Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Amos

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Introduction

Of what and to whom Amos' prophecy speaks: its style and subjects

The prophecy of Amos is one of those that speak of the moral condition of the people, and especially of Israel, who, as we have already seen in the historical books, represents more particularly the people as such; while Judah was but as an appanage of the house of David, although containing always a remnant of the people.

This prophecy, which does not extend so far down in the history of Israel as that of Hosea, is less fervent than the latter; sin is not pursued with that consuming fire of jealousy and of moral revenge, which characterises the burning and broken style of the prophet Hosea. Nothing, doubtless, can be more decided against evil than Amos; but, although very simple, he speaks, as it were, from higher ground. In Hosea we see the anguish of heart produced by the Holy Ghost, in a man who could not endure evil in the people whom he loved as being the people of God; while in Amos there is more of the calmness of God's own judgment. There is much less detail with respect to sin. Certain prominent transgressions of a special character are pointed out, and the most complete and absolute judgment is proclaimed.

Chapters 1 and 2

Jehovah pronouncing judgment from the place of His throne on the nations surrounding His land

Amos 1. In the outset Jehovah, proclaiming His own rights from the place of His own throne, roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem. Afterwards, quite at the end, the restoration of the house of David and of Israel likewise is announced. We may remark that, before the judgment of Israel and Judah is declared, that also of the surrounding nations is pronounced; and this, on account of their hostile and cruel behaviour to the people of Israel, and on account of that also which was essentially cruel in them, and opposed even to the sentiments of humanity; for God takes cognizance of all these things.

Syria is to be carried away captive into Assyria. The means employed for the judgment of the others is not mentioned. Gaza and the Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, pass successively in review; and, finally, Judah and Israel. God enters into much more detail with respect to the sins of His people. He had indeed specified that which characterised each nation judged; but with Israel He goes into detail. We may here again remark — that which we have seen elsewhere — that these judgments of Jehovah fall upon the nations that are established on the territory promised to Abraham, and belonging, according to this gift of God, to the people of Israel. God purges His land of that which defiles it, and consequently alas! of Judah and Israel likewise; but at the same time asserting and retaining His own rights, which He will exercise in grace on Israel's behalf in the last days. We see here the folly of the hope entertained by the enemies of the people, in seeking their ruin with the idea of finding their own advantage in it. Doubtless God can chastise His people, for He must make His own character manifest;

but the malice of their enemies brings His judgment upon them also.

The sins of Judah and Israel specified

With respect to Judah, Jehovah especially points out their contempt of the law and disobedience of His commandments.

In Israel the sin specified has a character more independent of the law (the reason of which is easily understood, if we consider the condition of that people), and connected with that departure from the fear of God, which allows man to give way to the selfishness of his own heart, and to oppress those whom God regards. They sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes. They care not for the sufferings of the poor; but even at the altar — supposed, at least, to be that of Jehovah — they lie down upon garments pledged through poverty, and make merry with the fines inflicted for transgressions. Nevertheless God had brought them up out of Egypt, had destroyed their enemies to put them in possession of their lands, and had given them the tokens of an especial relationship with Himself, whether by persons set apart for Himself, or by those whom He had sent as messengers to them; but they had caused the former to defile themselves, and had commanded the latter not to prophesy in the name of Jehovah. The heart of God was crushed, as it were, by their sins; and His judgment should overtake them. The charge of despising the poor is often repeated in this prophecy (Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:6); and this in special connection with Israel.

Chapter 3

Judah and Israel addressed together as nearest to God and therefore more responsible

Amos 3. After having specified each one of the nations that were found on the territory promised to Abraham, God addresses Judah and Israel together — the whole family whom He had brought up from Egypt. These only had Jehovah known of all the families of the earth; therefore would He punish them for their iniquities: a solemn but very simple principle. If we are in the place of testimony — of testimony to God — it is needful that this testimony should be in accordance with the heart and the principles of God — that it should not falsify His character — that our walk should agree with our position. And the more immediate this testimony is, the more jealous will God be with respect to His glory and our faithfulness. Judgment begins at His house. If there was evil in the city, it was that Jehovah had interfered in judgment.* Two cannot walk together except they are agreed. Two important declarations are attached to this principle. On the one hand, if God intervene and make His great and terrible voice to be heard, there is a cause: on the other hand, God would not act without warning His people. He would do nothing without revealing it to His servants the prophets. But the lion had roared: should they not tremble? Jehovah had spoken; the prophet could not be silent. This was the condition of Israel. It is this latter kingdom that, for the moment, the Spirit of God particularly addresses. There should be left but a few little fragments of them, even like the morsels of a lamb that might be taken out of the lion's mouth after he had devoured it. Finally, in speaking here of Israel, Jehovah specifies their

idolatrous altars, and declares that all the glory of the people shall perish. We may again remark, here, the way in which the kingdom of Israel is taken for the whole people, although Judah is spoken of and judged in its turn (see v. 9, 12-14). {* Though some take it as moral evil which would lead Jehovah to interfere — then shall Jehovah do nothing.

With the exception of the first two chapters, which go together, each chapter in Amos is a distinct prophecy.

Chapter 4

The oppression of the poor and will-worship

Amos 4 presents the oppression of the poor, and the worship which the children of Israel rendered at will in the places they had chosen. God also would act as He saw fit. He had indeed already done so; nevertheless they had not returned unto Him. He had repeated His chastisements in the most significant manner, but in vain. Therefore He calls on Israel to prepare to meet Himself.

Chapter 5

Real repentance and righteousness called for instead of religious observance and idolatry

Amos 5. After having deplored the ruin of Israel, He contrasts the places of their false worship with Jehovah, the Creator, and exhorts them to come unto Him and live. But Israel put off the thought of the evil day. Evil had the upper hand. The wise man kept silence, for it was an evil day. Nevertheless the Spirit calls to repentance. It might be that Jehovah would have compassion on the affliction of Joseph. Yet there were those in the midst of all this iniquity who professed to desire the day of Jehovah. The prophet tells them that it should be a day of terror and of judgment, of darkness and not of light. They should fall from one disaster into another. Jehovah took no pleasure in their offerings and sacrifices; He could not bear with their solemn feasts; He desired judgment and righteousness. But the people had been the same from the beginning: it was not Himself that they worshipped in the wilderness, but their Moloch and their Remphan, which they had made to themselves; and they should be carried away captive, beyond even the land that was now the object of their dread. This last appeal of the prophet involves deeply important instruction. The evil principle which was their ruin had been amongst them from the beginning: the interposition of God's power had checked it, and had turned aside its effect; but there it was, and with the decline of faith and godliness, when human interests no longer restrained it, the same evil had reappeared. The calves of Dan and Bethel were but a renewal of the calf they made in the wilderness. The people of Israel shewed themselves in their true character, notwithstanding all the longsuffering of God; and the judgment dates from the first act that displayed what they had in their heart. Here again we see all Israel looked at morally as one, when the ten tribes are spoken of. But this is made evident in a clear and striking manner by the whole prophecy.

Chapter 6

False confidence: apparent prosperity and inle ease

Amos 6 dwells upon the false confidence that deceived the heads of Israel. A similar judgment to that of Calneh and Hamath might fall upon Israel. Their chief men gave themselves up to luxury, as though all were prosperity. They had no sense of the affliction of Joseph. They should be the first to go into captivity. Jehovah would give up Israel to desolation. He would abhor the excellency of Jacob. For they trusted in that which was but vanity — in their golden calf. But He whom they despised would raise up an enemy that should afflict them from Hamath to the borders of Egypt.

Chapter 7

God's patience and the prophet's intercession had arrested the scourge, but Jehovah would arise to judgment

Amos 7. God had long waited patiently. More than once He had been on the point of giving Israel up to judgment. The intercession of the prophet, that is to say, of the Spirit of Christ which wrought in the prophets (an intercession, indeed, that owed its efficacy to His sufferings; see Psalm 18), had arrested the scourge. But now Jehovah would arise to judgment, with the measuring-line in His hand, and nothing should turn Him aside. With the house of Jehu Israel should fall. In fact this is what took place. It may be that the preceding judgments apply to the downfall of the family of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; and to that of the family of Ahab. Israel had been raised up again after each of those events, but not so after the house of Jehu had fallen.

The little chapel and court: man's religion cannot endure truth's testimony

A prophecy like this was out of place in the king's chapel. A religion, arranged by the policy of man without the fear of God, cannot endure the testimony of truth. Bethel was the house of the kingdom. The priest reports it all to the king. Let the prophet go away to Judah. There Judah was owned, and the truth might be proclaimed; but this was not the place for such unpalatable truths. The king was the ruler in all religious matters: man was master. But Jehovah does not renounce His own rights. Amos was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He had not this function from man, nor from the desire of his own heart. Jehovah, in His sovereign will, had appointed him, and his word was the word of Jehovah. The priest, who opposed it, should suffer the consequences of his rashness, and Israel should surely go into captivity.

Chapter 8

Deserved judgment must come

Amos 8 renews the declaration, that the end of Israel was come on account of their iniquity. God would no longer pass it over. The prophet announces likewise the distress the people should come into from being deprived of all guidance from Jehovah. They who trusted in the vanities that Israel had set up for themselves should fall, and never rise again.

Chapter 9

Exact and discriminative judgment executed by God Himself

Amos 9 presents Jehovah Himself as directing the judgment in such a manner that Israel should in no wise escape it, God treating them as He would the nations that were strangers to Him, as the Philistines or the Syrians, whom, in His providence, He had brought from other lands. Nevertheless God did not forget Israel. He executed the judgment Himself, so that, while Israel should be sifted among all the nations, not one grain should be lost. The wicked who did not believe in the judgment should be overtaken by it.

God's ultimate purposes of grace to David's seed and to Gentiles

In that day (that is, in the day of Jehovah's final judgment) He would not raise up the tabernacle of Jeroboams and of Jehus, although He had given them a place for a time during His longsuffering government; but (fulfilling His own purposes of grace) He would raise up the tabernacle of David His elect, and rebuild it in its glory. He would raise it entirely from its ruins, that His seed might possess the remnant of Edom and of all the heathen that are brought to know the name of Jehovah. At that time Jehovah would also bring Israel back from their captivity, and re-establish them in full blessing. They should enjoy the fruits of their land. Jehovah would plant His people upon their land, and they should be no more pulled up. It was the land which He Himself had given them. { This passage is quoted by the apostle James in Acts 15. Here (in Amos) it is quite clear that it applies to the last days, and it has sometimes been attempted to apply it to the same period in Acts also, laying stress on the words, "After this." But I am persuaded that those who do so have not rightly apprehended the meaning of the apostle's argument. He quotes this passage for one expression alone, without dwelling on the remainder; and this is the reason, I doubt not, that he is satisfied with the translation of the Septuagint. This expression is, "All the Gentiles upon whom my name is called." The question was, whether Gentiles could be received without becoming Jews. After having affirmed this principle, he shews that the prophets agreed with his declaration. He does not speak at all of the fulfilment of the prophecy; he only shews that the prophets sanction the principle, that Gentiles should bear the name of Jehovah — "All the Gentiles upon whom my name is called." There would then be such. God knew all His works from the beginning of the world, whatever might be the time of their manifestation.}

The ways of God with Israel: their judgment and assured future restoration — the sure mercies of David

Thus we find, in the prophet Amos, the judgment of the kingdom of Israel; but this judgment applied to the whole of Israel as a nation, and their assured restoration, in connection with the re-establishment of the house of David in the last days — a re-establishment accomplished by God, which nothing should again overthrow. He would plant them, and none should pluck them up: a testimony which assuredly has never been fulfilled, and as assuredly will be; Israel shall be in their own land and never again removed.

In general, then, this prophet sets before us, not great public events in the government of God, but the ways of God with His people, in view of their moral condition; the ten tribes, or the kingdom of Israel, being looked at as representing all Israel as a responsible nation, the link of their condition at that time with their original position (when, through the grace and power of Jehovah, they had come up out of Egypt), being the golden calves of Sinai and of Bethel.

The prophecy closes, as we have seen, with the re-establishment in blessing of the whole people, under the house of David, according to the sovereign grace of God who changes not. It should be, for the whole nation, the sure mercies of David.