



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Amos 3:9-15

“God Our Enemy”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For our Scripture reading we are turning again to Amos chapter 3, and we are reading verse 9 through verse 15 for our Scripture reading. Just a word or two since Mr. Pryor has asked me if perhaps I had some word to say about the Bible reading. We're doing this as something of an experiment to change our Wednesday night for a while. And the subject we're taking up is 1 Peter. And so a Bible reading is most successful if the individuals who attend do some study on their own ahead of time. So we'd like for you to get in the habit of taking a look at the sections of 1 Peter that we will be putting in the bulletin each week that we will expect to take out. And I will introduce the study on Wednesday night with about ten minutes of introduction to the book, maybe no more than fifteen, and then we'll open it up for comments and questions by those who are in the audience.

And the questions and comments, the questions particularly, may be answered by me or someone else. And in that way, we want to proceed through 1 Peter, studying it together, and profiting from that. We're not doing this as a permanent thing but simply as a change of pace for our Wednesday night which has for the past year been lectures on the subject of the divine purpose. So I hope that you will come on Wednesday night with some meditation, some study of 1 Peter verse 1 through verse 9. It will most profitable

for us if you do. We want to avoid having simply a session in which we pool our ignorance. So many discussion meetings are nothing more than that. So we will try to guide the discussion in a way that will be profitable, and it will be most profitable if you will do your part as well.

Now, the Scripture reading Amos chapter 3 verse 9 through verse 15. Amos writes.

“Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt and say, ‘Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst. But they do not know how to do what is right,’ declares the Lord, these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels. ‘Therefore,’ thus says the Lord God, ‘an enemy, even one surrounding the land, will pull down your strength from you, and your citadels will be looted.’”

Let me say just one word about the term citadel which as you can see occurs several times here, and we’ve already had it several times in the first two chapters. It does not mean what we think of as a citadel today. That is a fort or a fortress, an armed place. But rather seems to not only cover something like that but also large dwellings. That is more than the very small dwellings, large dwellings are perhaps a story or two. They are included as well by the use of that term. Verse 12.

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away with the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch. Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,’ declares the Lord God, the God of hosts. ‘For on the day that I punish Israel’s transgressions, I will also punish the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off, and they will fall to the ground.’”

It was the belief of some students that the altar, since it had horns, with the horns signified a place to which one could go for divine mercy. So that the horns of the altar were places to which one could flee and expect sanctuary. There is a debate over that, however, and I don’t really know the answer to it. If it was a place of sanctuary then this would be an acknowledgement of the fact that the Lord God is going to destroy any kind of sanctuary. “The horns of the altar will be cut of and they will fall to the ground.” Biblical students of the Old Testament, some of them denied that there is any indication in the Old Testament that the horns of the altar were really places of sanctuary.

“I will also smite the winter house together with the summer house; the houses of ivory will also perish and the great houses will come to an end,’ declares the Lord.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

Yesterday I was reading something and in the course of it the author made reference to Ronald Knox, a well-known Roman Catholic scholar who also translated the Bible and the modernist prayer, which he wrote. And this is the modernist’s prayer according to Ronald Knox, “O God for as much as without Thee we are not able to doubt Thee. Help us all by Thy grace to teach the whole race we know nothing whatever about Thee.” To reflect on it a moment I said I gave this prayer in the eight thirty service, and I thought that their lack of response was due to the fact that it was eight thirty. [Laughter] But I thought it was rather interesting. “O God for as much as without Thee we are not able to doubt Thee. Help us all by Thy grace to teach the whole race we know nothing whatever about Thee,” the modernist’s prayer. Oh well, I thought it was pretty good anyway. [Laughter] Let’s look to the Lord in as genuine a prayer as we possibly can.

We look to the Lord know in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the many blessings that are ours through our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he loved us and gave himself for us, that he has made it possible for us to have the forgiveness for our sins and justification before Thee. And we thank Thee for this the Lord’s day that reminds us again of the fact that he not only has died for our sins and been raised from the dead, but he lives today to secure through his ministry at thy right hand all of the blessings for the saints of God that he has won by the blood that was shed. And we praise Thee and thank Thee for a living savior then who constantly prays for us anxious and desirous that we enter into a deeper relationship with Thee Our Father. May we through the Spirit by thy Grace be enabled to live more closely with Thee this coming week.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the word of God which is limb for our feet and a light for our paths. May we by thy grace be enable to not only study the Scriptures more but also follow them. We thank Thee for this country in which we live. We pray for that country and for the leadership that we have from President Regan and others associated with him in the administration. Guide and direct us, Lord, and enable us as a nation to walk in the light of the principles that are found in the word of God. Deliver us from the kinds of sins that so often characterize the leadership of the nations of this earth. May we as a nation truly follow the principles of righteousness and justice among the men with whom we have to deal. We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ for those who preach the word of God and for each of us individuals who seek by thy grace to represent our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

May thy hand, Lord, be upon the true church of our Lord in such a way that a good testimony to the grace of our Lord may go forth throughout this land and to the ends of the earth. We pray for Believers Chapel as local manifestation and we ask Thy blessing upon our elders and upon our deacons and members and friends and the visitors who are here today, Lord, bless them. We pray for those who have requested our prayers. We ask thy blessing upon them, and if it should please Thee Lord give them

affirmative answers to the concerns and the problems and the trials and the requests that have been made.

We thank Thee again for our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. And now as we sing and as we listen to the word may we have the sense of the teaching of the Holy Spirit and the presence of God in our meeting. We thank Thee for all of the blessings of life that have been given to us so abundantly.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning is, “God Our Enemy.” Preachers often call our attention to so-called “forgotten truths” said to be the sure cause of our present failures as a church or as an individual. Sometimes you hear us say one of the forgotten truths is the importance of biblical doctrine. That’s the day to preach on biblical doctrine or perhaps we say to one of the great forgotten truths is the importance of Christian fellowship. And that’s the day to preach on Christian fellowship. Or perhaps it’s something a bit more unusual as one of the great neglected topics of Christian truth is the topic of spiritual gifts. And we launch out into a discussion of spiritual gifts. So to use the rather threadbare cliché again, we have forgotten that God who is sovereign in grace is also in judgment.

Isaiah the Prophet, writes in chapter 63 in verse 10 of his prophecy, “He turned to be their enemy.” Our peril is not so much falling into the hands of Satan as it is that of falling into the hands of an angry god. In fact, if you read through the Old testament you’ll discover that the alienation of God from his people is one of the great subjects of the Bible. We have it in the Old Testament particularly in connection with the nation Israel. And in passages like Joshua chapter 7, Judges chapter 3, and Psalm 78, we have the alienation of God from his people set forth. All, of course, ultimately, related to the fact that after the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, there is an alienation between the Lord God and his own creation.

The Psalmist in Psalm 78 in giving us a kind of history of Israel says some rather strong things. Listen to what he says. I’m going to read Psalm 78, verse 58 through verse 64. The Psalmist writes concerning Israel.

“For they provoked Him with their high places and aroused His jealousy with their graven images. When God heard, He was filled with wrath and greatly abhorred Israel; so that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh, the tent which He had pitched among men, and gave up His strength to captivity and His glory into the hand of the adversary. He also delivered His people to the sword and was filled with wrath at His inheritance, fire devoured His young men, and His virgins had no wedding songs. His priests fell by the sword, and His widows could not weep.”

There is such a thing as those who have the greatest privileges being subjected to the greatest discipline and judgment. Now, lest to be misunderstood I want you to understand that so far as the Scriptures concern it teaches that an individual who has been by the grace of God brought to genuine faith in the Lord may expect that he will be kept from divine judgment, but divine discipline is part of the experience even of believing men. And then, of course, when we look at Israel the nation the ethnic people upon whom God set his love and called them to a special place in the earth. Their relationship to him was not only individual but national.

And it’s obvious from reading the Old testament that while the individual believers in Israel were kept and had been kept for eternal salvation that the nation as a body of people was subjected to the ultimate discipline of the Lord God and had been scattered to the four corners of the earth, finally, for the extreme sin of the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And even though the promises still hold to the nation, the generations that have passed have been abiding under the judgment of a wrathful deity. So Amos now in the verses before us is going to depict a nation that is powerless and, therefore, defenseless

politically, personally and ecclesiastically. They have departed from the Lord God. They have as a nation been backsliding from him and finally Amos has announced, as the prophet of God, that the Lord is roaring from Zion and judgment is sure to come upon them. In other words, divine retribution is that which lies in the future for the nation, and Amos is the prophet to warn them of what is to come.

Now, there are some important principles here, of course. Here is a nation and, incidentally, I think that we can say this that the church of Jesus Christ looked at as a body of professing believers stands before the Lord in a similar relationship to that of the nation Israel. So when we talk about Israel being subjected to judgment, we can, looking at the body of people known as the church of Jesus Christ, we can see the same principle at operation in them because the church is heading into ultimate judgment. So the prophecies of the New Testament make quite plain to us.

One of the commentators on Amos, whose commentary I like, says, “Where religion is powerless everything is powerless. When the house of God falls, no house can stand.” And so we’re going to look in these verses at Israel. And we will look at Israel and its social declension, we will look at Israel in its personal declension, and finally at Israel in its religious declension.

“God Our Enemy,” what a thought. Nothing could be worse than to be the object of the enmity of the Lord God. There is no vengeance like that of the Lord God. And Amos lets us know that there is no vengeance like that of a covenant God, one who has entered into relationship with his people and then finds that they have turned from him as a people, and the consequences are drastic and catastrophic. He has said, “The lion roars from Zion.” And you might think that what Amos is saying that the lion roars from Zion against the heathen peoples. Well, of course, that is true but it’s even more terrible to think of the lion roaring against the professing people of God. And in verse 11 and verse 12 of this particular section Amos wrote, “Therefore, thus says the Lord, ‘An enemy, even one surrounding the land.’” And you can think of a lion as it circles its prey. And then in

verse 12, “Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion's mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away by the lion.” This time not a physical lion like one we put in our zoo but the Lord God himself obviously is in Amos’s thought.

In the New Testament, we read, “Judgment begins at the house of God.” Peter the Apostle says it. Well, that’s a principle that pertains to the dealings of God. He has said in the second verse of this chapter, “You only have me among all the families of the earth, therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” The privileges that we enjoy as the church of Jesus Christ expose us to the greatest kinds of judgment and discipline. It’s well for us to remember that as individuals to be sure that our faith is really in Christ and that we are seeking his face constantly through the word of God and through prayer and through fellowship with him and also in pursuing genuine holiness as is set forth in the word of God.

Now, we’re going to look at the three parts of Amos’s prophecy here. And first we look at social declination in Israel verse 9 through verse 11. This section incidentally is very easy to analyze because we have three distinct introductory sayings. Verse 9, “Proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the land of Egypt.” Verse 12, “Thus says the Lord.” And then there’s verse 13, “Hear and testify against the house of Jacob.” So we have three distinct sections and in each of these sections the failure of Israel is set forth. And as you read them and ponder them, you see that Israel fails in three ways. First of all, they fail socially then they fail personally and finally they fail religiously. If a nation fails socially then the Lord becomes their enemy. The strongholds of Ashdod and Egypt are to judge the strongholds of Samaria.

Think about that for a moment. The strongholds of Ashdod, Philistia, and the strongholds of Egypt, the ancient enemy of Israel that had Israel in bondage they are going to judge the strongholds of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. What an amazing thought for a prophet to proclaim. After all, Samaria is the capital of the

northern kingdom. The northern kingdom is the northern kingdom of the land of Israel. They are the covenant nation. They are the people that the Lord has brought forth out of Egypt, given them great promises to Abraham their forefather confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, given again as the children of Israel came into the land or on the borders of the land, were given the law on the basis of those ancient promises, brought into the land of Israel by this sovereign God who gave those unconditional elective promises. And now Ashdod and Egypt are to judge them, astonishing.

John Sampey of Southern Baptist Seminary many years ago used to say, “Amos snorted every time he saw a palace.” What he saw was enough to make him snort because he’s seeing a nation that has departed from the Lord God in spite of these great promises, in spite of their magnificent history of the past, and the experience of the miracles of that sovereign God who brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Now, notice in verse 9 precisely what Amos is saying. He’s saying proclaim on the citadels in Ashdod and on the citadels in the house in the land of Egypt and say, “Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria.” In other words, he says what you need to do is go to Egypt and on the house tops in Egypt and on the prominent places say to them, “Come to Samaria and then go to Ashdod to the Philistines and proclaim there and tell them on the housetops there to come to Samaria so that Philistia and Egypt shall gather in Samaria and take a look at what they see.”

Now, that’s astonishing because what he says they’re going to see is tumult, violence, oppression, and devastation. Well, now what could Philistia and what could Egypt learn about devastation and tumult and oppression and all of the other kinds of sins that characterize the peoples of that day. After all, Philistia was an expert in tumults and oppressions and in violence and devastations. And everyone knows that Egypt was probably the expert over the face of the earth in all of these things. But what Amos is saying is that if those people come to Samaria and take a look at what they see in Samaria, they’ll learn something new about the ways by which people oppress, do

violence, make devastation, and raise tumults among the people. In other words, the real experts are no longer Philistia and Egypt. The real experts are in God’s professing people in the northern kingdom.

Don’t you know that was a happy little message that Amos gave the people of his day? I think you could understand why Amos was not all that popular. He was an individual who told the truth as God gave it to him and it was not a very pleasant truth because the land was a land that had absolute disregard for order. The fabric of the society was unjust. Unjust behavior toward the people of the land characterize the peoples. Law and order was utterly unimportant and the Lord God says with reference to them they do not even know how to do what is right. They can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. That’s the last state of a people. And, incidentally, my dear friends sitting in the audience today we are fast seeing in our Western civilization that as we know it progressing toward that same state in which we have immorality, injustice, all of the kinds of things that indicate that the peoples of our western world do not really understand now the difference between right and wrong. And even in our religious societies we see much of the same thing.

One of the striking things to me is the way in which as you follow this the Roman Catholic Church is seeking to deal with what is found in that large professing church body. John Paul’s clean up campaign is rather striking. Now, of course, as an evangelical Christian there are lots of things about Pope John Paul with which I would disagree. They have to do with doctrinal matters, but I must say I have to admire the Pope for his desire to bring some kind of spiritual law and order back into his large denomination. Some of the things that he has found himself having to deal with have been their own bishops and the individual members of the church and other officials who have entirely unscriptural views concerning certain issues.

For example, not too long ago one of the important teachers of the Catholic university was demoted from his position. His authority to teach theology at the

university was revoked. And the reason for it was the protracted babble over the priests view on sexual issues. The priest, Reverend Charles E. Curran, a popular lecturer at the university in Washington, has generally argued the churches that the churches opposition to divorce, birth control, homosexual acts, and abortion should not be absolute. The Pope also, not too long ago, limited the authority of the priests of the bishop of Seattle by sending a bishop as a helper who had been trained in Rome and giving him the authority in these types of matters that the bishop of Seattle had had up to this time. He’s seeking to bring under control again a church that has departed from its ancient teachings over these primarily sexual issues.

The same kind of thing has been true in other places as well. And the only thing that I have in mind in bringing it up is to show that even in this large religious organization that may differ quite considerably from me and from us in matters of Christian salvation has found the same situation within that body a departure from the moral principles that the church has stood for down through the centuries. In fact, there are evidently countless leaders who do not know how to do what is right according to Holy Scripture.

Therefore, Amos says in the 11th verse, “Thus says the Lord God, an enemy, even one surrounding the land, will pull down your strength from you, and your citadels will be looted.” Assyria is not mentioned in Amos’s prophecy. It’s rather striking because, of course, they are an unnamed terror that lies in the background. Ultimately, Amos is speaking about the Lord God and when he says, “An enemy even one surrounding the land will pull down your strength from you,” what he has in mind is the Lord God. The striking thing about it, I say, is that Ashdod is a heathen country. Egypt is a pagan land. These are lands that do not have special revelation like Israel had, special revelation that touched the divine promises of a redeemer to come. They do not have special revelation and yet they are to sit in judgment upon those who have special revelation from God. They are not the nations who have been chosen.

In fact, in verse 2 Amos had said, “You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth.” They are not the chosen people. They haven’t been given unconditional promises. They don’t have the word of God, but it is these nations that shall judge Israel, the nation with the unconditional promises and the special revelation. So in a sense the more guilty are to judge the less guilty if we may look at it that way. Those without revelation are to sit in judgment on those who have revelation. The unredeemed are to judge those who are ideally and were at one time largely a redeemed people. To profess and live below the level of divine grace is in the sight of God a crime.

And so you cannot pass by something like this without asking ourselves the question, we profess that we are believers in Christ, we profess that the word of God has been addressed by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit has brought home to us our sin, the Lord Jesus Christ saving work, and by his grace we have made profession that we’ve been brought into relationship to him, we profess to have received the grace of God, but is our life in conformity to that of which we make claim? To profess to have received the grace of God and to live contrary to it is a crime of great proportions. I’m not surprised that Amos speaks as he does because to say that we are something and then to deny it is to bring reproach against the Lord God who speaks in marvelous grace to men.

How often have you heard people say he or she say that they are Christians, but we know things about them that are not Christian at all and those things have been said about some of us in Believers Chapel. No doubt you have heard them. I have heard them. I hope none have been heard about me, and I hope, as so far as you are concerned sitting in the audience, that none have been said about you. But when we profess to have received divine grace, if we live contrary to it we are very displeasing to the Lord God. And it’s entirely possible if we’ve never really believed in him and professed to believe in him we make God our enemy. To bring a reproach against the name of God is very serious with the Lord God.

Now, having said that about social matters, Amos now speaks about the personal declension of Israel. And verse 12 is a separate ironic oracle. I think you would understand this better if we read Exodus chapter 22, where we have the background of the passage. And I’m going to read Exodus chapter 22 verse 10 through verse 13. Here Moses gives some instruction concerning the Law of Moses and he says, “If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, an oath before the Lord shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor’s property, and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution.” But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.” In other words, he should care for the sheep. “If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces.”

In other words, he couldn’t like the people of the west many, many years ago who were keepers of flocks and who entered into collusion with the rustlers and allowed the rustlers to drive off a portion of the herd. And then to say to the one who owned the herd that something had happened to the flock, the animals they had run off or someone had driven them off. In fact, in Israel the shepherd if he came home, the shepherd and said to the owner that one of the sheep was taken off by a lion he had to bring some evidence of that. So he had to bring a piece that the lion left. That’s the background of this statement in which we read in verse 12, “Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth,” he’s going to have to pay for this animal if he doesn’t do that, “a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, so will the sons of Israel dwelling in Samaria be snatched away with the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch.” So Amos is saying simply this, that the ones who lull in Samaria on splendid beds and couches from Damascus that’s their lifestyle and they’re going to be snatched away by the lion.

And the lion, of course, is the Lord God. So just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or piece of an ear so will the sons of Israel dwelling in

Samaria be snatched away and all that will be left will be the evidence of the kind of life that they were living and it’s the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch, or as someone has rendered it, the ones who loll in Samaria on splendid beds and couches from Damascus. The point is clear. The beds, the couches, the pillows summarize the lifestyles. Or to put it in another way Amos would have said in our language the northern kingdom is characterized by sensuality. It’s characterized by luxury. It’s characterized by idleness. It’s characterized by indolence, and it’s characterized by indulgence.

And so if you had written the character references of individuals in the days of Amos in the northern kingdom those would be the things that would have described them. What a kind of resume could be written about you? You’ll notice nothing is said about their prayer life. Nothing is said about their relationship to the word of God. Nothing is said about the self-discipline about these people and nothing is said about their holiness. This is a character reference of the people living in the Northern Kingdom and it’s not good.

Most of you in this audience probably have at one time or another written a resume of yourself. How would it read? If it were written by the Lord how would it read? I know what you say. You say I was born in such and such a place. I attended such and such schools. I have been employed by such and such people, but if it really gave a true resume of you would there be some reference to your identification to the Lord Jesus Christ and your concern over spiritual things, your reading over the word of God, your prayer life, your anxious desire to live a holy life. Would that really characterize your resume? Or would life be like these in the northern kingdom characterized by the corners of a bed and the covers of a couch of Damask.

Well, the third of Amos’s descriptions of the children of Israel and his day in the northern kingdom is religious in character. In verse 13 through 15, he talks about the altars of Bethel and they come before us. And in order to understand precisely this I’m going to ask you if you’ll turn back to 1 Kings chapter 12 and will you listen as I read

verse 25 through verse 33. Remember when the days of Rehoboam King of Judah, Jeroboam the first apostatized established the northern kingdom because of the displeasure of others with Rehoboam founded the northern kingdom and schism took place in the nation Israel. And from that time on for a lengthy period of time, there were two kingdoms the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel or the northern kingdom and Amos ministered to them. Listen now verse 25, 1 Kings chapter 12.

“Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there and he went out from there and built Penuel. Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom will return to the house of David.’ [That is the southern kingdom.] ‘If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem [That’s what they would have to do according to the word of God.] then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.’”

Jeroboam was quite a politician. He sensed that if they kept going up to Jerusalem, it’d lose its hold over the Northern Kingdom. So the king took counsel and the result of his counsel is apostasy. Of course, he’s already an apostate but now he carries out further apostasy. He made two golden calves and said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt,” the two golden calves. “And he set one in Bethel and the other he put in Dan” making it more convenient you see to worship. Didn’t have to go to Jerusalem. If you were near Bethel, you worship in Dan worship there.

“Now, this thing became a sin for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places. And made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi, but no priests were to supposed to priests

unless they were the sons of Levi. One apostate’s step leads to another. And Jeroboam instituted a feast because after all God had said they should have feasts, a feast in the eighth month. Now, he’s talking about the feast of tabernacles, evidently, it was in the seventh month. So he has it in a different month but on the same day. On the fifteenth day of the month like the feast which is in Judah and he went up to the altar. Thus he did in Bethel sacrificing to the calves, which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priest in the high places, which he had made. Then went up to the altar, which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month even in the month in which he had devised in his own heart and instituted a feast for the sons of Israel and went up to the altar to burn incense.”

Now, this is very distasteful to the Lord God. It was an apostasy from the word of God not only in the schism between the kingdoms the establishing of another kingdom but the building the two golden calves and the calling upon the children of Israel to worship them and then their appointing of priests who were not of the tribe of Levi. And, finally, to make festival that were not according to the festivals set forth by the word of God. He was rebelling against the word of God in almost every way you can think of. He was an astute political man and he became a political rebel when he sought to establish a kingdom which would have a king other than from the house of David. He was a religious rebel in that he set up a cult that was not of the tribe of Levi. He was a theological rebel in that he was violating the word of God.

Now, notice how God speaks with reference to him and to the northern kingdom in verse 13 and Jeroboam the second is now on the throne hearing testify against the house of Jacob. That’s the usual title to remind Israel of their true past of the Bethel where God appeared to the patriarch Jacob and reaffirmed the ancient covenantal promises to them. So the house of Jacob, testify against the house of Jacob of all people, declares the Lord God, the God of hosts. These words in the original text are words that

stress the position of the nation Israel as the recipient of revelation and of the promises of God, and then the term used for God is of the sovereign Yahweh, God the omnipotent, a rebuke of the diminished worship of the golden calves.

I can imagine Jeroboam. He made the same kind of human justification that we often make. Well, after all, they really were worshipping weren't they? And isn't that the important thing to really worship the Lord God? If you have a worshipping people in the north and a worshipping people in the south does it really make a whole lot of difference that they worship in Bethel up there, whereas, the others in the south worship in Jerusalem? Well, yes, it makes a whole lot of difference. In fact, it's disobedience toward the word of God. It's worship though and it's the same kind of argument that we make today when we say he's a religious fellow. He may not be following the word of God but he's a religious fellow and surely God accepts religious people. You don't have to believe the word of God as you or I believe it. Doesn't God accept worshipping people like that? And their religion whether it is established upon the word of God or not doesn't really make any difference. Aren't all religions ultimately working toward the same goal? And can you not say that, ultimately, they all will be Christian in the sense that the Christian religion is the pure religion and these are the rather impure ones that tend towards the pure.

I just read an article this past week in Interpretation Magazine in which a distinguished Lutheran professor has sought to deal with the fact that Jesus and others spoke about Christianity as absolute. And he went on to say that the absoluteness of Christianity is essentially something that will ultimately be but not now and the fact that others are not at the present time in harmony with the absoluteness of our Lord's statements and the apostles doesn't mean that they're not true religions ultimately because they will ultimately conform to the true religion and we must regard them as such in our day. Oh, the blasphemy that exists in our own professing Christian institutions. So worship the golden calves.

I have no doubt that Jeroboam said now look the golden calves are not the Lord Yahweh. They stand for him. He’s the invisible God, and he is represented by these golden calves. I have no doubt that he said that. But you see when we associate an idol like the golden calves, it projects its nature upon the god that you really say you worshipping. An idol is a corruptible idol and, consequently, in effect you’re saying that the true God is a corruptible god. You’re in effect attacking the being and attributes of the eternal triune God. That’s why God found it such a terrible thing that men worshipped idols because they did not understand him. They that make them the psalmist said are like unto them and the God you worship will ultimately make you in his image.

If you’re surprised that the way professing Christians live and act, it’s often that the concept of the God that they worship is a faulty one and they’ve been made into the image of their false conception of the Lord God. So God must say as he does in verse 14, “On the day that I punish Israel's transgressions, I will also punish the altars of Bethel; The horns of the altar will be cut off, they will fall to the ground, I will smite the winter house together with the summer house; the houses of ivory will also perish, and the great houses will come to an end, declares the Lord.” Truth lost in formalism and ritualism by materialistic people will be reestablished by the Lord God in the judgment of them. The hand that God uplifted against the religion that adapted revelation to its own likes and dislikes.

I remember in Romans chapter 1 the Apostle Paul speaking about the progress of man from the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden and the way they departed from the creator and have begun to make images like unto themselves Paul says, “God gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over.” And one of the greatest of the sins that is specifically set forth by Paul in Romans chapter 1 is the kind of sexual society that exists today. There are other things too that characterizes the judgment of the Lord God. When the house of god is not supreme in our thoughts all our houses are in jeopardy.

One commentator calls these last few verses, “The fall of the house of Jacob.”

God our enemy solemn thought. What a terrible place to be in God our enemy but, of course, it need not be true. True faith by the sons of Jacob makes us really Israel’s. May the Lord establish within in our own hearts if we do not know the Lord a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. May he cause us to realize that a sacrifice has been made for sinners and that we are sinners and may he cause us to flee to the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. I call upon you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to put your trust in him who loved us and gave himself for us. Christ died for sinners and we are sinners. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him and possess everlasting life.

Amos’s burden was a social burden, a personal burden, and a burden for religious life conformed to the word of God. May God help us to have such a life personally and as a local church. Yesterday afternoon as I was thinking about this message and doing a little casual reading I saw this quotation by Oswald Chambers. He said, “Intellectual darkness comes because of ignorance. Spiritual darkness comes because of something I do not intend to obey.” May God deliver us from spiritual darkness. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee and praise Thee for the a faithful prophet who amid the unpopularity of an unpleasant message was nevertheless faithful to the word of God. Deliver us from departure from the truth. Help us Lord to conform to the word of God not only in our minds but also in our daily lives. Lord if there should be someone here without Christ again we ask give them no rest or peace until they rest in him and the sacrifice that he made for time and for eternity for the forgiveness of sins.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.