what is the one that's used here? The Lord. This is God's personal name, His covenant name with Israel.

Remember that? It's Yahweh, but they vocalized it as Adonai. That's where we ended up with Jehovah, with the consonants of one and the vowels of another. And it's kind of a mix-up word that they've since straightened out.

But this is the Lord. This is God appealing to His people using His personal name. You continue into chapter 2, verse 1, "thus says the Lord."

Verse 3, "says the Lord." Verse 4, "thus says the Lord." Verse 6, "thus says the Lord."

Verse 11, “says the Lord.” Verse 16, “says the Lord.” And again, I’ve got 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 instances in chapter 2. These chapter divisions are artificial, but not a part of the original letter.

But again, over and over again, and it’s always the Lord. In chapter 3, “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel.” He’s talking in personal covenant terms to His people.

And verse 7, “Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals the secret to His servants, the prophets.” “The Lord God has spoken,” verse 8. The Lord God. He’s transitioned from the Lord to the Lord God, Yahweh Elohim.

Verse 11 of chapter 3, “thus says the Lord God.” Verse 15 and verse 13—actually verse 13—“says the Lord God, the God of hosts.” We have a new appellation introduced there in verse 13.

The Lord God, the God of hosts, Yahweh Sabaoth. Remember that? The Elohim Sabaoth. Then in verse 15, “says the Lord.”

In chapter 4, verse 2, the Lord God is invoking His holiness. He’s invoking His righteousness, His justice. God’s holiness is made up of those two parts, righteousness and justice.

Verse 3, “says the Lord.” Verse 5, “says the Lord God.” Verse 6, “says the Lord.”

And beginning in verse 6, you have this refrain in chapter 4 that is repeated five times. And this is the review, this is the historical review that I alluded to earlier. Now, before we get too far down the road, just remember, God has sent Amos up to the Northern Kingdom with this message, and He gets their attention by talking about the sins, three transgressions and for four, in these surrounding nations.

And He hooks them in, gets their attention, then He turns it around to Judah and finally to the house of Israel, right? He’s much more detailed. So He’s got their attention, but when He’s giving that initial part, it’s the Lord, it’s the Lord, it’s the Lord. They say, “Ah, yes, this is our covenant God.

He’s protecting us. He’s taking care of these surrounding nations. Hooray for us.

Hooray for Him. This is all good.” And then He turns the corner.

He says in verse 6 of chapter 4, “I gave you cleanness of teeth. I sent famine. Your teeth are clean because you’ve had nothing to eat.

Lack of bread in all your places.” And in verse 6, “you have not returned to me, says the Lord.” That’s the refrain.

And that’s time number one. I put a little number one next to that in my Bible. I did this, yet you have not returned to me.

So I withheld rain. I advanced this famine. I made it more global, more widespread.

And in verse 8, I did all these things. People are wandering around looking for water. Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.

That’s refrain number two. I blasted you with blight and mildew when your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees. Again, this is the period before the current calm, before the current return to prosperity.

He says, “Look at what I did. I blasted you. I took down your vineyards and your trees.”

These are the more permanent forms of fruiting. The crops are one thing that cannot come up because of a drought. But these are the permanent trees that can maybe survive a drought for two or three years.

Now these are blighted and diseased and dying. And in the end of verse 9, refrain repetition number three, “yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.” So I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt.

Now it is extending to the population. There is disease and there is death among the people. Your young men I killed with the sword.

Along with your captive horses, I made the stench of your camps come up in your nostrils. Death of your animals and your sources of power and your sources of military strength. At the end of verse 10, “yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord.”

And notice, just big picture here, God didn't send the Assyrians down to take the Northern Kingdom into captivity in 721 B.C. with no warning. Look at how long and how persistently God has been dealing with them with warning judgments, with prophets coming and saying, “Return, turn around, change your mind. Why will you die, O house of Israel?” This didn't come out of nowhere.

This wasn't a surprise. Well, God suddenly got ticked off and now we've lost our land and we're off in captivity. There has been a resounding drum beat and an increasing tenor and tone of warning music for decades and for centuries.

“You have not returned to me,” verse 10. That's the fourth repetition of the refrain. Finally, in verse 11, “I overthrew you.”

As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning, preserved yet so as by fire. You ran out of the house with nothing but your nightgown on, yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord. That's the fifth repetition.

How many cycles of discipline were there back there in Deuteronomy that we looked at? Five. Therefore, verse 12, and He turns the corner. He says, “Look, I've given you these five warning judgments, and you have not turned.

Therefore, thus I will do to you, O Israel. Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet not your Lord, but your God, O Israel.” He who forms the mountains and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is.

Notice, He's no longer characterizing Himself as the God who brought you forth from the land of Egypt, the one that brought you into the good land, the one that cleared out the Amorites from before your face, the one that brought you to a land flowing with milk and honey. Who is He now? He's the God of creation. He's the God that formed the earth.

He's the giant God that's larger and beyond the covenant with His people. This is the God of all nature. This is the God of all creation, who makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth.

The Lord God of hosts is His name. Yahweh Elohim Sabaoth is His name. Now, that should give us pause there at the end of chapter 4. The Lord God of hosts is His name.

Is that His name to Israel? Keep your finger here and turn back to Exodus 3:15. Right away, having been through Exodus, you may remember that in those single-digit chapters, this is the career of Moses, getting ready to lead the people out. All those first 9 or 10 chapters, that's Moses.

What's happening in chapter 3? What does your Bible say right under the heading chapter 3? If you've got a New King James like mine, what does it say? Moses at the burning bush.

Exodus 3, look at verse 15. “Moreover God said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever and this is my memorial to all generations.”

I am the Lord God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord, the great I AM. Remember that? Verse 14, God said to Moses, “I am who I am. Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This is the derivation, the source of the name Yahweh that they vocalize and we have translated as the Lord. Yahweh is from the verb to be. So He says, “This is my name to you for all generations.”

What happened? If His name is the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the great I AM, what are we reading here in Amos chapter 4, verse 13? Is God changing His name? The Lord God of hosts is His name. This ought to be the most alarming note that Amos has yet sounded because God says to His people Israel, "I am no longer the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to you. I am the Lord God of hosts to you."

Remember lo ammi, no longer My people. Israel really is God's people. But He says, for purposes of instruction at this point, you are not My people.

And here, for purposes of judgment and discipline, you no longer have the right to call Me the God of your fathers. You want to talk to Me? You call Me the Lord God of hosts. That's My name as far as you are concerned right now.

After five rounds of discipline and your failure to return to Me, you don't have the privilege of calling Me, "O God of my fathers, O God of Abraham." I am revoking that privilege. You call Me the God of creation.

You are going to have to approach Me just like the Gentiles and the people of the nations. You are losing even your basic privileges. This is basically the child being sent to his room.

You don't have access to Me. You can't come sit in My lap. You can't come approach Me.

You go to your room, and you are just like any other child in the neighborhood right now. You have no access to Me, no special access. The only way you are going to come back to Me is the way any Gentile, any heathen, any uncircumcised Philistine or Hittite would have to come to Me.

This is serious, but it is not irrevocable. And what we want to see as we look at the book of Amos here is God's posture toward His people. They are in fact still His people, but His posture and His relationship with them at this point is at its lowest.

And it is as though they are like the nations. And that's the fifth cycle of discipline. And when you go back to Deuteronomy, you will be like the nations.

I will take your land away. I will send you out and scatter you. Right? So now look at chapter 5. "Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel."

The virgin of Israel has fallen and will rise no more. God used to look at the nation of Israel as this virgin daughter, but she has fallen not just physically, but morally. And there is no one to raise her up.

I mean no one. "For thus says the Lord God." And you can circle that one in chapter 5, verse 3.

"The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left." Remember we reviewed those provisions of the covenant for disobedience. Then in chapter 5, verse 4, "Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek Me and live." They have got to come back to the basic first step.

Seek Me and live. And you might circle that. Seek Me and live.

They can't even claim any provisions of the covenant at this point. Seek Me if you want to live. So you circle it in verse 4 there.

Don't seek Bethel. Don't seek Gilgal. These places where they have got all this idolatrous worship set up.

Verse 6, "Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph and devour it." Remember the house of Joseph? That's Ephraim and Manasseh. So that's number 2 there is verse 6. Number 1 is in verse 4. Number 2 is in verse 6.

And notice how He introduces Himself, so to speak, in verse 8. By the way, in verse 7, what is their fundamental crime? Their crime? You turn justice to wormwood, you lay righteousness to rest in the earth.

Those are the two components of God's holiness which they have ignored and trampled. What's the difference in righteousness and justice? What's the difference? Righteousness, personal righteousness, is our life before God. Am I living a righteous life or not? Job was an upright man and righteous in all his ways before the Lord.

Justice is the way we treat each other. Righteousness has more of a vertical emphasis. We don't perform justice toward God.

Justice is toward our fellow man. And these are the two areas. Without righteousness, you can't have justice.

This is why our legal system in this country is so screwed up. Why the Supreme Court is so messed up? Because we lack righteousness as a people, there can be no justice in the land. One is dependent on the other in the same way that the crosspiece of the cross depends on that vertical post.

And you're never going to see—you just give up on the district courts and the Supreme Court ever doing anything just in this land. Even when they get it right, they get it wrong in its application. And it's because we lack righteousness as a people.

What is the solution to the ailments of this country? The proclamation of the Word of God. A return of individuals and groups of individuals which form churches to God and His righteousness and living out justice. And as those churches grow and as a greater remnant of the population returns, just as God calls these people to return, that is the only thing that would ever turn the tide in this nation.

I personally am a little pessimistic that that's going to happen. It's one of the reasons I don't think we show up in prophetic end-time revelation. I don't see us in there except as the scarlet harlot falling off the beast and getting gored to death, wearing our red, white, and blue robe.

But be that as it may, seek the Lord and live. That is the answer. It's not who you elect.

It's not appealing to the Supreme Court to change the laws. It's not pestering congressmen to try to pass better laws. None of that will avail if there's not righteousness.

And from that righteousness, justice. That's the answer. So God says, "Seek Me and live.

Seek the Lord and live." Not seek Elohim Sabaoth. Seek the Lord.

Go back to your covenant relationship. Go back to the God of your fathers lest He break out like fire. That's number two.

Notice the condemnation. In verse 8 He says, "He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth."

That, by the way, is the second time that Amos refers to—two times he refers to what God does with those waters. And it's real interesting because you think about the knowledge of physics in the ancient world. Look at that statement right there at the end of verse 8: "He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth."

What? The waters of the sea? Water flows down the creeks and brooks and rivulets into the rivers that flow into the sea, and that's the big body of water. Amos says God takes the water of the sea and turns it into rain that waters the land.

This is evaporation and condensation. Nobody in the ancient world knew that except God and God's prophets. This is not the only place where they refer to that.

You don't find that anywhere else in the ancient world, that the waters of the sea turn back into rain. God knows this, and God revealed it to His prophet. But look at the strong.

God rains ruin, verse 9 of chapter 5. He rains ruin upon the strong. He talks about how God takes the water of the sea and rains it on the earth, and He says, what does the sea represent? The wicked are like the troubled sea, and He takes that truth of physics and He turns it into a biblical truth.

God is going to take the rain that He draws out of the sea of nations and rain it on the strong. He rains ruin upon the strong so that fury comes upon the fortress. Notice He's been talking about you, you, you, and it's going to resume in verse 11: "because you tread down the poor, you take grain taxes," and so on.

But notice in verse 10 it's they. Who are they? They are the strong. They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

Those in power, those in government, even today you look around, why do you think Christianity and Christian viewpoint is being suppressed? The national science education people and the powers that be in the legal system have suppressed, have driven out the Ten Commandments off of courthouse walls and out of classrooms, driven the mention of God out. You can talk about anything except God. You can mention anything except Christianity.

This is the strong. The strong hate the one who rebukes in the gate. Look at all the bile and spite and bitterness that's poured on the quote-unquote Tea Party and conservative Christian voice anywhere in public life.

They abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Just get used to it. Don't think that you're going to spark a revival speaking the truth.

The strong hate it and abhor it, and it's going to be that way until there is righteousness and justice embraced by more than a small remnant. And right now I don't think we've got ten left in Sodom. But then he returns and says in verse 14, here's the third call.

“Seek the Lord, seek good and not evil that you may live, so that the Lord God of hosts will be with you. Hate evil, love good.” Look at verse 15: establish justice in the gate.

It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. To the extent that we have a voice, to the extent that we have an influence, pursue righteousness. Notice in verse 14, seek good, that's your personal righteousness, and not evil, so that you may live.

Once you've done that, hate evil, love good, now you can establish justice in the gate. Get your own righteousness squared away first. Verse 16, “The Lord God of hosts, the Lord says this: There will be wailing in the streets and the highways, alas, alas, there's mourning among the farmers and lamenters wailing in the vineyards, for I will pass through you, says the Lord.”

Now, that's very significant. He says, “I will pass through you.” When's the last time—you remember another time that the Lord passed through? In Egypt He passed through, and there's only some houses that He passed over.

You remember that? Just real quickly here before we go to the break, look at verse 24. Keep that thought, “I will pass through you,” from verse 17. Look at verse 24 of chapter 5: “Let justice run down like water, let righteousness run down like a mighty stream.”

That's the fourth call to righteousness and justice and returning to the Lord. Look at verse 27 of that chapter. Because you do not turn, because you carry Sikuth and Chiun, your idols, the stars of your gods which you made for yourselves, verse 27: “I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus,” not just in Damascus, beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is what? The God of hosts.

Because you're not turning, because I'm giving you these appeals and I don't see any response, I don't see any humbleness of heart, this is My name. Well, just put a star by verse 17 because there's a concomitant, there's a related verse that we're going to see as we finish up this book. We've just got three more chapters, four more chapters to look at here, and we're going to see that in this last section there's kind of a book cover.

It begins here in chapter 5, and it's going to end in chapter 9. This has meaning and has a compelling application for us. We are the people of God, He's the same God, He's got the same standard, He makes the same demand on us as individuals that He made on them as a nation.

And if there's one thing we have to examine ourselves, we have to ensure that we're not being apathetic, that we're not redirecting the word of the Lord against others and looking over the fence at Edom and at Moab and the Philistines and the Egyptians and the people up in the north, the Syrians, and saying, “Oh, that doesn't apply to me.” It is so essential that we stop and examine ourselves and make sure that we are in the faith, and if we find any area of our life where we're not, to heed the call of God, to turn and to pursue at all costs and as a first priority, personal righteousness as we walk before the Lord and justice in our dealings with others.

No hitch in our step, no compromise, no delay, no putting it off, no procrastination. We need righteousness now. We need justice now because God will judge His people.

The axe is laid at the root of the tree and judgment comes first in the house of God, and whose house we are, right? So these aren't old dusty proclamations from 3,000, 2,600 years ago. It prevails, it pertains now. Let's pause here and take our break.