

## The Prophet Amos.

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Amos exercised his prophetic gifts within the kingdom of the ten tribes. His home was within the tribal limits of Judah in a rural village named Tekoa some ten miles south of Jerusalem. God, however, commissioned him to be His prophet within the limits of the Northern Kingdom.

Amos was not a prophet by profession. He did not belong to the schools of the prophets. As he said himself he was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son. He was only a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, an occupation that would not go far to cultivate the external grace so much in demand among those who, at that time, held place and power in Israel. It was an honest occupation, however, and one that afforded much opportunity for meditation. Consequently when God needed a messenger to deliver to the kingdom of the ten tribes the revelation of His will He could find none more fitting than this humble man of Tekoa.

The time when Amos carried on his prophetic work was during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II., king of Israel. At that time the Northern Kingdom was at its highest point of material prosperity. It was always in this respect more prosperous than the kingdom of Judah. Its lands were more fertile, its limits more extended and its resources more abundant. During the reign of this sovereign there were so amply developed that its prosperity assumed large proportions surpassing that allowed at any preceding or succeeding period. Jeroboam was not a good man but he was a successful king as men estimate success. As a soldier he drove back his country's enemies extending the bounds of his kingdom to Hamath on the north, Damascus on the north-east and to the Dead Sea on the south-east. As a statesman he applied himself to develop its resources, encouraging as he could both agriculture and trade. Through these measures much wealth was accumulated and great material prosperity secured. Amos makes frequent reference to these circumstances. He speaks of the eagerness with which some applied themselves to trade (8:5) and others to agriculture (5:11.) He also mentions the interest taken in improving homes and residences, some erecting comfortable homes of hewn stone (5:11) others not resting satisfied until they had palatial summer and winter residences (3:15) and a few ambitious to have palaces of ivory (3:15.) All this bespeaks the vast wealth that had been and was being accumulated.

Taking everything into consideration, however, the country at large was in a very unhappy condition. Associated with the marked prosperity were many deplorable evils, some of them indeed consequent on that prosperity. In the first place the wealth gained was very unequally distributed as wealth generally is. While some were exceedingly rich, others were in a chronic state of extreme poverty. Moreover, among the wealthy moral evils abounded. They lived in sinful luxury, (6:4-6.) They oppressed the poor (4:1, 8:4.) They interfered with the course of justice, bribing the magistrates lest they should restrain lawlessness and violence (5:10-12.) They also corrupted trade, the wealthy merchants taking advantage of their less fortunate neighbors, making the ephah small and the shekel large, and using balances of deceit. In the sphere of religion, matters were no better. There was a great show of devotion to Jehovah, but the heart was not involved. This is evident from the restiveness of dealers during the Sabbath and feast days eagerly expectant as they were of the hour when they might resume their dishonest trade (8:5.) It is still more evident from the fact that in their public worship conducted at Bethel, Dan and other places they frequently transgressed the second commandment. The golden calves of Jeroboam were still made use of in presenting their sacrifices unto the Lord (4:4, 8:14.) In spite of its prosperity, therefore, the country might well be compared to a basket of over-ripe fruit (8:1.)

It was because of this sad state of affairs that God sent His prophet. He looked with undying compassion upon the nation in its sin and sorrow, and sent His inspired servant with the message that the occasion demanded.

The substance of the message was the need of righteousness. The people were to cease from oppression. They were to mete out justice. They were to become honest in trade. They were to abandon their life of luxury. God, the prophet was to teach, was a righteous God and could not, therefore, look with approval upon unrighteousness, but on the contrary demanded justice between man and man. The message as it fell from the prophet's lips seemed severe, but it was not, it was full of mercy. For as the nations hope lay in forsaking unrighteousness, that message was the most merciful that would remind them of their wrongdoing and urge them to forsake it. The message was specially meant for the wealthy. It was their sin that was hastening the impending ruin, and it was therefore on their reformation chiefly that the hope of the nation depended. A poor man himself, ex-

perienced in the oppression of the rich, the prophet was a fitting agent to deliver such a message.

Associated with this demand for righteousness was a statement of the penalty by which righteousness is sanctioned. The wrongdoer was assured that unless he forsook his ways destruction would overtake him. Want would follow on his luxury. The alien would inhabit his houses of hewn stone and drink the wine pressed from his grapes. His summer and winter residences, with his palaces of ivory would be destroyed, and his cities levelled with the dust. His kingdom would be overthrown and the people sold into bondage. The oppressor would be oppressed, the robber would be robbed, who sold his brother into slavery would be enslaved. A mighty nation would sweep down upon them bearing away everything in its course. This was God's method of government over nations and He would make no exception in Israel's case. All this the prophet was to declare. It was a stern message, but it was delivered in mercy hoping that the people should become righteous and thus avert the threatened judgment. As Christ afterwards spoke of judgment to save His hearers so did God through His prophet speak at this time hoping to save the nation.

The prophet was required to state, and did state, certain considerations that went to make the justice of the threatened judgment all the more evident. God had bestowed many temporal and spiritual blessings upon the nation. He had delivered them out of Egypt. He had cared for them during the forty years, spent in the wilderness, and He had driven out the Amorites before them, men in stature like the cedar and in strength like the oak. To meet their spiritual wants He had given them prophets and Nazarites. In addition to this, He had in His providence disciplined them in a way fitted to correct their faults, sending for that purpose death, locusts, mildews, wars and such like calamities. All these blessings and judgments were intended to influence the people for good, and when the result was not secured the guilt was all the more aggravated, and the judgment all the more deserving.

The people cherished the hope that their religion, their relation to God would avert the threatened overthrow. The prophet was instructed to show that this was an unfounded hope. He was to teach them that their religion divorced from righteousness would be to them of no benefit. God despised their feasts and sacrifices and would not be influenced by them. Only by becoming righteous would God's favor be secured and the judgment averted.

Such truths associated with the demand for righteousness the prophet was commissioned to teach. And teach them he did, in a number of addresses delivered at different centres throughout the land.

The result of his work was far from encouraging. The bearing of Amigah, the priest, towards the message may be taken as an indication of the bearing of the nation as a whole. The consequence was that the threatened judgment fell and the kingdom of Israel was overthrown.

The prophet saw this. He saw it almost from the beginning of his ministry. He also saw that a select few would survive and that in the day of the Lord this small company would swell into a prosperous multitude. In other words, he saw that through all the disasters visited upon the nation on account of sin, the kingdom of God would pass unscathed. We may, therefore, on the authority of this prophet, cherish the confidence that whatever ills may befall the world because of sin, whatever upheaval may rend society because of unrighteousness the kingdom of God will endure and extend until its sway shall be co-extensive with the habitable world.

## Christian Development in Japan.

The Doshisha University in Japan, founded by Joseph Neesima with the aid of the American Board of Foreign Missions, has brought all questions in dispute between it and the Board to an end by declaring itself independent of the Board, and the native Trustees have assumed complete control of the institution. This they are enabled to do legally owing to the fact that by Japanese law natives alone can hold real estate and the foreign missionaries were obliged to select such to represent them. Some such assertion of real control was certain to arise sooner or later, but it is unfortunate that it should have taken place with so much friction, and still more unfortunate in this case that it should have resulted from a sort of reaction in the growing institution against Evangelical Christianity. The Trustees, indeed, still profess their intention to maintain its Christian character, but there is considerable doubt as to their good faith in expressing such an intention, and still more as to their ability to carry it out. Much, however, will depend upon the spirit that may ultimately prevail in the native churches and a revival of true religion among them might still disappoint the fears of its real founders.