

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets Lord of All Nations (Amos/Obadiah)

Lesson #4 for April 27, 2013

Scriptures: Amos 1-2; Isaiah 58; Luke 12:47,48; 1 Kings 8:37-40; Amos 4:12,13; Obadiah.

1. Amos described himself as a herdsman or sheep-breeder (Amos 1:1) and “a tender of Sycamore fruit.” (Amos 7:14) He went from Judea to Israel to proclaim his message.

The sycamore fig tree was a large tree, but the figs were generally of an inferior type. Their quality was greatly enhanced if each fig was pinched or slit on the upper part of the fruit before it matured. The resulting fruit became sweeter and softer.

The climate of Tekoa was not conducive to sycamore figs, so Amos most likely performed this part of his work in another part of the region. His book does not tell us whether he owned his own flocks and fig orchards or whether he labored as a hired hand for others. Whatever the case, he was itinerant. Both his shepherding and fig-slitting took him to different places. Undoubtedly, the observations he made as he traveled informed and fueled his comments on Israel’s situation before God. (*The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier - Amos*)

2. Tekoa was a small village located about 10 to 12 miles directly south of Jerusalem and about 5 or 6 miles southeast of Bethlehem.
3. Uzziah was king over Judah from 767-750 B.C. and Jeroboam was over Israel from 782 to 753 B.C. Therefore, we might conclude that the ministry of Amos took place sometime between the years 767 and 753 B.C. Nothing is currently known about the great earthquake he mentioned in Amos 1:1. However, it was remembered 250 years later in Zechariah 14:5.
4. Virtually nothing is known about the prophet Obadiah. He probably lived at the time of the Babylonian exile during one or more of the conquests of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar.
5. Both Amos and Obadiah came from the country of Judah, but each prophesied primarily against other nations. Amos traveled north and prophesied against the country of Israel; Obadiah prophesied against the country of Edom. Both prophets prophesied against groups of people who felt quite satisfied with their condition at the time. Apparently, they saw nothing wrong with abusing other people for their own advantage. And essentially, neither group paid any attention to the true God.
6. Amos started his book by prophesying against the nations surrounding Israel. He started with Syria in the north, moved to Philistia in the southwest, then to Tyre in the northwest, to Edom in the southeast, to Ammon and Moab in the east, to Judah in the south, and then he went to work on Israel as his main target. He was particularly hard on the rich who were abusing and unfairly using the poor. He described what we might today call crimes against humanity—cheating people out of their rightful wages and even selling them into slavery.

The history of Israel is dark. Not one of the 20 kings in the Northern Kingdom followed God. All of the kings—from the first, Jeroboam, to the last, Hoshea—were wicked. They did things that were wrong in the sight of the Lord. There was not a single exception. Only plots, revolts, exploitation, violence, terror, corruption, tragedy, and desperation prevailed. Just to

illustrate: seven of Israel's kings were assassinated, one committed suicide, and one was "stricken by God." The Bible uses King Ahab and his wife Jezebel as a symbol of the evil in Israel. Not one was a God-fearing ruler; none repented or undertook reformation. They led the people to destruction. They were leaders of doom. What an unfortunate and evil situation. No wonder God needed to send "strong medicine" to shake the stubborn nation and stop the prevailing wickedness. But unfortunately, as we know from history, not even the voice of a prophet helped. (*Adult Teacher's Bible Study Guide*, p. 50)

7. By speaking about the nations surrounding Israel, Amos is reminding us that God is not the God of a special group; but rather, He is the God of all humanity.
8. Amos was the first prophet to write his message in some detail. He believed that he had to speak out against the injustice that was taking place throughout the territory of Palestine. Such injustice had become more or less the ethical standard among those nations. Amos reminded them that the day of God's judgment was coming.
9. **What is the relationship between our spiritual condition—our relationship to God—and our ethical treatment of those around us—our neighbors?** In times of prosperity, social injustice sometimes becomes even worse. Christianity is supposed to affect our way of living every day of the week and not just on Sabbath.
10. Read Isaiah 58. Do we as Christians recognize the need to reach out and care for the poor and needy around us? This is personal benevolence, not a government handout. Remember the two great commandments given by Moses and repeated by Jesus: to love God and to love our neighbors. (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5) Throughout Scripture, from Exodus 22:21-24 through James 2:14-26, God's people have been asked to look after widows and orphans. This is supposed to be one of the major functions of the church. (Acts 4:32-36) Is this works as compared to faith? Do we need a balance?
11. Read Amos 3:1,2. Amos had already spoken against the nations surrounding Israel. Then, he quoted God as saying: "Of all the nations on earth, you are the only one I have known and cared for. That is what makes your sins so terrible, and that is why I must punish you for them." We know that God is omniscient, knowing everything. So, what is implied by this verse? We recognize that God chose the Hebrew nation. The Hebrew verb *yada*, "to know," implies an intimate friendship and not just a casual knowledge. Adam "knew" Eve his wife, and they had a baby. (Genesis 4:1; John 17:3) By contrast, at the time of judgment, Jesus will have to say to many of His followers: "Go away; I never 'knew' you." (Matthew 7:21-23; Acts 19:11-20) How can I know that God "knows" me?
12. It is a terrible temptation for people who are doing fairly well and consider themselves even wealthy to relax and sit back and forget or ignore their responsibilities to God and their neighbors. Does that sound a little bit like Laodicea? (Revelation 3:14-22) Is it possible that God has blessed Adventists too much? Read Luke 12:47,48. Has any group in the history of the world had more "light" and more privilege than we do? These verses suggest that when God has blessed us greatly, it is so that we can do more work for Him. Are we doing that? Are we making use of what we have been given? Our cups are overflowing!

The professed churches of Christ in this generation are exalted to the highest privileges. The Lord has been revealed to us in ever-increasing light. Our privileges are far greater than were the privileges of God's ancient people.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 317.

13. All through history, God has called people not just to special privilege but to great responsibility. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in our day has experienced more spiritual privileges than any generation before. Are we living up to our responsibilities?
14. After speaking about the abuses against humanity throughout Palestine, Amos focused on the nation of Israel and said, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (Amos 4:12, *NIV*) And how is God going to punish those who have experienced such great privilege? Amos mentioned seven disasters including famine, drought, scorching winds, locusts, plagues, war, and a destruction like that of Sodom and Gomorrah! And how were the children of Israel supposed to respond to such events?
15. Read 1 Kings 8:37-40. Are we, as suggested by Solomon in his prayer of dedication of the temple, prepared to turn back to God in forgiveness so He can bless us once again? Remember that Amos was prophesying about 30 years before the nation of Israel was completely destroyed and uprooted by the Assyrians. Amos was giving an end-time message!
16. How would the Adventist Church, even our local congregation and we ourselves, respond if God said to us: "I am going to punish you; and because I'm going to do this, get ready to face My judgment!" Aren't we about to face the greatest time of God's judgment in the history of the great controversy? Does meeting God scare you? Should it? How has God treated sinners all through Scripture? What will God be doing while sinners are perishing at the very end? He will be weeping! (*Story of Redemption* 29.1) It is not God that we need to be afraid of, but sin! (Romans 6:23) Our behavior changes the epigenetic expression of our genes. "Good genes" can be turned on and "bad genes" can be turned off.
17. Read the short book of Obadiah. The nation of Edom had established itself in a very rocky and mountainous area east of the Dead Sea. Their capital known as Petra is located at the end of a very narrow passage through a steep canyon which could be easily defended against any invading army. Edom was the nation of Esau's descendants. And they had had an ongoing battle with their cousins the Israelites down through the centuries. Obadiah began by pointing out their arrogance, (Obadiah 1-4) prophesied a coming humiliation, (Obadiah 5-9) and then condemned them for their violence against Judah at a time of terrible distress for the Israelites. (Obadiah 10-14)
18. While we cannot be certain, it seems that the book of Obadiah was written at the time of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. At that time, the Edomites not only celebrated the destruction of Jerusalem but also preyed on the fleeing Israelites and helped to plunder Jerusalem. Obadiah thus warned: "Edom, you will get back what you have given." (Obadiah 15) Obadiah 16, *NASB*, continues, saying that those who act in that way will "become as if they had never existed." Adventists and other groups who believe in the non-immortality of the soul have often used this verse as teaching about the total eradication of the wicked at the end.

From the beginnings of Israelite religion the belief that God had chosen this particular people to carry out His mission has been both a cornerstone of Hebrew faith and a refuge in moments of distress. And yet, the prophets felt that to many of their contemporaries this cornerstone was a stumbling block; this refuge, an escape. They had to remind the people that chosenness must not be mistaken as divine favoritism or immunity from chastisement, but, on the contrary, that it meant being more seriously exposed to divine judgment and chastisement. . . .

Does chosenness mean that God is exclusively concerned with Israel? Does the Exodus from Egypt imply that God is involved only in the history of Israel and is totally oblivious of the fate of other nations?—Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 32, 33.

19. Don't we think we are God's chosen people today? Are we taking our responsibilities seriously? It is natural for human beings to be friends with those who have something to offer them. What about being friends with those who have nothing to offer you but, in fact, need something from you? Think of the privileges that Seventh-day Adventists have been given in our day: the Sabbath, the writings of Ellen G. White, and an understanding of the great controversy that helps us to make sense of all of Scripture. Are we so excited about these privileges that we are prepared to tell the world?
20. Do we know the truth about God so clearly—and can we support it from Scripture—that we can explain to those around us the truth about how God deals with sinners?
21. In Amos 1-4, does Amos seem to be judgmental? Do we know how to speak out against wrong behavior without being judgmental? Or, should Christians always be “politically correct”?
22. Revelation 19:10 suggests that God's final end-time people will have a prophetic ministry to the world. Are we doing that? Are we addressing the social and spiritual abuses taking place in our world? Are we embarrassed to speak out against sin? Do we always stand up for justice and righteousness? Our world seems to be so possessed with the idea of political correctness that we do not want to speak out against any kind of wrong behavior.
23. Read Amos 3:7. (Compare Deuteronomy 29:29; 2 Chronicles 20:20) In Scripture and in the writings of Ellen White, don't we as Seventh-day Adventists have a wealth of information about what is coming upon our world? Are we warning our neighbors? Is it our responsibility to let the whole world know? Will Jesus be able to return before we do that? (Matthew 24:14)
24. Why does God in advance reveal His plans for this world? Is it His plan that we know somewhat in advance exactly what is going to happen? Or, is it that when things happen, we recognize that God knew in advance that it was going to happen? (John 13:19; 14:29)
25. What parallels do you see between our situation today and that of ancient Israel and Judah? How would we respond if an Amos-like prophet came to us? In Amos 4, God cried out to the Israelites four times; and yet, it apparently made almost no impact. (Amos 4:6,8-11)
26. God would love to have His people today focus on their relationship with Him and live lives of righteousness. He has waited 2000 years for a people who are prepared to stand up and represent Him to the world. Will God ever become impatient? Is God trying to say to us, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.” (Amos 5:24, *NIV*)
27. Are we prepared to meet our God?

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