

The Trumpet Is Sounding But No One Is Alarmed



David Wilkerson September 9, 2002

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Amos speaks most clearly to our times. The prophecy he delivers zeroes in on our generation, as if it were ripped from today's headlines. Indeed, Amos' message is a dual prophecy. It was meant not only for God's people in his day, but also for the church right now, in our time.

Amos described God as a roaring lion, ready to strike Israel with judgment: "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). The prophet declared, "God has risen up as a roaring lion, ready to strike his prey. And when I hear this lion's voice roar, I have to warn."

The Lord was using Amos to awaken Israel. What was his message? God was about to send judgment on his people, for their overwhelming evil and corruption.

Of course, the Lord never judges a people without first raising up prophetic voices to warn them. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (3:7). Now, as Amos saw the cloud of judgment gathering, he was compelled to speak: "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (3:6). Amos' message here is chilling: "God has sounded a trumpet of warning to his people. But no one is alarmed."

Right now, few want to hear a message having to do with judgment. Our nation is already filled with fear. We expect another terrorist attack at any minute. And the economy looks bleaker than ever. People are saying, "I can't handle any more."

But the Lord speaks when he will. And his Spirit provides us strength to hear his Word, as delivered by his anointed servants. Our Lord will faithfully empower his people to endure whatever may come.

Amos directs his prophecies primarily to the people of God, the compromised church.

When Amos prophesied, he addressed the Gentile nations surrounding Jerusalem. Surely these heathen would fall under God's wrath. They were stealing Israel's borders, waging war against them, and killing their children.

Yet, now Amos said, "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel" (Amos 3:1). The lion's roar was against Israel itself. God's people were about to be punished for corrupting the pure worship of the Lord: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (3:2).

There is a divine law echoed throughout Scripture. It says, in essence, "The greater the measure of grace poured upon a people, the greater the judgment will fall on that people, if God's grace is despised." If a people have been given much truth, they're more responsible. And if they corrupt that truth, their judgment will be doubled.

Right now, God is surely judging America for its wickedness. I think of all the ways our nation has removed his name from the public. Growing up, I was taught that America was a Christian nation, founded by godly men who sought freedom to worship the Lord in truth. Of course, South Africa and other nations claim the same origins.

I have no doubt that God has blessed certain nations like America, to help evangelize the world. In its infancy, this country was the greatest missionary-sending nation on earth. America sent pastors, teachers and evangelists all over the globe. Meanwhile, a holy people back home kept back the flood tides of iniquity. Godly leaders, devoted preachers and zealous congregations stood up to honor the Lord's name.

But iniquity began to abound. God's name was mocked. And our nation became pleasure-mad. We turned to idols of wealth, prosperity, material gain. And we quickly lost our zeal and compassion for the lost. Now we're no longer a great missionary-sending nation. Instead, we're exporting a gospel of prosperity and covetousness.

In his great love and wisdom, the Lord has sought to purify our nation with severe chastenings. He's allowed droughts, floods, financial collapses, tornadoes, hurricanes, drastic weather changes. He's sounding the trumpet loudly. But no one is alarmed.

Many ministers claim, "God isn't like that. He isn't behind any of these tragedies. They're all the devil's work." I can't tell you how much these preachers exasperate me. They don't know their Bible. Consider the following word from Amos:

- * "I...have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (4:6). God is telling his people clearly that he's about to cause an economic collapse in their midst.
- * "Also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered" (4:7). The Lord is clearly in control of all weather, good or bad.
- * "So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied" (4:8). God is in control of droughts. And right now, entire states are having to ration water, due to severe shortages.
- * "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them" (4:9). In recent months, New York has been invaded by swarms of Japanese beetles. These pests are killing trees in Central Park and destroying vast acres of forest upstate.
- * "I have smitten you" (4:9). Who is responsible for all these things? God wants it absolutely clear in our minds: he is behind it all. "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (4:10).

You can't tell me the Lord isn't behind all the judgments we're experiencing. Many ministers present God as a kindly, doting grandfather. Of course, the Lord is merciful and gracious. But what these shepherds don't understand is that God's judgments are his mercy and grace. He's saying, "Return to me. I've had to send these chastisements to purge your nation and get your attention. You've sinned so deeply, you've blinded yourselves. Now judgment is the only language you'll understand. This is all about my love for you."

Amos prophesied a dual judgment, on the nation and simultaneously on the church.

Amos speaks of God's judgments as "great tumults in the midst thereof" (Amos 3:9). The word tumult means a state of confusion. In other words, the nation would be turned into chaos and disarray by great attacks of violence and terror.

"For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces" (3:10). What does Amos mean here when he refers to palaces? He's speaking of what we would call big business or large corporations.

Think about the events unfolding in our nation at this moment. Numbers of the most respected businesses in history are being exposed for "robbery in their palaces." CEOs of trusted institutions have cheated stockholders through crooked accounting practices. They've laid off thousands of employees. Meanwhile, they've built up huge nest eggs for themselves. Even as they were impoverishing others, they were securing wealth for their own escape.

Amos declares, "Thy palaces shall be spoiled" (3:11). These once-unshakable corporations are now being bankrupted. Wall Street is quaking. Yet, most dire of all, Amos predicts a plague of fear, because of attacks of terror from coast to coast: "An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee" (3:11). Could the prophet's words be any more timely? He's warning, "An enemy is going to hurl down your crowns of splendor. Those palaces of power and wealth you've gloried in will be razed to the ground."

After all this, an economic lion will appear, devouring the wealth and prosperity of those who got rich by their theft: "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch" (3:12).

When a lion devours its prey, it eats until there's nothing left but bone. That's exactly what Amos says this enemy will do to the luxurious rich. He'll leave nothing but bare remnants of their ill-gotten wealth. Amos tells them, "You thought you were safe because of the millions you secured. But a roaring lion is going to devour it all. When he's finished, there will be nothing left but a carcass."

Beloved, the same trumpet of warning is being sounded again in America today. But very few people are alarmed.

God says while he is visiting his judgments upon the nations, he will also visit the church.

Scripture says judgment begins in the house of God. Indeed, before the Lord strikes any nation, he will reveal his wrath in his church: "Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob,,,that in the day that I shall visit the transgressions of Israel upon him I will also visit the altars of Bethel" (Amos 3:13-14). The house of Jacob here represents the church, God's people.

Think about what Amos has prophesied to this point: God would most assuredly judge every nation that turned its back on him. He would allow wicked adversaries to plunder and terrorize those nations. And every person who turned to godless pleasures and debauchery would be humbled and brought low. Yet, amid all these things, God's primary concern was still his church. He was preoccupied with his people, those who called themselves by his name.

It doesn't matter if our government removes God's name from our coins, our courthouses, our schools and public gatherings. None of these things grieves the Lord as much as the wickedness in his church. God laughs at the ungodly's foolish attempts to push him out of society. Their day of reckoning has already begun. Even now they're being visited by his wrath. But the people who hurt God the most are his own family. He's wounded most deeply by the wickedness of his children.

The Lord now turned his focus to what was happening at Israel's altars. The name Bethel means "house of God, place of pure worship." It was once said of these altars, "The Lord is in this place" (Genesis 28:16). Indeed, Jacob called Bethel a dreadful place (see 28:17). By this he meant a place of reverence, because God manifested his presence there.

Bethel was where Jacob envisioned the ladder stretching upward to heaven. It was a holy place of worship, where God met those who sought him in purity. Often throughout Israel's history, the Lord referred to himself as "the God of Bethel." And at one point, he instructed Jacob to return to Bethel to restore the altars there.

In short, God was telling Israel, "I'm about to judge your wicked nation. The world will tremble because of the war and violence that will come upon you. I'll send floods, droughts, pestilence, blastings of mildew. Your economies will be shattered, your wealth devoured. Yet, at the same time I do these things, I'm going to visit Bethel also. I'm going to pour out judgment on my people, because they've polluted my altars. I'm going to punish them for their corrupt worship."

This had happened before at Bethel. When Jeroboam became king, he corrupted the worship there: "The king...made two calves of gold, and said ...behold thy gods...And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship...and [he] made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (1 Kings 12:28-31).

First, Jeroboam erected idols in the worship places. Then he took the criminal element of society, people who had

no heart for God, and named them priests. Israel's worship was totally corrupted, because it came from wicked, sinful hearts. So, from Jeroboam's rule down to Amos' day, God despised Bethel as a place of mixture. And he finally judged this false worship. He brought down the altar there, ripping it apart.

Today, there remains a spirit of Bethel in the church. It's a backslidden spiritual condition. And its main feature is a worship of mixture that's meant to draw crowds. It's an outward show of flesh, full of zeal and exuberance. But it's without any holiness whatsoever. And it's ensnaring many in these last days. The more that people believe this worship is of God, the blinder they become. And the Lord is set to judge it all. He warns, "If you're involved in this corrupt worship, you're only multiplying your sins."

Again God urged, "Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings" (Amos 4:5). Why did he say this? It was because the law forbade any leaven in a meat offering to be consumed by fire (see Leviticus 2:11). Moreover, leavened bread was meant only for priests. Likewise, every thanksgiving offering of bread was to be "unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil" (7:12).

These unleavened offerings were all intended as illustrations. They signified praises that were pure. Throughout Scripture, leaven is seen as a type of sinful flesh. It was sometimes used to refer to leprosy. God's message here is clear: "Your praise offerings are full of flesh. I will accept only those sacrifices that are sanctified, offered by clean hands and pure hearts. There can be no leaven, no fleshly indulgence, in my presence." "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4).

Outwardly, the Bethel worshippers were very religious. They zealously sacrificed every morning. And they were faithful to tithe and give. Once again, God urged them, "Bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes" (Amos 4:4). He saw these people begin every day by praising and worshipping. They were joyful as they went to their praise gatherings. Indeed, the movement of Bethel worship became so popular, it extended to cities throughout the region, from Bethel to Gilgal to Beersheba.

But the Lord warned them all: "Seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba...(it) shall come to nought" (5:5). God was about to bring everything down. He was going to consume all their leavened sacrifices of praise and worship. Why? Because the people "leave off righteousness in the earth" (5:7).

Thank God for the acceptable, holy, high praises that rise to him.

God still has a holy, separated remnant whose sacrifices of praise are pure. These godly saints aren't caught up in worldly pursuits. Their worship has the sound of mighty, rushing waters. And they're brokenhearted before the Lord, having a holy reverence for him. Out of such reverence come glorious shouts of praise.

Yet multitudes in the church are always looking for some new thing. They want new and exciting ways to worship God. So they seek out Bethel altars, where the praises sound loud and joyful. But the worship in these places is led by men who don't weep over the sin in God's house. Their praises may be exuberant and colorful. But there's no true presence of Christ. And there's no protection against the deception of the flesh.

It was probably exciting to take part in the praise gatherings at Bethel. But those worshippers had no concern for the things of God. They didn't help the poor or reach out to the needy. Instead, their praises were full of flesh and leaven. Amos warned, "Seek the Lord...lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph" (Amos 5:6). Likewise, let me offer this warning from the Lord: does your pastor not preach a sin-exposing word? Is there no godly reproof, no call to repentance, no warning to forsake sin? Then you're probably worshipping at a Bethel altar. And you're in great danger of being deceived.

God declared, "I will also visit the altars of Bethel: and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground" (3:14). This was a devastating word. In the Old Testament, the wooden altar in the temple had four carved horns attached to its corners. These horns were covered with brass, and were in the shape of a ram's horns. The horns represented the right of sanctuary. By laying hold of them, an offender placed himself under the protection of God's saving, keeping grace. As a young boy, I heard many godly old-timers say, "I'm safe, Lord. I've laid hold of the horns of the altar."

We see this kind of sanctuary illustrated in the life of David's son, Adonijah. This rebellious man had tried to usurp

the throne of Israel. But David's other son, Solomon, issued a death warrant for Adonijah. Panicked, Adonijah ran to the temple and grabbed hold of the horns of the altar. His life was spared.

Now God was telling Amos he would cut off those awesome horns of protection. The Lord was going to sever the horns from the altar and cast them to the ground. This meant the people would no longer be under his protection. Instead, they would be open to great deception. They would have no security against false doctrines or false worship.

I've seen the awful results of worshipping at an altar without horns.

In Africa, multitudes are coming from around the world to hear a man who claims God gave him prophecies in his mother's womb. Americans especially are traveling by the hundreds to receive a "personal prophecy" from this man. But the message is totally unbiblical and blasphemous. These unwise seekers are being snared by a deception.

In a Balkan state, a prophetess claims to lead people through trips to hell. The woman used to be a witch, and she says she once was in hell herself. She instructs people to lie on the floor and release their minds, while she guides them on an imaginary trip through what she experienced. People are flocking to her for the experience. But it's all unscriptural, an utter confusion. Indeed, there's something evil underlying this work.

In Brazil, an evangelist promises to heal cancer in people for \$1,000. He also performs exorcisms for a fee. He has developed a huge following, and he's getting rich from his claims. Yet it's utterly unbiblical, a complete deception.

America itself has become the world's worst pusher of deceptive gospels. How? Christians have become biblically illiterate. They don't bother to read God's Word anymore. They're not willing to fast or spend time in prayer. Instead, they run here and there, seeking out the flesh-pleasing teaching of some compromised evangelist.

How could multitudes of believers fall for such deceptions? How could they be so easily led astray? How did these masses become so blind to false works of the flesh? Amos tells us why: their protective walls are down, because of sin. God has removed the horns from the altar. And the people have lost all discernment. Such believers will be among the first to embrace the Antichrist.

God says when he visits his church, he's going to shut down everything that's polluted.

"In all vineyards [churches] shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the Lord. Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light...I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them...Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:17-24).

God's message is clear: until his righteousness begins to flow in our midst, cleansing our hearts, we won't be able to give him a true sacrifice of worship. Praises that come from hearts filled with lust and covetousness are but noise in his ears. He won't accept the worship of those who seek only pleasure or refuse to forgive others.

Amid all these prophetic warnings, Amos delivers this word of hope: "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (5:14-15).

I urge you, heed Amos' message. Seek the Lord with all your heart. Allow yourself to be judged by his Word. Confess and forsake your sin. Then God will bless you with discernment. You'll know whether you're worshipping at a Bethel altar. And you'll be able to worship him in Spirit and in truth.

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