

## ***Major Lessons from Minor Prophets*** ***Seek the Lord and Live! (Amos)***

Lesson #5 for May 4, 2013

Scriptures: 2 Kings 17:5-23; Amos 5:1-15; 7:10-17; 9:11-15; Hebrews 5:14; Isaiah 5:20; Acts 15:13-18.

1. In this week's lesson, we will study Amos 5-9. Amos, a migrant farm worker and shepherd from the southern kingdom of Judah, traveled north to speak to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel a few years before they were to be taken off into Assyrian captivity. To get an idea of conditions in Israel at that time, read 2 Kings 17:5-23 if you have not done so recently. How and why did God choose the prophets that He chose?
2. When God led Israel out of Egypt and after forty years of wandering in the wilderness established them in the land of Canaan, He had glorious plans for His people.

Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through the nation's honor and exaltation. If Israel had walked in the ways of obedience, He would have made them "high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor." "All people of the earth," said Moses, "shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee." "The nations which shall hear all these statutes" shall say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Deut. 26:19; 28:10; 4:6. But because of their unfaithfulness, God's purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 28.

3. What an incredible contrast between God's plan for His people and how they ended up! Our lesson for this week starts with Amos singing a funeral song for the nation of Israel! (Amos 5:1-15) In order to prevent his people from traveling to Jerusalem and worshiping at the temple there and possibly returning their allegiance to God, Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, established two places of pagan worship. One was in the north in the territory of Dan, and one was in the south at Bethel just a few miles north of Jerusalem. The history of the northern kingdom of Israel was downhill all the way from then on. Why were those pagan religious festivals so attractive? As they were reveling in the Baal feasts, were the people pretending to worship Yahweh at the same time?
4. People who worship pagan gods, and in Israel's case the fertility cult gods Baal and Ashtoreth, soon lose any sense of justice and feel no need to follow the Ten Commandments. They oppressed the poor, robbed them in every way they could, lived drunken lives, and committed just about every sin one can imagine. Amos followed up his funeral song by spelling out some of their sins. Then he turned and said, "While you claim to serve the Lord, the day of the Lord will be terrible for you." (Amos 5:18-20)
5. What did the people of Israel do to worship Yahweh? Were some of them still traveling to Jerusalem? In the northern kingdom, they had no temple built to Yahweh. There were no Jewish synagogues yet. But, there were still many Levites living in Israel. And they did have the schools of the prophets started by Samuel and promoted by Elijah and Elisha. Were those schools still functioning? Were there places to worship Yahweh in the northern kingdom?
6. Read Amos 5:21-24, *GNB*:

<sup>21</sup> The LORD says, "I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! <sup>22</sup> When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not

accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. <sup>23</sup> Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. <sup>24</sup> Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed.) New York: American Bible Society.

7. What did those religious festivals consist of? Were they actually pretending to worship Yahweh? What were the noisy songs? Had they learned some religious practices from the pagan ceremonies in which they had been involved and which they then introduced into the worship of Yahweh? Could we cheat in business all week and worship God on Sabbath?
8. It is interesting to note that 120 years later as the southern kingdom of Judah was collapsing, a similar message was given to those people by Ezekiel. (Ezekiel 26:13) We know that instruments and vocal music were used in the temple in Jerusalem. (1 Chronicles 16:42; 23:5; 25:6,7) They used trumpets and cymbals and, no doubt, had drums. They also used harps, lyres, tambourines, and flutes. **But, the emphasis in this passage is not on how noisy their songs were but rather, how irrelevant all their religious practices were because their lives were filled with every kind of sin, injustice, bribery, etc.**
9. Read Amos 5:14,15; Hebrews 5:14; Romans 12:9; and Proverbs 8:36. How does one convince people to do what is right and not what is evil? To love the good and to hate evil? Does personal example help? The history of our world shows repeatedly that evil almost always wins the popularity contests. (Revelation 13) Why is that? **What is attractive about sin?** Are there short-term benefits to sin? Are there any long-term benefits to sin?
10. Is the purpose of Sabbath school class and church attendance so that we can take a longer-term view of life? Do our religious services make us better citizens, better neighbors, and shining lights to the world? (Matthew 5:16) If our religious services do not make us act more Christ-like during the week, are they a waste of time? Can the world see that we are Christians?
11. We know that Satan is going about as a roaring lion looking for anyone he can deceive or devour. (1 Peter 5:8) How should Christians respond to that?

All who in that evil day [in the future] would fearlessly serve God according to the dictates of conscience, will need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His word; for those who are true to God will be persecuted, their motives will be impugned, their best efforts misinterpreted, and their names cast out as evil. Satan will work with all his deceptive power to influence the heart and becloud the understanding, to make evil appear good, and good evil. The stronger and purer the faith of God's people, and the firmer their determination to obey Him, the more fiercely will Satan strive to stir up against them the rage of those who, while claiming to be righteous, trample upon the law of God. It will require the firmest trust, the most heroic purpose, to hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 431.

Are we ready for this?

12. Read Amos 5:23,24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; and Psalm 51:17. We do not offer animal sacrifices in our religious services today. What would be the equivalent in our day? Attending church? Paying tithes? Witnessing to our neighbors? It appears that what we see in the book of Amos is a religion that had deteriorated into dead formalism. All the excitement was in the pagan festivals. The “fatted calves” of today are ourselves!

13. In our day, how do we keep religion interesting? With billions of dollars being spent on movies, the Internet, television, music, and even radio to grab peoples' attention, how can Adventist churches compete, especially for the attention of the young people? If we as an older generation feel uncomfortable with the music and the activities of our young people, are we just turning them away from the church? How do you think the people of Israel responded to Amos and his condemnation of their sins in Amos 5:16-7:9?
14. Why would God call a man who was a migrant farm worker and shepherd to be an international prophet? If a migrant farm worker from Mexico showed up at one of our churches and began to condemn us for our religious practices, how would we respond?
15. How have we responded to the words of our own prophet? Look at the "Reasons for the Delay" in *Evangelism* pages 694-697. Repeatedly, starting in 1868, Ellen White said that there had already been long delay and that we should have been in the kingdom long before that. Similar statements were made in 1883 and 1900 and 1903 and 1909, etc.

It was not the will of God that the coming of Christ should be thus delayed. God did not design that His people, Israel, should wander forty years in the wilderness. He promised to lead them directly to the land of Canaan, and establish them there a holy, healthy, happy people. But those to whom it was first preached, went not in "because of unbelief." Their hearts were filled with murmuring, rebellion, and hatred, and He could not fulfill His covenant with them. {*Ev* 696.1}

For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. **It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years.--***Manuscript 4*, 1883. (*Evangelism* 696.2)

16. Over one hundred year later, what would the prophetess say to us today?
17. Read Amos 8:11,12 and Daniel 12:4. Adventists have used Daniel 12:4 as a prophecy suggesting that there would be future developments, new inventions, and more rapid means of travel prior to the second coming. These things are all true; but, they are not what Daniel was talking about. Notice in Amos 8 that the "rushing to and fro"—using the same words in Hebrew—was talking about people searching for the Word of God. In our day with Bibles more widely available in many different translations in English and in more languages than ever before, how could it be possible that people would be searching for the Word of the Lord? Do people know where to go to learn the truth about God? Will crises come?
18. Is the problem that while the Scriptures are available people have not been reading them? Or, even if they read them, they have not understood what they were reading? Are we reaching out to the world to help them understand the Bible? Even of our Christian friends, how many understand how to interpret Revelation 14:6-12, our famous key text? Do they understand the truth about God's wrath? About hellfire? How about the length of *forever*?
19. Unfortunately, in the days of Amos, God apparently was ready to fall silent. There was nothing more that He could say that would make any difference. What happens when things become so serious that God stops speaking and steps back? Read 1 Samuel 14:37; Psalm 74:9; Proverbs 1:28; Lamentations 2:9; Hosea 5:6; and Micah 3:5-7. What about us? Our prophetess died in 1915! Does that mean that God has stopped talking to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or, are her messages still relevant today? Are we reading them?

20. What was the result of the work of Amos? Did any of the people from the northern kingdom move to the south? Would they have been welcomed? How many of the Israelites of the north believed what Amos said?

21. Read Amos 9:11-15. Amos ends with some very encouraging words. When will those words be fulfilled? See Luke 1:32,33 and Acts 15:13-18. Does it seem clear that the words of Amos will not be fulfilled until Christ comes again? How do you think the people in the days of Jesus interpreted these words of Amos? So, what are we supposed to learn from studying Amos?

Our standing before God depends, not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 239.

22. How are we responding to the light which has already been given to us?

23. We live in a society which is not only evolving but also is almost going through revolutionary changes over relatively short periods of time. How should Christians relate to societal and cultural changes? Should our attitudes be molded by what society around us says? How should we think about abortion and homosexuality? Or, relatively minor things like the wearing of jewelry? Even the length of ladies dresses which used to be such a hot topic within our church seems to have faded in interest. Is that a change for the better? Or, for the worse?

24. Can you think of some cultural or societal changes that are actually for the better? Is being “politically correct” a Christian virtue?

25. Do we as Adventists live healthier and longer lives because we are more closely following the advice of Ellen White which is now so broadly supported by medical research? Or, are we turning away from the health messages we have been given? If Amos were to come to us today, what would he say?

26. Repentance is something that we as Christians should be very familiar with. As individuals, we should be repenting on a daily basis. Is there a time for corporate repentance? For example, should the Adventist Church repent of what happened in 1888? Should we repent for delaying the second coming of Jesus Christ? Are we thus responsible for World War I? And World War II? And 9/11? Are we correctly representing God to the world?

27. The Israelites in the days of Amos probably spent a lot more time in the Baal festivals than they did worshipping Yahweh. Do we spend more time in Bible study, prayer, and witnessing than we do enjoying entertainment from various sources?

28. Do the words of Amos 9 make God seem a little bit like a divine Santa Claus? Who are included among “the house, or kingdom, of David”? Clearly, Peter believed it included the Gentiles. (Acts 15:15-17) We have already seen passages in Hosea (compare Isaiah 45:22; Genesis 12:3) that suggest that God is the God of all nations. Are we prepared as individuals and as a church to reach out to everyone around the world so the gospel can be finished?

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