

The Birth of the Writing Prophets

How far short all the kings of the Old Testament fell from God's ideal. The poverty of godly leadership created an acute longing for the coming of Messiah. May we likewise long for Christ's return as we are repeatedly reject those who claim the power and position to be our human saviors and instead wait for Christ alone.

Mon/Tues: Read Isaiah 8:16 – 9:6 & 2 Kings 14:23-27

Bind up the Testimony

The date was the beginning of the 8th century B.C. and Jeroboam II [named in this passage as Jeroboam the son of Joash] took the throne to rule with his father in a co-regency - a means of shifting power from one king to the next in line, common in the ancient East (2 Kings 14:23-24). Jeroboam II would rule with great military and economic success for 41 years, but he lacked the penitential spirit to turn back to the LORD from the idolatry of his fathers. In fact, his reign represents the culmination of 150 years of idol-worship that started when the tribes of Israel broke away from the kingdom of David.

During Jeroboam II's reign, the LORD sent forth a literal explosion of prophets as one last merciful message and warning to these kings of Israel (and Judah). Listen to the names of these famous prophets who were called by God during the reign of Jeroboam II and shortly thereafter:

Amos (760 B.C) was called to go to Israel to pronounce her doom just a few years before **Hosea**, an Israelite, began to prophesy the urgent message to repent. **Jonah** was a contemporary writing prophet to Hosea (2 Kings 14:25). **Isaiah** and **Micah** took up the prophetic mantle during the second half of the eighth century B.C. and were the next generation of prophets after Amos and Jonah.

The Kingdom of Israel was so dark spiritually that God mercifully had shifted His tactics. Each of these prophets were writing prophets who bore testimony to the LORD *far more in their words than in their miracles*. This set them apart from the pioneering prophets Elijah and Elisha, who were men of miracles and confrontation.

Why so many prophets when both Israel and Judah had demonstrated decades of hard-heartedness and deafness to the prophetic message to turn back to the LORD? There are two answers to this question which will provide fruitful meditation for the weeks to come:

- 1) The LORD knew that Israel (and then Judah) would refuse to heed the prophets. But nonetheless, the words predicting divine judgment and exile would be written down and sealed up (Isaiah 8:16-22) to see if their words came true. This is the first reason the prophecies were written down – so that the LORD could show that He had sent these prophets to usher in doom when their prophecies of judgment came true (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).
- 2) These prophecies were written down as proof that the LORD was doing something far greater through them than just proclaiming repentance or judgment. He was speaking through them to predict the Messiah. Isn't this what Peter says?

By the Spirit of Christ in them, these prophets were writing about the Messiah's coming; sufferings and glory!
1 Peter 1:11

We see this also in Isaiah 9:6: the Promised Child would be born “unto us,” a promise meant to light up the dark day in which he prophesied.

Meditate and Pray: How encouraging for these prophets, so maligned and rejected in their day, to be given the precious prophetic treasure of predicting the coming of Christ! Give thanks that this same treasure of Christ revealed as your Savior is the treasure that *you* can hold onto today.

Weds/Thurs: Read 2 Kings 14:23-29 & Amos 1:1-2:3

How Great our Debt to You

A mere two hundred and forty years after David the shepherd boy was anointed king in place of Saul (around 1,000 B.C.), Amos, the first writing prophet, was called by God as a missionary to go from his home south of Jerusalem (in Judean village of Tekoa, about five miles south of Bethlehem) to prophesy against the northern Nation of Israel during the forty-one year reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23).

In Amos 1:1-2:3 we read a refrain of condemnation directed towards the surrounding pagan nations. Why this message, if Amos’ burden was to preach against the sins of Israel? This is a beautiful illustration of the LORD’s forbearance towards His people. As 2 Kings 14:27 puts it, “The LORD had not said that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.”

Why not, we may say to God, when Israel was so ripe for judgment, and in fact guiltier than the nations whom Amos condemns, since Israel sinned against more Divine light and favor? The reason for the LORD’s incredible patience with His people is found in 2 Kings 13:23:

But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and He turned toward them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has He cast them from His presence until now.

Meditate and Pray: It is God’s covenant grace that spares the worst of sinners and the worst of nations. Sing about such persevering grace, using hymn # 494 in our red Trinity hymnals:

“Forgive our sins as we forgive,” you taught us, Lord, to pray;
But you alone can give us grace to live the words we say, to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart, old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals the truth we dimly know; how small the debts men owe to us; how great our debt to you, how great our debt to you.

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls, and bid resentment cease; then, reconciled to God and man our lives will spread your peace, our lives will spread your peace.

Friday: Read Amos 1:1-2:3 & Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-20

All are Silenced

The late Scottish Minister James Philip points out that the beginning of the prophecy of Amos establishes the same Divine arguments against *any goodness on the part of mankind* that Romans 1:18ff echoes.

Whether it is Syria (Amos 1:3-5); Philistia (1:6-8); Tyre (1:9-10); Edom (1:11-12); or Ammon and Moab (1:13-2:3), the whole world is found guilty before the LORD for their violent and immoral ways. There is no one righteous, no not one. All are silenced at God's bar of judgment by their incontrovertible guilt.

Meditate and Pray: Please ask the LORD to grant our evil, corrupt and proud Western world the ability to see and repent of our own sin and wickedness. This is the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, give great thanks to God for opening your eyes to see that you *were* darkness, but now are light in the LORD (Ephesians 5:8).

Sat/Sun: Read Amos 2:4-11 & Romans 2:17-24

Singular Defiance

In Romans 2, God directs His condemnation away from the pagans of Romans 1 to the religious Jew, proving from their hypocritical behavior that they are no different than the Gentiles whom they scorn as morally and spiritually inferior to their principled lives.

We see the same as we transition from the judgments against Israel's neighbors to the judgment against Israel in Amos 2. Leaving aside the LORD's condemnation of Judah (Amos 2:4-5), we study now the LORD's denunciation of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, for enslaving and oppressing the poor, coupling with temple prostitutes, and using their ill-gotten fines for drunken orgies to their false gods (Amos 2:6-8).

These categories of terrible sins are committed in the face of the LORD's singular goodness to Israel (Amos 2:9-11) as He had raised up prophets for them and given them victory over giant foes when He had bestowed on them the land of Canaan. Amos concludes this first salvo against Israel by forcing them to admit that the LORD's case against them was strong. They *had departed from the LORD though He had consistently designed only their good and their blessing*.

Meditate and Pray: What terrible sins flow from ingratitude. The root of the terrible evil of the nations lies in their refusal to be grateful to God (Romans 1:21). Likewise Israel ungratefully rejected prophets such as Amos and refused to acknowledge, remember, and celebrate the LORD's grace. Sing about the importance of gratitude using hymn # 98:

1 Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and
voices, who wondrous things
hath done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms,
hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

2 O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever-joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

3 All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and him who reigns
with them in highest heaven—
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heav'n adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.