



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 2:1- 3:2

“The Peril of Unconditional National Election”

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying, as most of you know, the prophecy of Amos, and we have reached in our studies chapter 2 in verse 3. And we're going to begin Scripture reading with verse 4.

Now, I must say that I've been a little derelict in asking you if you have read the book of Amos. I encouraged you as we began the study to read Amos, told you I was going to ask you to raise your hands. And I read the book of Amos, but I had not read it in the original texts. So I had to go out of town and the result was, I didn't have time to really work through Amos again, and therefore, I didn't ask you last week because I hadn't done what I said I was going to do, but I have done what I said I was going to do. And so now I'm going to call on you. How many of you have read through the book of Amos since we have... Well, that's pretty good. The rest of you, we consign to thirty days imprisonment of reading the Scriptures. I'm going to ask you again, but I cannot do it next week because I won't be here. But for every time you read it through in the English text, I will read it through in the original text, which means I'll spend probably a little bit more time than some of you will reading the English text.

I have always enjoyed the prophecy of Amos, but I must confess the more I read it the more I do enjoy and appreciate this unusual but effective prophet of God. As we

mentioned in the original study, Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah, but he was called by God to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel in the days of the divided kingdom, and so let’s keep that in mind. That’s very important for reading this book and particularly reading this section that we are in at the present time.

So we’ll begin reading at chapter 2, verse 4 and we will go through chapter 3 in verse 2 for today.

“Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; Their lies also have led them astray, Those after which their fathers walked.

"So I will send fire upon Judah And it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem."

Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for money And the needy for a pair of sandals. These who pant after the very dust of the earth on the head of the helpless, Also turn aside the way of the humble..." [that may be rendered in different ways as your margin of your Bible probably indicates. It may be rendered trampled ahead of the helpless on the dust. He continues,] "...And a man and his father resort to the same girl In order to profane My holy name."

Again in the original text there is no word for same. This represents an interpretation. In fact, the term girl may be generic, and it may simply mean that a man and his father resort to the sexual license suggested by this in order to profane my holy name. I’m inclined to think that that is true, that this is not some form of relationship similar to an incestuous relationship to which he refers. And, “On garments taken as pledges they stretch out beside every altar --” and this too you may think that Amos did not write as nice Hebrew as I suggested that he did, but we don’t know everything about

the Hebrew language still, and so consequently there are places where we may render texts in more than one way. Further, we don’t know the historical situation in every way that we might. It’s possible to render this, and on garments taken as pledges they take them -- that is the temple girls, the temple prostitutes, aside by every altar. “...And in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined.” We’ll talk about this illicit worship in the message that follows. Then we have the contrast, and it’s emphatic in the original text.

“ ‘Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Though his height was like the height of cedars And he was strong as the oaks; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below. And it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, And I led you in the wilderness forty years That you might take possession of the land of the Amorite. Then I raised up some of your sons to be prophets, and some of your young men to be Nazirites. Is this not so, O sons of Israel?’ declares the LORD. ‘But you made the Nazirites drink wine, and you commanded the prophets saying, ‘You shall not prophesy! Behold, I am weighted down beneath you as a wagon is weighted down when filled with sheaves.’ [And again this may be rendered in more than one-way too.] “Flight will perish from the swift, and the stalwart will not strengthen his power, nor the mighty man save his life. He who grasps the bow will not stand his ground, The swift of foot will not escape, Nor will he who rides the horse save his life.”

Verse 14, “native ability will not save them.”

Verse 15, “their skills that they have gained will not save them.

And finally, even qualities of life will not save them. “Even the bravest among the warriors will flee naked in that day, declares the LORD.’ Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which He brought up from the land of Egypt: " You only have me among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Now, we will treat this expression you only have me, which is not wrong. We will treat it a bit more literally because the original text says simply only you have I known. And we’ll explain what is meant by the word “known” later on. Essentially the meaning is the same, but I will be saying you only have I known for that in this case is, in my opinion, a bit happier rendering than you only have me among all the families of the earth.

May the Lord bless this reading of this word, and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Message] Our subject for today, as we continue our exposition of the prophecy of Amos, is “The Peril of Unconditional National Election.” Amos’s carefully structured roll call of the nations that are under the judgment of God draws to an end in the section that we have read for our Scripture reading. And as one reads through this and notices the remarkable organization of this series of messages, it suggests the fact that the prophet’s messages were not, generally speaking, impromptu or extemporaneous messages. This is not, as one of the commentators has said, an unplanned ramble around Israel’s borders. If Amos were an open-air preacher -- and we’re often inclined to think of prophets simply in that way -- he couldn’t have used greater subtlety to gain an audience.

Notice what he has done. He has condemned ancient enemies such as Syria and Philistia. He has condemned the treaty breakers like Tyre. He has condemned Israel’s mortal enemies such as Edom. And he has also laid special stress upon the atrocities committed by Ammon and Moab. Few probably noticed, if we understand the psychology of most of us, that Amos was tightening the noose around Israel as he circled their borders condemning the nations about it. It probably never dawned upon them that he was really honing in on Israel.

Six oracles are over, the last two before us, and of course, they will touch Judah, which they may have enjoyed even more than the others. Sometimes we enjoy the sufferings of our closer friends than almost anyone else. And finally he turns to Israel itself. But six are over and the last two raise a very significant question. Specifically the oracle to Israel raises the question of divine election. Can it be equated with a non-moral teaching of divine favoritism? I don’t think there’s any question that when people hear the doctrine of divine election mentioned, they immediately in their natural minds think, this is divine favoritism and its divine favoritism of a non-moral character. You mean to say if God just arbitrarily selects certain people and passes by certain other people that that’s not favoritism and does that not mean it doesn’t make a bit of difference what we do one way or the other?.

Well, Amos will give us some further insight with regard to that question. And we’ll not, of course, have time today to discuss all of the things that are raised, all of the questions that are raised by the subject of divine election, but we will try to answer the question, Is it to be equated with a non moral teaching of divine favoritism?

Now, let’s turn to the oracle against Judah first. That’s found in verses 4 and 5. Then following that we’ll turn to the oracle against Israel in the remainder of chapter 2, and finally the oracle on election to judgment in chapter 3, verse 1 and verse 2, which represents evidently another message of the prophet Amos. The oracle against Judah. And remember this, those of you who have read through the book, you probably won’t need to be reminded of this and perhaps even some of you have been coming Sunday after Sunday, and you’ve heard me say this three or four times, perhaps you don’t need to be reminded either. But let’s at least one more time point out that Amos is following a certain pattern.

He, first of all, uses the formula a kind of graded numeric formula, which is not to be taken literally but just to express the fact that the nations are guilty of a number of transgressions, but one has finally exhausted the patience of God. That’s the meaning of

the expression, for three transgressions of and for four, I will not revoke its punishment. And as you look at these oracles of judgment after the formula is mentioned, there is an indictment of the particular nation. Then there is the punishment specifically set forth, and, finally, as a general rule, at the end of the oracle there is the little messenger formula, Thus says the Lord. And in this way Amos lays great stress upon the fact that it is God whose speaking through him, and he’s giving God’s words.

Now, he has come back. He’s moved around the quarters, and he’s coming now to the geographical center. So we read in verse 3 -- 4, “For three transgressions of Judah and for four, I will not revoke its punishment.” Judah is now before the Prophet Amos.

I don’t know whether Amos had a helper or not. Some of the prophets did, but I can imagine him saying perhaps, to use modern language I have a couple more oracles to make as he turned to his helper, give me a couple more of those three hyphenated four forms again so I can fill in another name. So this one is one in which he fills in the name of Judah. He says, “For three transgressions of Judah,” so he’s coming closer and closer. I’ll only note the indictment here. He says that they rejected the law of the LORD. I can imagine that there may have been even some derisory cheers from the audience of the northern kingdom.

The prophet is finally gotten around to Judah. We thought he would never bring it up. There was no love lost between Judah and Israel at this time, but the indictment is the important thing for us. And notice what Amos the Prophet says about his own country. He says, “They rejected the law of the LORD And have not kept His statutes; Their lies also have led them astray, Those after which their fathers have walked.” In other words, to put it very simply, Judah has silenced the voice of revelation. Their privilege -- that is the privilege of having divine revelation, now represents their peril. The question of where is truth to be found is a question in which we’re all interested. As you turn to the Old Testament in various passages this question is raised. It’s one for

kings in 1 Kings chapter 22. It’s one for prophets in Ezekiel chapter 2. It’s one for priests in Malachi chapter 2.

The problem of where is the truth to be found is one for people as well. Different answers have been given. Men sometimes give the answer, truth is to be found in an antiquity. One of the commentators -- one of the older commentators, says antiquity, the popular era of one generation becomes the axiom of the next. Occasionally human authority is brought forward as the basis of the truth, where it is to be found. That’s no safe guide either so this author says. The children canonize the eras of their fathers. Nothing really ultimately affords a safe anchorage in life so far as truth is concerned except the word of God. We, as believing Christians, believe that in the Scriptures we have the ultimate criterion by which truth is to be measured. So that the Scriptures themselves, the written deposit of the completed Scriptures, is the ultimate guide to what is truth. So in Israel’s -- in Judah’s case -- in this instance, in Judah’s case, they have rejected the law of the Lord. They have not kept his statutes.

Now, think a moment about the implications of this. He says, they’ve rejected the revelation of God. They have not kept his statutes. Their lies also have led them astray. So that in abandoning the criterion by which judge truth, they not only now stand in neutral territory, they stand in territory that is opposed to the word of God. They have come to lies. For it’s either truth on the one hand or it is a lie on the other.

So when we say that we are -- when we say we do not follow the word of God, we’re not saying we’re neutral. In that very fact, we have taken our stand against the truth of God, and the result is lies.

It’s possible that Amos is speaking about the idols in this instance, but that’s just simply a specific indication of the general truth. Their lies have led them astray. Sometimes thinking about the New Testament revelation, we remember that the church, according to the Apostle Paul, is the safeguard of the truth. Paul says the church is the pillar -- not pillow, pillar -- the church is the pillar and the ground of the truth. What is

meant by that is simply this. That the church, that is of course speaking of the true church -- the true church is the depository of the divine revelation, and it is the responsibility of the church of God to guard that truth. That’s why it’s such a great sin for the church to depart from the word of God. And when we think about the pulpit as the place where the church let’s its voice be heard, when the voice that comes from behind the pulpit is not in harmony with the word of God, then we have violated the apostle’s instructions by which the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. But at the same time, while it’s the duty of the church to safeguard, the truth the truth is the safeguard of the church. So that the truth is really that which is to govern us in all of our activities in our preaching, in our living, and if we depart from it then we can expect error to result.

Notice that expression, their lies also have led them astray. What did they go astray? Because they’ve abandoned the truth. The most practical kind of Christian living is the product of the knowledge of the truth, of adherence to the truth, of practical living of the truth. It is that that keeps individual Christians and a body of Christians from being led astray. We say this over and over again, but the Bible says it over and over again. Their lies have led them astray.

In the final analysis then, unbelief leads ultimately to immorality. As we’ve said over and over again, the essence of sin is to selfishness, it’s not autonomy, it’s not all of the other kinds of things of that character. The essence of sin is unbelief. It manifests itself in rebellion and issues finally in immorality. So their lies, their unbelief, has caused them to be led astray. That’s Amos’s analysis of the situation in Judah. They’ve rejected the law of the Lord. They have not kept his statutes, and, incidentally, you probably could make a little bit of a difference between revelation -- or rather I should say law in this instance and statutes. Because when we say law, we’re not to think of something that is simply legalistic when he says they have rejected the law of the Lord. The idea lying back of it is the personal communication of the will of God. And so in that sense they

have abandoned that personal relationship to the Lord God. Statutes suggest his individual perceptive regulations.

So a whole lot is bound up in this, in Amos’s words concerning Judah, but Amos really is coming to his climax now. And so in verse 6 he will move on to Israel as Israel listening to Amos’s oracle against Judah, they are probably saying, the prophets have spoken about the day of the Lord, well the day of the Lord evidently is here because judgment has -- is going to come to pass upon our enemies. It’s going to come to pass even upon Judah. This is quite wonderful, our theology is correct after all, because these heathen wicked countries and even Judah stand under the judgment of God, little realizing that Amos is going to move on now to the people to whom he’s speaking. And so we read in verse 6, “For three transgressions of Israel” and I can hear a quietness come over the audience at this point if he had an audience on that street corner, if it was on a street corner. “Three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment.” I’m thinking in my own thinking of New Testament passages such as Romans chapter 2, verse 1 and verse 2 where the apostle, after speaking of judgment upon the Gentiles because of their sins in chapter 2 in verse 1 says,

“Therefore you are without excuse. Every man of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.”

So Amos breaks his pattern now, and he’s going to give a lengthy exposition of the difficulties that exist in the northern kingdom and of the judgment that God is going to mete upon them. It’s an extended oracle, and there are some rough charges. Notice the indictment in verse 6 through verse 8, and there are sins against others, sins against

divine revelation. And then in verse 9 through verse 12, sins against the grace of God. I’ll just pick out a few of them so you’ll get the flavor of it.

“For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they sell the righteous for money.” Lying in the background of this is the rich legally oppressing the poor. The most trivial deaths become the occasion or become the occasions for the wickedness or bribes and that type of thing. Their society was a society that was riddled with this kind of thing. In fact, someone has described this society, as Amos pictures it, as the survival of the slickest.

And if you don’t think that we, in our day, are afflicted by this, take your newspaper and read the business section. The business section is a catalog of the kinds of crimes that affect our society today which are crimes that are accomplished by the individuals with whom you in north Dallas are living and walking and having contact with in the stores in which you go. We are a society that could be described also as the survival of the slickest. I won’t name names. It’s not necessary. You know them as well as I do. And if you have any doubt, read the business section. And if you want to know more about it, read *The Wall Street Journal*. That’ll give you a much broader coverage. And in fact, almost any journal of any kind today is filled with the slickest of criminal escapades in our particular society.

Of course, we are not a theocratic nation as Israel was, and we must understand that as we speak about these things, but it’s quite clear from this that the rich were legally oppressing the poor. The most trivial debts are the occasion of the oppression. Judges are bribed in order that people may gain their way. The prophet goes on to say, “These who trample the head of the helpless in the also turn aside the way of the humble.” To deny justice to the afflicted is part of the failure to exercise the kinds of social justice that should be carried out in our society and particularly by those of us who are Christians.

Let me say just a word about this. I won’t say too much. I said little more at 8:30 this morning and afterwards I was a little sorry I spent that much time on it. We have a

lot of emphasis in evangelicalism today to the effect that we, evangelicals, should be actively involved in the question of social justice in our day.

Now, let me say that I agree with the sentiment expressed by that. Our faith should manifest itself in actions that are in harmony with principles of social justice that are found in the word of God. There’s no question about that at all. And when it comes to voting, when it comes to supporting things that are -- that raise questions like that, we should stand on the right side of those things.

At the same time, I must confess there is another conflict that I feel and the conflict is this. If I, as a conservative, preacher of the word of God, spend my time in questions of social justice, then I have to ask myself the question, who is going to preach the gospel? Who is going to preach the gospel so that men may be delivered not simply from the oppressors in the business world and in other worlds about us, but who is going to preach the gospel by which we might be delivered from eternal damnation? Who’s going to that? If I spend my time doing that, whose going to preach the gospel, because, my liberal friends who are wholly into questions of social justice, they’re not preaching the gospel. So if I, who know the gospel, do not preach the gospel, I must confess no one is going to preach the gospel, and so what we’re going to have is social justice but no divine salvation.

Now, I ask you the question, should we fear him who is able to send a soul to hell, or fear the one who is able to put your soul in a physical prison? Well, it’s obvious that the ultimate question is the question of eternal salvation. And since my colleagues and compatriots who stand behind pulpits do not preach that the way of salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the atoning sacrifice, since they don’t preach that, I feel I must do that, but at the same time I do want to stand for the principles that we call principles of social justice. I think Amos gives us some good guidelines. He puts his finger upon the evils, but in the final analysis, he traces it to the fact that they have rejected the law of God they have not paid attention to his statutes.

Now, he turns to sexual questions. Is Amos talking about the 8th Century before Christ, or is he talking about the 1980s? Listen to what he says, “And a man and his father resort to the girl.” That is, the same kinds of sins that fathers commit, the sons are committing, adultery, fornication characterized the society of Israel in Amos’ day, and he has a word for it. I don’t think he’s taking about perversions specifically here, though no doubt there was that, but every man, in Amos’s day, as he puts it forth here, is inclined to what we call womanizing. They were womanizers. A man and his father resort to the female, womanizers.

Now, if you don’t think our society is not like that, you haven’t been acquainted with the society about you very much at all. And when one thinks about this in the situation, it’s even worse, because, you see, in those days Baal worship was very common. Amos has that in the background for the northern kingdom is involved in this. Baal worship was the worship of a fertility god. So since Ba-alas was a fertility god, as you know from our past expositions of Josea and other places, in the worship of Baal in the temple, it was characteristic of the temples to have attached to temples female prostitutes. Since Baal was a fertility god, then the association of intercourse the means of fertility and fertility god who would bless their agricultural endeavors, the linkage is obvious. One of the commentators uses the illustrations of parents trying to teach a little child to blow its nose.

Now, you know when a little infant is really small you cannot really talk to them and give them instructions about what to do in life. So what do you do when your little infant needs to have its nose blown? Well, what you do is you take a Kleenex and you put the Kleenex over the infant’s nose and then you make noises like that [laughter]. Have you ever done that? Well, some of you look very embarrassed. I know you did it because the very fact that you’re embarrassed shows that you did do it. And you tried to teach by going through the motions. Well, that’s Baal worship. You see that’s exactly the depth of it. Baal is the fertility god.

So in order to induce Baal to bless your farm plot, what do you do? You go to the temple and you engage in intercourse with illicitly with the temple prostitutes in order to give the idea to Baal that you want him to bless your little farm. So what we have is the lowest kind of attitude toward god. Baal is the kind of god that you have to go through visible object lessons in order to get him to understand. What kind of god is that, to worship a god like Baal?

Well, that’s what’s meant here and obviously the people of the time just used that as a means of engaging in illicit intercourse with prostitutes. What a society. And further, did you notice that purpose clause in verse 7? And in the Hebrew text that is a purpose clause. It’s not a result clause. It’s not that a man and his father resort to the girl so that they profane my holy name. It’s that they resort to the girl in order to profane my holy name. In other words, that’s their purpose. They are so rebellious, so wicked, that they do this in order to make angry and profane the name of the God of heaven. We have a great deal of that in our society today too, but we must go on.

This question of womanizing in a sex-oriented society is something that is certainly appropriate for us today. Pitirim Sorokin, who died 1968, was a famous Harvard sociologist. The fact that he comes from Harvard makes his words even more significant not because they’re more truthful but because from that environment he still feels as he did. In his book, *The American Sex Revolution* he stated that our civilization has become so preoccupied with sex that it now, to use his words, “Oozes from all the cores of American life,” unquote. He warns that history has demonstrated that sexual license a very effective tool for destroying a civilization, whereas a strong civilization cannot be built without sexual restraint. Sorokin sees a close parallel between the sex habits of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome during their decadent years and the present sex revolution in America.

We have learned, to our sorrow, some of the facts of the word of God. I don’t find people on our papers saying much about this, but of course, they should, but

Suzanne Garment writes a column in *The Wall Street Journal* a few weeks back wrote this. I thought it was very good because Miss Garment is a Jewish lady, very knowledgeable. I enjoy her columns. She’s not writing from a Christian standpoint or from any standpoint of believing that the Scriptures are the word of God, so far as I can tell. But this is what she said, there was a time in the 1960s -- about three seconds long it turned out -- when the sexual revolution had happened and woman’s liberation, as it was named then, was not yet fully born. Single people could get contraceptives and did not know that they could also get herpes or AIDS.

Sex was a symbol of liberation of all kinds. Nobody had heard that it could be an instrument of oppression. Then came war, the woman’s movement, increased attention to family, and dread disease. Today it’s nothing but an embarrassment to see news photos of Hugh Hefner still in those satin pajamas and that shawl-colored bathrobe still smoking his pipe and doing business from his big round bed. Playboy Enterprises is in trouble today, but the chief culprit is not a repressive attorney general. She’s talking about Attorney General Edwin Meese, of course.

Large numbers of people in this country and beyond have surprisingly -- have a surprisingly distant desire to pull themselves, their institutions, and their rules together after years of disrepair. Some organizations and individuals in the marketplace and in politics will catch the tide and swim with it. We’re also going to see an increasing number of beached whales. We have seen them. The lesson is plain and clear. If you live according to the mores of the present society of which we are a part, you’d be one of those beached whales. You can be sure of it. Your life will be ruined, but if you live according to the standards set forth in the word of God, you’ll be preserved from that.

Amos has a word for us in 1986 and further, my friends, my dear Christian friends, for Believers Chapel, for we too have been perhaps are maybe even in this audience afflicted with the same kind of thing.

Now, Amos giving the words of God, five times he uses the I in verse 9 through 12 contrasts Israel’s acts and attitudes with the acts of God.

“Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, Though his height was like the height of cedars And he was strong as the oaks; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below. And it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I led you in the wilderness forty years that you might take possession of the land of the Amorite. Then I raised up some of your sons to be prophets And some of your young men to be Nazirites.”

In other words, I not only delivered you. I did it -- incidentally this is an indirect way of saying salvation is of the Lord. And that lesson is learned even in the Exodus. Salvation is totally of the Lord. He brought them through the Red Sea. He brought them into the land. Those poor souls could never have gotten there. He did it. So even in their physical life, the events of their life, there is proclaimed loudly the truth salvation is the work of God, but Israel didn’t care just as so many today don’t care when they hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And further, after doing all of that for them he gave them divine guidance. They came into the land and so he raised up prophets to speak truth to them. They turned from the prophets. They were backsliding in Amos’s day. Not only did God do that, but he gave them some examples, the Nazirites, examples of holy living of dedication to the Lord God. But what did they do? Well, Amos says with reference to the prophets, he said they said to the prophets you shall not prophesize. Later on in the seventh chapter if you’ve read your Amos you’ll remember he has a few words with Amaziah. They’re very interesting words by the way. And further with reference to the Nazirites, what did you do with them? You made them drink wine. In other words, the rebellion is deep and significant.

The penalty is set forth in verses 13 through 16. It’s very plain. Either verse 13 says, “I oppressed unto you” -- that is God feels the weight of their sin or -- “I will press you now” -- that is, he will crush the nation in divine judgment. The God who overthrew the Ammonites comes upon them, and he winds it up with those striking strong significant solemn words declares the Lord. If anything can make us respond to the warnings of Amos, it is that expression declares the Lord. These are God’s words, my created friends.

Now, in chapter 3, verse 1 and verse 2, we have a brief oracle from Amos. He’s finished with the nations specifically, but now we have an oracle on election to judgment, the essence perhaps of a sermon that Amos preached. It has an introduction. It has a saying. He talks about the sons of Israel, and he talks about them having been brought up from the land of Egypt. So he’s talking about the kingdom as not divided now, but as a united kingdom. And the route of their judgment is their status as God’s people. Think about that for a moment. The route of their potential judgment is their status as God’s people. You know what that means for us today? You attend a Christian church. You attend a church where the word of God is expounded. You belong to it. You form part of it. That’s the route of your potential for even greater judgment. Think about that. Listen to what he says. He says, “You only.” Incidentally that’s very emphatic in the Hebrew text. *rak et.khem ya.da.ti*. “You only have I chosen.”

Now, of course, when he says, you only have I known, he is telling us very plainly that the love that God expressed to the sons of Israel is distinguishing love. That is, he doesn’t love the other nations like he loves the Nation Israel. Oh go ahead and say God’s unfair. He has his preferences. All men are sinners. If, for example, he desires to bless one category of sinners, that’s his perfect right as the Lord God. He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, he says in his own words. Everybody deserves him. Everybody. Everybody. That person sitting next to you. If he has been in marvelous grace toward you that deliverer of your soul, thank him for his grace. You deserve

punishment just as much as the one who sits next to you. We’re all sinners. It’s God’s sovereign prerogative to exercise mercy as he will. Don’t act against that. Don’t get mad against that. Respond to it. The gospel is offered to you. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you should be saved. You’ll settle that question right now by turning to him and saying, Lord, I’m a sinner. You say that sinners may be saved through the blood of Christ on the cross. I believe in him. I entrust myself to you. That decision in your heart is a decision which you may make. He says, “You only,” distinguishing love elective love covenantal love. “You only have I known.”

Now, of course, this word “known” is not cognitive. God knows of all the nations on the earth. His knowledge is not limited. He’s not a God who has to be told a lot of things. He didn’t have to go to Dallas Theological Seminary. If he went over there and spent eight years there, he wouldn’t learn one truth. He’d hear a lot of error perhaps here and there through the way by students and possibly even a thought or two by one of the professors, but nevertheless he wouldn’t learn a thing. He knows all of that truth, and he knows it perfectly. And yet he says, “You only have I known” of all the families on the earth. It’s obvious that what he means you only have I known in a special way, his intimate elective love. That’s the meaning of the Hebrew word *yadah*. You go back in the Old Testament a number of places God speaks with reference to Abraham, he said I know Abraham. I know what he will do. That’s what he means. He’s chosen Abraham. He is the recipient of the covenantal blessings. He talks about Jeremiah in the same way.

In the New Testament, we have the same thing when we read that we are foreordained according to the foreknowledge of God, he means not that God looked down through the years and saw who would leave and decided that he would choose the one that he saw would be believed as if he had gained in knowledge by looking down through the years. No in sovereign elective love, he set his will upon an individual group of people, the nation Israel, and he loved them.

In fact, let me let you in on a little secret. Why did God love Israel? Well, I’m going to tell you why. God loved Israel -- now, wait. Get it. Write it down, because it’s very important. God loved Israel because he loved Israel. That’s right. That’s theologically sound. He loved Israel because he loved Israel. Now, you want to know why he loved Israel, because he loved Israel. Do you want to know why he loved Israel, because he loved Israel. That’s it. Love is sovereign. There is no reason for it. The love is not of what they were in their good works, in their right attitudes, it’s because of what he would do with them. Listen to what he says. Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 7 and 8,

“The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The Lord did not set his love on you for these reasons, [verse 8] but because the Lord loved you.”

Oh, that’s very difficult for us to grasp, isn’t it, that we love sovereignly. We love sovereignly. You ladies if your husband loves you because you’re a good cook or because you look beautiful or because you have style and class, all of these things are helpful you know, but if your husband loves you for that reason, he doesn’t love you. He really doesn’t love you. Love is sovereign. When you see a person who loves another person and you can say my goodness why did he fall in love with her, you’re probably more likely to be hitting upon true love because you could say she can’t cook, she’s sloppy looking, she doesn’t take care of things at the house, but he’s devoted to her. The poor fellow has fallen in love. It’s sovereign. That’s the way love is. That’s the love of God for us. It’s sovereign love, in spite of what we are. Rejoice in it. That’s what Jesus said. He said rejoice that your names are written in heaven. That’s the way you respond

to the doctrine of election. You rejoice in it and thank God for the sovereign love by which he chose you.

Well, you know Moses goes on to say a few words. He’s given a whole line of things and in the eighth chapter he still thinking about God’s relationship to Israel but notice what he says. He says the eighteenth verse,

“But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And it shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish.”

These are the people that God has loved because of the covenant promises, but he warns them that they may perish.

Now, it’ll take another message to clarify that. I just want you to note this fact. We are not talking about a god who can love and save an individual and then permit them to be lost. We’re not talking about that. We are simply talking about the fact that when God sets his love upon a nation such as Israel, it’s possible for individuals within it to fail to come to know the true God. And, furthermore, when he has set his love upon us, we have responsibility. You only have I know among all the families of the earth therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities. Reformed theologians say simply the love of God is the ground of our choice of God but that does not mean as we said when we began, that does not mean that we are propounding a non-moral teaching of divine favoritism. We are saying just the opposite, that there is a strict correlation of divine choice and culpability. When a person has great advantages and privileges, he has great responsibilities.

And the nation as a nation had great responsibilities because of the light of divine revelation that had been poured out upon them. And you who sit in an audience like this and over the weeks listen to the word of God proclaimed hear the word of God expounded and do not respond to it, I fear for your soul. To turn it around, I fear for my own soul. I fear. I do not believe that once saved, a person can be anything but saved but, nevertheless, I think it’s proper for every believing Christian to use Paul’s words to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

Why does God want us? Why does he tell us special privilege involves special responsibility? For two reasons. He wants to disciplinarily purify the people of God. He wants to make us what he would desire that we’d be, and warning and admonition is a proper threat for us. And, secondly, he wants to test professors. Test professors and also purify the saints. I confess. I’m sorry to take you overhead -- over a bit. Cowboys have made just two first downs. [Laughter] They haven’t scored yet -- but yesterday and the day before I was thinking about this text again. I confess that at my desk I put my Bible down. I turned to the Lord God and I say, O God, keep me, preserve me.

May the salvation that I think that I can say that I know that I have be the kind of salvation that makes me different. I pray that for you. I encourage you. And for those of you who may be here and you’ve never believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we invite you to settle the question right now. You can within your heart confess, I’m a sinner, Lord. I know I’m a sinner. Christ has died for sinners so the Scriptures say, therefore he’s died for me. I receive as a free gift eternal life. That decision in your heart means eternal salvation. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Don’t leave this auditorium without trusting him.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words that Amos has given us. They are significant warnings for us as well. We so often fall into the same sins that

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Judah and Israel did. Deliver us, O God. Make us like the Prophet Amos, fervent for the truth of God, for the glorification of thy name, that thy name may not be profaned in our lives.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.