

## Divine Warning

Disaster Should Lead to Repentance

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I think we have all been sobered by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and have all done a measure of thinking about the who, what, where, when, and whys. In one sense we have been almost overwhelmed by a flood of factual and speculative information so that, in many cases, we are virtually numb - not knowing exactly what to think. But in the midst of all this information, some things are beginning to become clear.

I think the book of Amos describes social conditions in Israel, and God's reaction to them, more specifically and clearly than any other book. Amos also clearly shows Israel's reaction to God's attempts to bring them to repentance and to change of life. I am going to read Amos 4:4-13; and I am going to do it out of the paraphrase. So if the words do not seem to match up correctly, you will understand why. But I think that the man has done a pretty fair job in translating this.

**Amos 4:4-13 (TLB)** Go ahead and sacrifice to idols at Bethel and Gilgal. Keep disobeying - your sins are mounting up. Sacrifice each morning and bring your tithes twice a week! Go through all your proper forms and give extra offerings. How you pride yourselves and crow about it everywhere! "I sent you hunger," says the Lord, "but it did no good; you still would not return to Me. I ruined your crops by holding back the rain three months before the harvest. I sent rain on one city, but not another. While rain fell on one field, another was dry and withered. People from two or three cities would make their weary journey for a drink of water to a city that had rain, but there wasn't ever enough. Yet you wouldn't return to Me," says the Lord. "I sent blight and mildew on your farms and your vineyards; the locusts ate your figs and olive trees. And still you wouldn't return to Me," says the Lord. "I sent you plagues like those of Egypt long ago. I killed your lads in war and drove away your horses. The stench of death was terrible to smell. And yet you refused to come. I destroyed some of your cities, as I did Sodom and Gomorrah; those left are like half-burned firebrands snatched away from fire. And still you won't return to Me," says the Lord. "Therefore I will bring upon you all these further evils I have spoken of. Prepare to meet your God in judgment, Israel." For you are dealing with the one who formed the mountains and made the winds, and knows your every thought; He turns the morning to darkness and crushes down the mountains underneath His feet: YHWH, the Lord, the God of Hosts, is His name.

It stuck me - as I listened to commentary Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday - that it was not until I heard Billy Graham use the word **repentance** (one time, in his address during the service at National Cathedral) that not one figure of national prominence even remotely suggested that we might be guilty of something and the attack was in reality a warning of God's displeasure with us. Instead, the full concentration of comment was on our innocence. That all of those affected by this sneak attack were innocent victims as though they were all somehow not connected to the whole of America and what America as a nation does.

Not only that, there was not one mention by these national figures of the multitudes of sins perpetrated by all Americans. It is as if what individuals do in their private lives has no affect on the whole. It is as though the law that "what one sows one shall also reap" does not exist.

Yesterday afternoon, John Reid heard Jerry Falwell being interviewed on Pat Robertson's program. Falwell said that earlier in the week he publicly stated that we Americans ought to be asking God what we have done that this should happen to us. He said that he received so much criticism from people accusing him of judging them that he wished that he had never said it.

That is disheartening, but it is not fully unexpected in light of what I have just read to you from Amos. We are following the same, well-worn, and proud path as ancient Israel. "There's nothing wrong with me. Everybody else is evil. I'm an innocent victim." With this attitude, there will be no change. And the disasters can only increase in frequency and intensity as time proceeds.

Now listen again to Amos and again from the paraphrase. You might want to think of this in light of the service at the National Cathedral yesterday.

**Amos 5:21-24 (TLB)** "I hate your show and pretence - your hypocrisy of 'honoring' Me with your religious feasts and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and thank offerings. I will not look at your offerings of peace. Away with your hymns of praise - they are mere noise to My ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. I want to see a mighty flood of justice - a torrent of doing good."

Amos, like all of God's true prophets, did not receive any thanks for his warnings about Israel being guilty.

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**Amos 7:10-13 (TLB)** But when Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, heard what Amos was saying, he rushed a message to Jeroboam, the king: "Amos is a traitor to our nation and is plotting your death. This is intolerable. It will lead to rebellion all across the land. He says you will be killed, and Israel will be sent far away into exile and slavery." Then Amaziah sent orders to Amos, "Get out of here, you prophet, you! Flee to the land of Judah and do your prophesying there! Don't bother us here with your visions, not here in the capital, where the king's chapel is!"

It is very plain that nothing has changed. Carnal people do not like to hear spiritual truths.

Like it or not, none of this relieves us of our responsibilities as priests. I am convinced that, by and large, Americans are so far from a true knowing of God that they do not even know what to repent of. Humility is so far from them that the reality of sin, and its effect on the quality of life, is incomprehensible. Americans understand somewhat of crime and its effects on the quality of life. But of sin and its effects, they are virtually blind.

So yesterday they prayed at the National Cathedral. A woman, in defiance of God's Word, introduced the service. There were Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim clergy praying and reading God's Word. Which did God hear? Did God hear any of them, when it is clear that they all disagree as to the nature of God and the ways He is to be served? And not one of them pays attention to keeping any of His Sabbaths, among other things.

None of what I have said is in any way intended to denigrate what must have been the sheer terror of those who died, nor the grief of those bereaving their lost ones. I am just reporting what God showed happened in ancient Israel and what He shows that Israel will do in our time. And what we are already beginning to hear evidence of, is already happening.

Now, listen again to God's Word but this time from Joel. Again, this is from the paraphrase.

**Joel 2:17 (TLB)** The priests, the ministers of God, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping; and they will pray, "Spare your people, O our God; don't let the heathen rule them, for they belong to You. Don't let them be disgraced by the taunts of the heathen who say, 'Where is this God of theirs? How weak and helpless He must be!'"

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Brethren, this happened at a time when the power of the holy people is shattered because of our own sins. And any warning is certainly not going to be done by our power or might. It is very plain that it will be done by God's Spirit. He will hear us, because He loves us and He has appointed us to this priestly responsibility. We had better not fail to make use of our privilege.

To me, this is more of **a wake-up call** to the church than anybody else; and we must take advantage, because our lives are 'on the line' more than anybody else's. We must ask God to guide us to repentance, to truly love Him and our neighbor (especially our brother), and to raise up a witness in His behalf before the Israelitish people.

We must ask God to guide the leadership of this nation. And we must ask God to be merciful, patient, forgiving - and to teach them what they must do - for His name's sake.