



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 1:3 – 2:3

“The Fourth Transgression”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading is in the first chapter of the Book of Amos and in the light of the fact that it's a very short passage, I'm going to read again the two verses that we had for our Scripture reading last week. So we're going to read Amos chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 5.

The prophet writes,

“The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. He said, ‘The LORD roars from Zion’”

I'd like for you to notice the term that is used to describe the Lord here is the term in the version that I'm reading the Lord with capital letters, the famous tetragrammaton, or Yahweh, as modern scholars frequently like to render the name or those of us who remember reading other versions many years ago, Jehovah. That's important because that is a specific name with certain connotations. And those who heard Amos preach at the first would have understood those connotations, and later on I want to say just a brief

word about it. So notice it is not God who roars from Zion, but the Lord who roars from Zion,

“And from Jerusalem He utters His voice; And the shepherds' pasture grounds mourn, And the summit of Carmel dries up." Thus says the LORD, 'For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment.'”

Now, one might ask immediately, well, what is the punishment referred to here? I will not revoke its punishment. Well, evidently the prophet intends to understand by that the punishment that God has determined should come to Damascus. In other words, it's something that he has already determined in his mind, God's mind. So

“I will not revoke its punishment, Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron. So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad.”

Hazael was the king of Syria and Hadad – several Ben-hadads as a matter of fact the term is not a personal term. Hadad was the name of a storm god and so Ben-hadad means son of the storm god and a name given to several characters in the Old Testament. The cult of Hadad was established in Damascus. And so Hazael had a son named Ben-hadad. This may be the son referred to. It may be a later one. “And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad. "I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven (or the valley of iniquity), And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden [probably a name of an ancient city]” so the people of Syria will go exiled to Kir. Later on in the book Amos will say this is the place from which they have come originally. In fact, even some modern scholars have sought to identify this with Ur of the Chaldes. At any rate, it's a prophecy that they will go back to the place

from which they had migrated to their present domicile. And finally this particular prophecy ends with, “Says the LORD” or this aspect of this opening prophecy. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. And let’s bow together now for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity and privilege again of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee and praise Thee for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we thank Thee for the Old Testament revelation as preparation for the coming of our Lord and the completion of the redemptive program.

We thank Thee for the way in which the Old Testament prophets faithfully proclaimed not simply the mercy and loving kindness of a covenant keeping God but also the disciplinary judgment that is part of the manifestation of the character of our great God in heaven.

We thank Thee, Lord, that art good, loving, filled with loving kindness, merciful but also holy, righteous, filled with justice. We praise Thee and thank Thee for that Thou art. We thank Thee and praise Thee that Thou art the infinite God. And we’re especially thankful today, Lord, that Thou hast marvelous grace brought us to the knowledge of Thyself.

We thank Thee for the forgiveness of sins that is the free gift of the Triune God for those who by Thy grace are brought to rest themselves upon Christ and the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross.

We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon this assembly of Believer’s and friends and visitors. We pray for our elders and for our deacons and for the ministries that the chapel attempts to carry on: the radio ministry, the publications, the tapes, and the Bible classes. Lord, bless them we pray richly. May there be in the proclamation in the word of God a true testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

We pray for those who are sick and troubled and have requested our prayers. We ask, Lord, if it be Thy will that Thou will give healing in accordance with the way in

which Thou desire to bless us and bless those concerned. We pray for wisdom, for strength, for the supply of all needs. For those who are undergoing trials at the present time, we commit them to Thee.

We pray for our country, for our president. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the day in which we live and, Lord, we ask that Thou enable us to remain faithful to the word of God that thou hast so faithfully preserved and brought to us. We’re thankful for this meeting and the meetings of this day and may we, Lord, have the sense of Thy presence with us. We know Thou art here as we open the Scriptures and proclaim the word of God. Speak to the hearts of every one of us for we each have needs. May Thy blessing be upon us as we sing as the word of God has studied.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Last week as we began our series of studies in the prophecy of Amos, I made the point or tried to make the point of Amos was one of the four prophets who with Josea, his fellow messenger to Israel, Isaiah and Micah lived in the golden age of the Hebrew prophecy. Josea and Amos ministered to the northern kingdom; Isaiah and Micah to the southern kingdom. We commented upon the fact that Amos was from the middle village of Tekoa. That he was a shepherd or shepherd or perhaps the sheep breeder. We’re not exactly sure of the force of herdsman. He was also, he said, a dresser of sycamore trees. He was not, however, a simple uncultured rustic as one might think in the twentieth century. In fact, it’s possible he was the owner in charge of other shepherds. He may have been a very substantial of the community. On the other hand, he may have been a simple shepherd. We’re not exactly sure.

One thing that we know from reading his prophecy is he had a good understanding of history. He had also an understanding, an accurate understanding so far as we can tell, of the geography of his times. So if he was not a man who was instructed in the theological schools of his day -- he affirms that in the seventh chapter -- he was, at

least, a man who had by debt of his own study and his own experiences come to be a man who was exceedingly well-informed man of his day.

The fact that when you read his text in the original language it becomes evident that he writes in rather skillful ways the Hebrew language, it becomes evident that he was really truly a remarkable man. It’s no wonder that Amos’ prophecies have been preserved for us. He was certainly a very unpopular man in the northern kingdom. And as he stood on the streets corners and in the byways of the Northern Kingdom and pronounced disciplinary judgment upon them for their disobedience to the word of God, Amos, no doubt, was a byword in the Northern Kingdom and people were very much upset with the things that he was saying.

He says that he was a prophet and yet not a prophet. We understand by that that what he meant was that he was not a member of the prophetic guild, but nevertheless he had been called by God to prophesize. As he puts it in the seventh chapter of the fourteenth verse,

“I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.'”

So he was an individual who though not trained in the schools was nevertheless called by God to do the work of a prophet. That kind of person is a genuine prophet. You can never be sure that someone who attends theological seminaries a genuine -- genuinely gifted man of God to proclaim the word of God. In fact, the experience of individuals who have spent years in theological seminaries is that many, many people go through theological seminaries and obtain the degree and are not gifted by God for the ministry of the word of God as they sometimes mistakenly think.

Now, I must say that it is possible for a person to mistakenly think that he has been gifted by God and nevertheless be a useful man in God’s service. All of us, I imagine at one time or another, have had to admit that we were mistaken about the ways in which we thought that God was leading us. There’s nothing wrong in going to theological seminary in thinking that you have been asked or called or guided by God there in order to minister the word of God, and then to discover that really that is not your gift. That does not mean you cannot be useful. In fact, for those of us who ministered the word of God, we know that such can be even more useful in the Lord’s work than those who stand behind the pulpit constantly and attempt to preach the word of God.

Amos was called by God to his task. He was wrenched from the country of Judah and called by God to preach to the northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel. The theme of his sermons is the end of Israel in the disciplinary judgment.

Now, we must remember that the text says that he begins by saying the Lord roars from Zion. And the reason in the Scripture reading that I had laid a little bit of stress upon the term “roared” is that one might get the impression from reading through Amos that he had nothing to say but judgment. In fact, there is only one passage in which he speaks strongly of loving kindness and faithfulness in divine mercy to Israel, and that’s the last paragraph or so of this ninth chapter the last chapter of the book.

But when we read here the Lord roars from Zion, we’re thinking about disciplinary judgment but every Israelite who knew anything about their history would know from the use of the term “Lord” or “Yahweh” that lying back of that very term was the experience of the nation in the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to them and the calling of them out of the land of Egypt into the promised land. The Abrahamic promises where promises that God had committed himself to and that he had fulfilled in that sense. He remembered his covenant with Abraham, and he brought Israel out of the bondage of Egypt. And so that great event always loomed large in the past history of Israel. And so

when Amos says here in the very first chapter, the Lord roars from Zion, well, that’s a message of disciplinary judgment all right, but it’s the message of disciplinary judgment from the covenant keeping merciful God.

Now, Amos said that he was called by God. I said last week that therefore, he was a Calvinist. I said that hoping that most of you would smile and most of you did. Some of you got a little angry as far as I could tell, but after all I was only speaking anachronistically not desiring to stir you up at all but just to show you that in the Old Testament as well as in the New the work of God is linked in its initiative to the Lord God himself. And if you can grasp that fact, then you will have some sense of divine grace in your own personal salvation. So he said the Lord took him. The Lord worked first in his life.

The most crucial event of his life was his call, and God was responsible for that. Over and over through the Bible that great theme is set forth and is only remarkable to me that individuals who can preach the word of God for years and years cannot recognize that fundamental fact. I can only say, as is true of almost all biblical doctrine, we understand biblical doctrine not because we’re intelligent, not because we’re educated, not because we have advantages but we understand biblical doctrine ultimately by the divine illumination. And sometimes that comes later and sometimes it comes at the end, but it will come. We’ll be much happier if it comes early.

So Amos pronounces the Lord roars from Zion. One of the things you do learn if you went to the prophetic guilds and studied there is the fact that conscience is an inward monitor in the inmost being of every one of us. It is implanted there by God because he creates man in his own image. It’s part of the image of God.

Now, conscience being part of the image of God has just as other parts of man been affected by the Fall. Just as our mind is affected by the Fall -- and we’re naturally blind -- our will is affected by the Fall -- and we’re naturally rebellious. And our emotions are affected by the Fall, and they are naturally corrupt. And so our conscience has been

affected by the Fall. As a matter of fact, we know that conscience is even spoken of in the New Testament in that sense. One may turn to a passage like 1 Timothy chapter 4 in verse 2 and read words like this,

“By means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron”

So conscience is a faculty depraved as a result of the fall and intended to be a monitor to point us to the distinction between right and wrong but even conscience now having been touched by sin is a depraved indicator. We say and the Scriptures, I think clearly teach this, that men are totally depraved as a result of the fall.

Now, our audience changes from time to time and especially when we talk about things like this, the audience changes. But when we talk about total depravity, we need to understand precisely what that means. We don’t mean by this that man is as bad as he can be. That’s the first thing that we do not mean. Total depravity does not mean that men cannot do nice things, good things, things good according to human standards. Of course, we hasten to say that there is nothing that man does that is good to God ultimately unless it is something that is done out of faith and for the glory of God. But using human standards, men may do marvelous things.

There are many men that we recognize that have done things, that so far as objective acts are concerned, are acts that we would say are good. So when we say men are totally depraved, we don’t mean that they’re as evil as they can be. What we mean simply is that sin has touched all of their faculties. Or to put it in another way, depravity or total depravity is the corruption of the total human nature not the total corruption of the human nature. Let me say it again. Depravity is the corruption of the total human nature not the total corruption of human nature. So we mean simply that sin has touched all of our faculties. That’s what total depravity means.

We may illustrate it by a beautiful clock, a beautiful antique clock that has the loveliest looking hands, the loveliest frame, a beautiful piece of furniture to put in your hallway. And, furthermore, if you open up the back, the works are outstanding. They look beautiful. They are clean. They are nice. They do everything but keep time. That is a picture of a totally depraved clock, beautiful, lovely. It just won’t keep time. So when we say men are totally depraved, we mean that the whole nature has been corrupted but not totally corrupted but our minds and everything else are affected by sin.

Now, if that is true, then as we look at the history of the human race, what do we find? Well, the history of the human race could be told as a catalog as the crimes committed in the name of conscience. It’s a striking thing as you look down through human history that almost all of the great acts that are committed, good and bad, are said to be committed by those that are in authority out of a good conscience. Gorbachev speaks out of what he calls a good conscience. Reagan speaks out of what he calls a good conscience. Bishop Tutu speaks out of what he calls a good conscience. President Botha speaks out of what he calls a good conscience. Everybody speaks out of a good conscience. Why all the crimes then that are committed in human history? Why they are crimes committed out of human conscience. The human conscience has been affected by sin.

Now, one of the students of the prophecy of Amos has made the point that men ultimately are judged by or according to their failure to lead men. In other words, men are judged as men ought to be. Now, the Lord Jesus says that all judgment has been committed to him. In the statement that the Lord makes in John chapter 5 in verse 27 when he says that all judgment has been committed to him. He puts it this way,

“And He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

Now, that term is a Messianic term. That term looks at him as a Messianic figure as a great Messianic figure, as a divine human Messianic figure, but strikingly it’s been committed to our Lord as the Messianic figure as the God man. So that men are judged ultimately by their failure to measure up to the standard of what men ought to be. The passage here that we are looking at in that light, if that is true -- I’m inclined to think it’s true. The passage here is a role call of the nations that surrounds Israel. Take your text if you have it with you and why you don’t have it with you, I don’t know. We are studying Amos. So have it with you and find Amos. If it takes you fifteen minutes to find Amos, find it before the meeting starts. At any rate, if you have chapter 1, now notice the way in which the prophecies are given or this prophecy is given. Amos says in verse 3,

“For three transgressions of Damascus and for four.”

Now, look at verse 6, “For three transgressions of Gaza and for four.” Look at verse 9, “For three transgressions of Tyre and for four.” Verse 11, “For three transgressions of Edom and for four.” And verse 13, “For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon and for four.” Chapter 2, verse 1, “For three transgressions of Moab and for four.” Verse 4, “For three transgressions of Judah and for four.” And finally in verse 6, “For three transgressions of Israel and for four.”

So you can see what Amos had done is just go around the circle of the land. He has spoken about the Philistines. He has spoken about the Phoenicians. He’s spoken about the Edomites. He’s spoken about the Syrians, of course. He has spoken about others around the land and finally he narrows attention down as if to anticipate someone saying he’s from the south, he won’t say anything about the south.

Well, he finally comes to Judah and by then, of course, the people who are listening to Amos, if they’re listening to him preach, they’re beginning to get the idea because he’s getting closer and closer when he comes to Judah that he might say

something about us. Like that all familiar story about the fellow who was preaching in an audience where there was response and people said amen, and he started preaching about adultery and everybody was saying amen. And he talked about smoking, and everybody said amen. And he talked about other sins, and everybody was saying amen. And finally he said and now we want to talk about gossip. And one woman is supposed to turn to another one and said, he’s done stopped preaching and gone to meddling.

[Laughter]

Well, I think that when Amos finally got down here to Israel, they finally got the idea that what he was doing was no longer preaching as a prophet but he was surely meddling in things that he was not to meddle with.

Now, I want you to notice this before we look briefly at the first of the oracles for that’s all we’ll have time to look at today. These nations around and about the northern kingdom excluding Judah, these nations: the Phoenicians, the Syrians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, they did not have any special revelation. They did not have any law like Israel had the law. They did not have any Moses to proclaim Allah to them. They had no genuine prophets like the prophets who had been raised up by God. But yet, my Christian friend, they were under divine judgment.

Now, that’s an amazing thing without any special revelation but not without responsibility. You can imagine how people might have said, but we didn’t have what Israel had Moses. They had the law. They had the prophets. They have a direct word from God. As a matter of fact, he had appeared to many of them, and he had performed mighty miracles on their behalf. Surely we’re not going to be held responsible when we don’t have the abilities and the privileges that they had.

No, no they’re responsible. Every person upon the face of this earth is responsible to the Lord God. The very fact that God has created you in his image and the very fact that he has about this -- in this creation about us displayed his glory his mightiness majesty and even though your conscience and your mind and your emotions and your

will have been affected by the fall, there still is enough of the divine light given to you so that you are guilty before God.

The Apostle Paul plainly states that in the New Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament assume it. Amos assumes it here. These kingdoms were guilty before the Lord God. The Russians are guilty. The citizens of the United States are guilty. The citizens of Brazil are guilty. The citizens of any nation upon the face of this earth, they are guilty before the Lord God. All have sinned and are constantly coming short of the glory of God. That in itself is enough to make this particular prophecy of significant import for every one of us.

Now, let’s look at the oracle itself. We read in verse 3 of chapter 1,

“Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment," [that is the punishment which I have determined.] “Because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron. So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael And it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad. I will also break the gate bar of Damascus, And cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, And him who holds the scepter, from Beth-eden; So the people of Aram will go exiled to Kir," Says the LORD.”

This is the first of the eight oracles of Yahweh’s imminent action against the nations. And the repetition of the three transgressions of and for four emphasizes the unrelieved menace that the Lord God is for these nations as Amos is preaching. You notice the pattern is the same in them. There is a messenger formula each begins, “Thus says the Lord.” And then there is an indictment, “I will not revoke its punishment because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron.” The punishment is then set forth, “I will send fire upon the house of Hazael and it will consume the citadels of Ben-hadad.” And again each one of them concludes with a messenger formula as if to allow the refrain to penetrate the ears of those who hear “Says the LORD.” So the Lord says, “Says the

LORD.” Over and over again Amos makes his point in that way. It’s a very solemn indictment of those who are named here.

You might wonder what is meant by the expression “for three transgressions of Gaza or four or for three transgressions of Damascus,” Damascus, of course, the capital standing for Syria, and for four. Well, that is a graded numerical statement saying, not meaning three or four, nor even three plus four, but it’s a large indefinite number. It was just a figure of speech used for a large indefinite number of crimes committed. One finds it not only in Amos. One finds it in the Psalms. One finds it particularly in the Proverbs and even in one of the prophets. So what Amos was saying is we’re not talking about any one particular thing. If we talked about the particular thing we could go on and on and on. We’re talking about indefinite crimes but there is a specific one that is mentioned, “they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron.”

Now, Gilead was to the north of the Jordan River but below to the northern kingdom. So this then is a graded numerical saying meaning a large and definite number. Emphasis may rest on the list or the final item and here rests upon the final item. The last one here is the incident that has exhausted the patience of Yahweh. In other words, there’ve been numerous cases of crimes against the people committed by Damascus but this one is the one that has exhausted his patience. So he will not revoke its punishment.

Now, he’s just begun by saying the Lord roars from Zion, and this is one of his roars. I will not revoke its punishment they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron. You can see here that the law of conscience is spelled out in human relationships, and the spotlight is on the relation of man to man. If you read through these and I hope you’ve been reading through the prophecy of Amos -- came in the bedroom last night at 1:20, and Martha was lying on the bed. I knew what she was reading because she was anticipating that today I would say, Have you read Amos? -- not going to say it today -- but she was reading Amos faithfully with eyes a little droopy [laughter] but nevertheless reading it. If you read through these opening prophecies here you will notice that I say

the spotlight is on the relation of man to man; barbarity, first of all, in this first section of the prophecy; hideous slave trading in the next; promise-breaking in the next; unnatural persistent hatred in the next; atrocities against the helpless in the next; and atrocities against the dead in chapter 2, verse 1 through 3 in the discussion of Moab.

Amos, it has been said, was a prophet of social justice. Well, now we must not think of social justice as we think of social justice today. Social justice today is unfortunately linked with socialism, and the sense of many people is that one cannot have social justice if he does not have socialism. And so we have great figures who tell us that they hate capitalism and they want a caring government, little realizing that a caring government is a government of people who care, and the fact is that human nature is sinful. What is capitalism? Is it a system of evil men for accomplishing economic ends? No, no, no. It’s not intended to be that. What is capitalism? Why it’s simply a system for producing goods and services. As a matter of fact, it is done better than any other system to this point in the history of the human race.

Now, when we look at other systems, we will find a vast difference between them. They go at things in a different way. It’s my opinion that capitalism does understand the fact that human nature is sinful. Capitalism is realistic, not perfect, realistic. It has many flaws but the flaws are not the system. The flaws are those who are involved in the system, the evil man. They are the ones who are responsible for the evil, but unfortunately no system can change the nature of man and thus in socialism it fails by being fundamentally a system that does not understand human nature. That’s to my mind the fundamental flaw of socialism. Humanity’s natural inquisitiveness will always be at odds with any system that requires persons to produce as much as they can but permits them to keep only what they need.

Further, coerced charity has the opposite affect from voluntary charity such as ideally exists in a capitalistic society. Actually all of the charitable institutions that we know about us today are the products of the people who are in a capitalistic system. It

could be a whole lot more, and it could be a whole lot more significant. And some of you sitting in this audience could also part with a few more of your dollars for causes that are good and would even commend the system which most of you hold to be a better system as I do myself. Recipients of coerced charity are taught in socialism to believe it’s their right to be taken care of, and they look to the government for help rather than to their own labors.

The welfare state results and the institutionalism of covetousness characterizes such societies. Take a look at Soviet Russia. Take a look at other societies in which socialism has full play in them. That’s what you find and if you find something different I’d like for you to bring it to me because I think that history stands back of that. As a matter of that, the campaigns against capitalism carried on by individuals in this country and in other countries constitute, as one person has put it I think so beautifully, constitute one of the notable chapters in the history of false witness. And one of the things responsible for this is our own media in the United States of America. They have a basic misunderstanding of human nature coupled with its apparent socialist bias. In fact, these two go together.

Just recently Mr. Gorbachev has expressed certain things that the media has picked up as being really wonderful indications as perhaps a change of attitude in the relationship between Soviet Russia and the United States. I hope that such takes place but not at the expense of what we believe -- what I believe is the freedom that we enjoy in this country. In *Foreign Affairs* magazine just recently, a person has written an article in which he has suggested that since Anatoly Debrinin is now the head of the foreign policy apparatus in Moscow and since he spent so many years in Washington that’s a good sign. That’s a bad sign. He’s always been an implacable opponent of the system that we have in the United States of America. As this individual has put it, Gorbachev smiles and the American media see peace on earth, but unfortunately that is not true to the facts of the situation.

Amos was a social prophet, but he was a social prophet within the society of the northern and southern kingdoms, particularly the northern kingdom. And consequently he was not a prophet of social justice in the misguided way in which that term is used in our society today. He spoke about right and wrong, and he spoke from the fundamental basis of the word of God. What a difference between the social prophets of today and Amos. The social prophets of today do not ground their opinions in the word of God, else they would be believers in the Revelation ultimately the concerns are our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Seems to me I got off the point there [laughter] but anyway. Let me say just a few words about this particular prophecy. I think I can say them in the words that the time that we have. Amos says with reference to the first of these nations about them, the Syrians, “They threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron.”

Now, let us remember the reason he speaks of Damascus here is Damascus was the capital of Syria, the capital of Aram, a city-state to the northeast of Israel. The chief adversary in the border war was between Israel and those nations about the border from the years 850 to 800 B.C., a time when Assyria was in a bit of decline. Hadad was the ancient god of storm whose cult was established at Damascus. Hazael referred to here was one of those wicked men of the Old Testament who was appointed to office through Elijah and Elisha.

Now, I’m going to turn to the passage in 2 Kings chapter 8 in verse 7 through verse 15 in which Hazael is encountered by the Prophet Elisha, and it is stated by Elisha that he is destined to rule over Syria. We read in 2 Kings chapter 8 in verse 3,

“And it came about at the end of seven years, the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went out to appeal to the king for her house and for her field.”

I’m sorry. I began reading at the really the wrong place because that has to do with the remarkable thing that happened when this woman in the providence of God came into the presence of the king. Verse 7,

“Then Elisha came to Damascus, Now Ben-hadad king of Aram was sick, and it was told him, saying, The man of God has come here." The king said to Hazael, Take a gift in your hand and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' So Hazael went to meet him and took a gift in his hand, even every kind of good thing of Damascus, forty camels' loads” [my goodness this prophet is to profit from this, is he not?] “and he came and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad king of Aram has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'" Then Elisha said to him.”

Now, Elisha was not a fool. He knew that this fella Hazael before him was a wicked man and furthermore, he knew that Ben-hadad wanted a favorable prophecy. After all, that’s what people in the pulpit say, don’t they, to people like you. They say nice things, not things you need but nice things. So listen to Elisha. You know, one thing about these prophets in the Old Testament and men of God in the New Testament, they knew that God supported his prophets. And therefore, they didn’t have to look to the church for support. So consequently they said what they thought was right, which is the way all of us who preach the word of God should preach it.

So he looks at Hazael and he says, “Go, say to him, 'You will surely recover.’” That’s the message Ben-hadad wanted. He’s gonna get well. So he says, “Go, say to him, 'You will surely recover but the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die.'” And as Elisha looked at him fixed his gaze on him this man Hazael, Hazael saw the eyes of the prophet, saw into him, and so he became ashamed. He was a hypocrite standing before him. He wanted Ben-hadad to die because he could succeed him maybe.

So Elisha, “fixed his gaze on him until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept.” The tears began to come down the eyes of Elisha as he looked at him. And, “Hazeal said, “Why does my lord weep?” Then he answered, “Because I know the evil you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up.”” Now, what does Hazeal say to that? “But what is your servant, but a dog, that he should do this great thing?” Well that’s what he did do. Here is a man who’s properly warned by the Lord God, and instead of that he feigns righteousness, self-righteousness, and answers like a hypocrite. I’m not a dog. I wouldn’t do something like, but that’s what he did.

So what does he do when he goes back into the presence of Ben-hadad? I got to get rid of him. So he goes and gets a towel. He got one of those nice wonderful fluffy towels that you buy at Neiman Marcus and he’s thought well the easiest way to suffocate him is to wet it. So he wet it and he put it over the sick man’s head and he suffocated him to death. That’s Hazeal. This man came to the throne. That’s what he did. He threshed Gilead.

Now, if that’s a literal threshing, that means that the instrument with which they separated the wheat from the chaff a wooden fledge-like instrument that had also iron on it and some cases even had iron spokes upon it. And they took the children of Israel they captured and they ran the sled over them. They threshed Gilead according to Amos. This is Hazeal. This is the thing that he has done.

Now, this has happened a good time before Amos. That God has not forgotten it. You see we think -- well that happened in that’s an earlier part of the United States history or maybe that happened in the first part of this century. That happened in World War I. That’s today for an eternal God. The things that we do yesterday, the things that we did twenty years ago, they are today with the Lord God. As sin that you committed twenty years ago is a sin as much a sin today as it was then. It’s festered a little bit more.

That’s why punishment is endless because sin’s guilt is endless before the Lord God. Time does not wipe out guilt. So as a result, Amos pronounces judgment on the kingdom of Syria.

Finally, even a reversal of their history takes place, and the people that were led out from Kir are sent back to Kir as the prophecy states. In other words, the Lord God makes and cancels history. He controls history. He’s the Lord of history and of all history, the history of every nation, this nation and the history of every individual. The assumption underlying these messages is these nations are accountable to God for their social actions. Nazi Germany’s actions are not something committed a generation or so ago. They are today before the Lord God.

Russia’s actions of the past, Stalin’s purges things like this, as well as perhaps the events which led to the overthrow of the czars, all of the evil of that particular era is present to the Lord God. The things that have happened in the United States that are crimes and many have happened because our nature is just like the nature of the Russians. Our nature is just like the nature of all men. We are all depraved. They are today before the Lord of God.

People are not things. That’s the fundamental found in the threshing of Gilead. Threshing is something you do to things like grain for profit. You don’t thresh people. I can imagine an interview with Hazael. You can see it right now. It’s on the front page of the New York Times. General Hazael speaks about war. So someone speaks to him and says, How can you do the things that you are doing? That’s a culpable kind of action, the cruelty and brutality of your actions. And General Hazael, now the king, says, there’s only one way to make war, you hit the enemy with everything you’ve got and every way you can. But that’s inhumane. Listen, there’s a war on, didn’t you know?

As Mark once said, nothing should be left to an invaded people except their eyes for weeping. Augustine said that there were just wars. I think he was right. He said but those wars also are just without doubt which are ordained by God himself in whom is no

iniquity and who knows every man’s merits, but such wars are few and far between among wars fought among men.

William Tecumseh Sherman, the Yankees like him. We Southerners, we don’t know whether we like him or not, but anyway General Sherman had some good sense. General Sherman said, “You cannot call off on war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it. There is many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory, but boys, it’s all hell. You can bear this warning voice to generations yet to come. I look upon war with horror.” He was right. And though, of course, he had to participate in it, he had the right view about it. It’s a manifestation of human nature, and human nature is not good.

There is one final point I leave with you. If you go out over these nations around about Israel, you will discover this about them. Not only did they not have all of these advantages that I spoke about, but nevertheless were guilty, but there is something else significant. Every one of these nations had a religion. Every one of these nations worshipped a god. They all had their local deities. They all carried out their religious cultist, just as Israel did.

In fact, Amos will say later on that these people of his day were doing more by way of offering voluntary sacrifices that had been done previously. They are religious people. They are people who parade under a God, all of these nations. They had their Gods but mind you the prophet says they’re all guilty. Why? Because their gods were false gods and false gods always -- the worship of them always leads to sinful acts. They that make them are like unto them. Gods create people in their own image and false gods create people in their image. And those who worship false gods, even under the guise of Christianity, if it’s false Christianity they will be false. It’s impossible otherwise. Worship a false god, you’ll be false.

And that unfortunately my friend is the problem with the professing Christian church in the United States of America. We have a great deal of profession of Christianity,

but the gods of the religious men today are not the gods of the Bible, triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the Son coequal with the father who has offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners through the shedding of his blood in his incarnate life, through him only, only salvation comes.

May God in his marvelous grace enlighten you as to your own condition and also point you to the love and mercy of the true God in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom you may have eternal life. I, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, call upon you to believe in him, trust in him, acknowledge your lost condition, flee to him for the redemption and the forgiveness of sins which he freely offers. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. May God give you grace to come. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful and thankful to Thee for these warnings which we so need, from the ancient herdsman from Tekoa. How thankful we are for bold and faithful men of God. We thank Thee for the ministry of his word to us. O God, if there are some in this audience who have never come to Christ, may they at this moment acknowledge their sin, acknowledge Christ’s saving work, receive him as their own savior.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.