

The Sixth Century Axial Period (Part 1)

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This is a sermon that I have given before, but to the best of my knowledge the last time that I gave it was at the Feast of Tabernacles in Palm Springs California in 1989. The overall subject involves prophecy. I believe that what I say here is still applicable, but I think that its fulfillment is far closer than it was then. I think that it is time that it be given once again.

Mr. Armstrong would occasionally tell us that one third of the Bible is prophecy, and that ninety percent of that one third is for our day. Prophecy plays a very large part in our lives, so no Christian should be without a fairly good overview of the immense scope of what looms in the not too distant future.

I have found that most of us have a strong tendency to concentrate on the prophecy and not the prophet who delivered the message. This is not bad; it is actually good to do that, but it is also helpful to understand how God used these especially gifted men for our benefit.

This is as it should be, but at the same time we should remember that the church is built at least partly upon the prophets and what they wrote. They not only prophesied—foretelling events that will occur—they also gave the most accurate accounts of history, mostly of Israel, and within that, much doctrine, too.

Most of us may be unaware that the first person named as a prophet in the Bible was Abraham; that is in Genesis 20:7. God Himself calls him a prophet, but the first person chronologically who was referred to as prophesying is Enoch. That is mentioned all the way at the other end of the Bible, in Jude 14.

We are going to be looking at some of what the Bible shows a prophet is and what he does; then we are going to zero in on one particular period of time in mankind's history because some of these foremost prophets and what they did during that period of time is exceedingly important for us to understand; and it can be a real bolster to our faith. Now when they spoke, shortly after they spoke, there was a small former fulfillment of what they said and did, but when it is repeated at the end time, it is going to be huge.

From this we can learn much and broaden the scope of our understanding of what God is working out in our generation. We will go back to the book of Exodus 4; we will begin with one of the most prominent of all the prophets—Moses.

Exodus 4:10-16 Then Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant. But I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” So the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say,” but he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.” So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said. “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he

will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.”

The word “prophet” comes from a root word that means “bubbled up” or “stirred up in spirit,” but the usage in the Bible is more important than etymology, and we just saw something, here—a definition: A prophet is someone who speaks for another. A prophet is representative who carries a message from another, usually from a higher authority. A prophet is an expounder of the word of God.

In this situation, Moses' and Aarons' relationship is an analogous to God's and Moses'. It is as if they were paralleling one another, on different tracks but at the same time paralleling one another. Moses is instructive in regard to our feelings about ourselves. We all say something or think something or feel something much the way Moses did. We say to ourselves, “What can I do? I have no abilities, I am too weak, I do not have enough education, I am not strong enough, I am the wrong sex.” We can come up with all kinds of justifications.

This goes along with what I said in my previous sermon: God can arrange things in our life that we are not comfortable with and would be even painful to us. Thinking of being a prophet was painful to Moses, and he was trying to get out of it, so he was making justifications.

Moses said, “I am not a man of words, but I am heavy of mouth and tongue.” Some people say that he was saying that he was guilty of stammering; that is not quite right. It is really closer to this: “I have not the gift of speaking fluently.” Remember, Moses was a pretty high ranking person in Egypt; I do not mean that he was fluent in Egypt, and then he lost his fluency when he was tending sheep; but there is no doubt, just from my own experience... I know that if I do not speak for a while before a group I begin to lose some of the kind of action that a speaker expects to have when he speaks. So he must have lost some of that as well; and he was preparing God for a failure here.

What he really meant was that he did not have it by nature (the fluency). “I do not have fluency by nature, nor have I received it since you spoke to me.” This is the same man who Stephen rightly and honestly said in Acts 7 was “mighty in words and deeds” and was schooled in all the wisdom of Egypt.

Perhaps Moses had grown a little bit rusty in speaking to sheep rather than the people, and audiences of people, so he feared that he was going to let God down; and so he wanted God to hit the ground softly. In addition, it is also possible that Moses still had worldly ideas about being a leader, and perhaps some of this came from his earlier experience in Egypt. It may be that he had the common carnal idea that he should be some kind of a blazing hero. Moses had to learn—he had to be humbled—to understand that in the overview, he was really nothing but a tool that God was going to make very good use of.

Again referring back to Exodus 4 (and Moses there), I said that he had yet to learn that he was going to be a tool, and the real focus in the operations in which he was going to be involved was to be on God. God had called him to be a servant, and whatever Moses had would be sufficient when combined with the power of God.

It did not mean that Moses would suddenly become fluent; God knows how to use His creatures to His ends and to build them on the one hand and to humble them at one at the same time.

Moses at this point simply did not wish to be used in that way; it seems as though everything that God does through men is done in spite of men. If a man has great resources, his sufficiency, his pride in his sufficiency makes God unnecessary to him; so he has difficulty submitting. So we find the pattern, in I Corinthians 1, God calls the weak. He does this so that He Himself will be glorified. In Exodus 7, we will take another step on the formation of Moses' experience.

Exodus 7:1 So the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet."

Moses was to God as Moses was going to be to Pharaoh, in that God revealed His will to Moses; and then Moses, acting in the position of God, revealed God's will to Pharaoh. God put the words in Moses' mouth, and then Moses put the words in Aaron's mouth, then Aaron spoke to Pharaoh. You see a sequence of actions here. So Moses was God to Pharaoh in that he executed God's will.

So in biblical usage then, a prophet is one who expresses the will of God in words. We will see this develop as we go along. In biblical usage a prophet is one who expresses the will of God in words. It is through Moses that the function of the prophet begins to be clearly established; their function was to cry aloud and show men their sins; therefore, as an extension from this, they were also pastors and ministerial monitors of the people.

A prophet's function differed markedly from the priest, in that the priest approached God on behalf of the people by means of ritual; whereas the prophet approached men—going in the opposite direction—as ambassadors from God, beseeching men to turn from their evil ways, repent and live.

II Corinthians 5:20 Therefore we ["we" refers to the ministry; in its broadest sense, the "we" becomes applicable to every son of God, but I want you to see this right now, mostly in a sense of its most direct application, that being to ministry Paul is referring to himself and that party of ministers that were traveling with him.] are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

This is why I told you that it applies most broadly to everybody, but most specifically to the ministry. The New Testament ministry more closely approximate the prophet's function than the priest. That is why we are not called priests; we are most directly ambassadors of Christ.

The rest of the congregation...you, too, have that function and there is a reason why...where is our citizenship? Our citizenship is in God's Kingdom; our citizenship is in heaven as the book of Philippians 3:21 shows very clearly. So in one sense everybody is an ambassador for Christ, but within this context most specifically it refers to the ministry.

You see then the term ambassador, the term ambassador in English indicates a representative sent by one country to another. In this case the country is the Kingdom of God and in Paul's sense, sent to those preparing for entrance into the Kingdom of God. The office of prophet was not merely to foretell the future, but also to forth tell, with power and with exposition and application of the law which is the declaration of God's will.

This is why the ministry more closely parallels in its responsibilities with the prophet than with the priest. We do no rituals, if you understand the New Testament ministry; it is the job of an ambassador for Christ that we are occupying.

What this means in terms of the prophets...their job had two elements to it, on the one hand there was the moral and doctrinal, on the other hand was the predictive. We are very familiar, because we look at it almost constantly as the predictive, we look at the prophetic aspects of it, but very, very much of the doctrine in the Bible came through the prophets.

While they were preaching to the people to repent and change, they were also saying things in their exposition of the law of God what the application of those laws were to be, so the doctrines are taken right out of them. What we have in the New Testament then is the New Testament ministry expanding, magnifying, what the prophet originally said and making it applicable to the New Testament.

In priority, the prophets' teaching shows the existence of an eternal, almighty, sovereign, wise and holy God, who does all things according to the purpose of His will, something that comes through very strongly in the prophecies. As far as we know, the priests did not do any or very little of this kind of thing.

We have two distinct offices, serving the people, serving God, under the Old Covenant: the prophets and the priests with two distinct functions. Within their prophecies is an understanding of history, their understanding of history shows meaning only in terms of God's purpose and their participation within that purpose.

That is what we use the prophecies for, because they show God's purpose and what our participation is to be. Thus man's history as recorded in the Bible is moving in the direction of that purpose and will, which is very important to our faith. I think you can understand that the book of Revelation ends where it does because God's purpose for mankind is done at that time.

Everything in the Bible, all the history recorded, and all the prophecies made are moving in that direction, not in the direction of the world, in the direction of God's purpose. When you think about this, I think you will see it and understand it clearly.

Since this all comes from the mind of God, prophecy is not intended to open the future to idle curiosity; its greater purpose is the furnishing of guidance to God's people to give encouragement, hope, confidence, and instill urgency in the lives of the heirs of salvation to prepare themselves for the Kingdom of God. I know that you know that is true.

Deuteronomy 18:15-16 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren, Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die."

If you remember what happened there in Exodus 20...the people were so terrified, they cried out to Moses to ask God to stop all this demonstration because, "we want to hear this from a man." This is what he is referring to. God is going to follow through on what they asked for. He will raise up prophets to speak to the people for Him so that they are not terrified by His appearance in the cloud or His voice.

Deuteronomy 18:17 And the Lord said to me, "What they have spoken is good, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren and will put My words in his mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him."

Now every other prophet is going to follow the pattern that God established in Moses. That is what he is saying there. That particular prophecy is applied in the New Testament specifically to Jesus Christ. What we have to understand is that in reality it most specifically refers to Jesus Christ, but it also generally applies to every prophet after Moses.

God is promising here that there will be an unbroken line of prophets from Him to the people who act in their responsibilities, like Moses did. That is delivering the word of God to the people. I believe the prophets have been, until New Testament times, God's way of reaching the people. Whenever the people needed a prophet, a mediator with God, God would raise one up and put His words in the prophet's mouth; and much of the prophet's work, though, in the end time beginning with the New Testament ministry has been replaced by the Bible.

Prophets are not much needed anymore. We know that God has prophesied that two prophets are going to come right at the end time; so they will be on the job, but until this time, the Bible is taking the place of the prophets; and then the New Testament ministry is delivering to the people what has already been spoken or written by the prophets.

From the time of Jesus Christ on, the only thing that was added was the New Testament and very much of that has already been written out of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 18 comes a warning:

Deuteronomy 18:10-14 There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.

Man has a powerful urge to explore the future, and to know the will of God, but men have to resist the impulse for satisfaction apart from what God has already said. That is bad business. All of these that are listed here are heathen ways of scanning the future, and through these means men sought the knowledge and power of God to serve their own ends. That is what happened in practical fact. They avoided God, and instead used another means to gain for themselves a following. All these things that are mentioned here are forms of idolatry. The reason these things are a danger is because there is no godly reality, no godly absolute, no godly law at their base; and the person who seeks the will of God through these means is at the mercy of lying demons and imaginative men and women. Not good sources. You stick to the book. That is what he is saying.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them." You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you

from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk, So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

There is a principle here—it is the prophetic voice of one of God's true prophets that speaks for God, and he will always have at the base of what he says the keeping of God's Commandments for evidence that identifies him as a true prophet (all *Ten* Commandments).

If a prophet arises and you know that prophet to keep Sunday, then he does not speak for God because the base of *all* Ten Commandments is not there. He is identifying himself to you. God is making him identify himself to you, because he has given you the proof.

There is an additional proof—that is the exposition of his message will always be in harmony with previously revealed truth, even though the prophet may be breaking new ground, because the prophets did break new ground as God gave them word. But the new ground always agreed with the old ground. In other words, you can see that the new ground is actually derived from some aspect of the old ground.

When Jesus came, it is recorded in Matthew 5:6-7, it is the fulfillment of a prophecy that appears in Isaiah 42:21. The prophecy is that He will magnify the law and make it honorable. So Jesus the greatest prophet of them all, broke new ground, but what He did was magnified, stretched out the application of the old, and actually made it more binding than it ever was before.

That is why He put in, there, that He was not going to do away with the law and the prophets.

So, He identified Himself to anybody who understood Deuteronomy 13. He was tying His message directly into the Ten Commandments. They misinterpreted it anyway, but, nonetheless, that is a very easily understood, very easily seen proof of a true prophet.

Prophets tended to arise in times just prior to a crisis that God was going to bring upon Israel or Judah. He would send prophets to give warning while that was still on the horizon. Who knows, we might have seen one. There is a possibility that God is warning us before something far worse occurs.

This can build our faith now; it can give us a sense of urgency about taking care of matters with God—make sure that is the top priority in our life. Then that was never enough for God; He is very thorough; He is very kind and merciful as well. When the crisis arises, He raises up more prophets, to show the people exactly what is happening, why it is happening, and what they can do to maybe be saved from what they are going through. He does not give up trying to get people to change; so He sends them before and then He sends them during. When are the two witnesses going to do their preaching? While the worst things in the history of mankind are going on there is going to be somebody broadcasting to the whole world on what is happening.

Many in the church are looking for Elijah to rise up. That may never occur, because he has already come; but it is possible that the scattered churches of God are doing the work of Elijah, as organizations. This is just speculation; I am not a prophet; I am a preacher. There is another thing; and that is the ministry of the prophets were sometimes accompanied by tremendous miracles that occurred with Elijah and even more so with Elisha, and was used by God as a reinforcement of their ministry.

On the other hand, there was John the Baptist; he did not do a single miracle, yet Jesus said, no greater one has been born of women. It is obvious that God does not evaluate a person's worth in His eyes by the miracles that he does. John the Baptist was a very humble man with huge responsibilities to witness of the Christ. That was his job, and he did it well, but even he had his moments of crisis.

Now we will go to Elijah; please turn to I Kings 18:17-21. Elijah is instructive.

I Kings 18:17-21 Then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Is that you, O troubler of Israel? And he answered "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

Elijah came at a time of a great deal of trouble in Israel, a lot of evil to overcome; and they had at that time probably as bad, if not the worst king, than the ten northern tribes had. But this was about one hundred and fifty years before Israel actually fell and became the "ten lost tribes." God was beginning to make a powerful witness before that fall and scattering would occur.

This was Elijah's work: It was to reveal the true God to Israel in a time of rising national crisis, giving people the opportunity to repent. Notice Elijah says disturbing things which Ahab recognized. Brethren, we have to understand that people's human nature likes to feel comfortable—at ease—with themselves, even in moral mediocrity, deceiving themselves as well as deceiving others.

A prophet is a troubler because he awakens people to their moral and spiritual responsibilities; and the people defiantly were lethargic as far as true spiritual things were concerned. I have read that when a person is freezing to death, he feels a pleasant numbness that he does not want to end; but when the heat is applied, it hurts. That is what Elijah was doing.

These people were so cold religiously, when the heat was applied, it really troubled them. It was painful and they did not want to deal with it. But, that pain, brethren, is indicative of the cure for the problem.

There are several ideas as to exactly what Elijah said. He asked them, "How long are you going to hop from branch to branch?" Like a bird hopping not knowing where to settle. Another says that the word picture is of a person standing first on one leg, then the other, indicating lameness. There is no doubt, though, about his intent. He is saying, "How long are you going to keep hopping from one opinion to the other?" Their spiritual lethargy for the true God made them uncommitted. They were just floating along, content with what they were spiritually.

On the one hand, their conscience was still just strong enough that it encouraged them to worship the true God, but their fear of men persuaded them to worship Baal, because they did not want to look strange. They were attempting to combine the worship of God with the worship of Baal and

Ashtoreth, and this syncretism was a very typical Israelite practice. It is alive and well today in the United States of America. They say they worship God; they believe that God exists and that they are worshipping God, but they are following Baal right on his heels.

That will not work, Jesus said very clearly that every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation. He also said right in the Sermon on the Mount, that no man can serve two masters. We have to understand that our Lord God is not a God whose favor is bought with crumbs.

I saw an interesting statement the other day, and I think the man was probably right in what he said. His survey of Israelitish practice of religion and their idolatry was as simple as this: They reduced the true God to nothing more than a god among many gods. They still gave a certain amount of respect to Him, but Baal was just as good.

Is this not what we are hearing today? "We all worship the same God, whether you are a Muslim, Buddhist. We all worship the same God"—that is reducing the creator God to just a god among many gods. When you are that way, there is no commitment to any god. Our God is sanctified by what He is, and He is not like them.

That is the prophet's job—to clarify that before the people. I am sure that the two witnesses are going to do that, and they are going to lose their lives because of that. They are going to sanctify God and His truth and His purpose before the people, and it is going to kill them.

That is why Jerusalem, standing for the entire nation, killed almost every prophet. They could not stand the trouble that he was bringing into their minds. He was not stoning them or anything; the truth eventually got to them, and in order to get rid of the truth, you kill the one who is speaking for God. It is a natural human reaction.

Some, from time to time, get discouraged with church because they are always being told disturbing things about themselves, but this is the place that God has provided to have your mind stretched and measured against Christ's standard. So to keep on coming to services and then leaving it like you have just been to the theater, without God's truths on the mind and the issues resolved in life, with firm decisions to repent and change, is nothing more than an erosion of character. The purpose of Christ is to cure, not only to comfort. Sometimes cures involve pain.

Now we will go to John the Baptist.

John 1:19-23 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said.

John 1:26-27 John answered them, saying, "I baptized with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

John 1:29-30 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said “Behold, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I said, “After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.”

So John was not *the* Prophet, but he was obviously preparing the way for a greater Prophet. That is the one spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15. We will follow John a little bit more, going back to the book of Matthew 11:11-14. Jesus is speaking. He is talking about John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:11-14 Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

That is a plain, clear statement from Christ.

John 10:40-41 And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.”

We are building a case here of what a great man John the Baptist was, and what Jesus had to say about it. Please turn to Matthew 17.

Matthew 17:10-12 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” [This happened right after the transfiguration of Jesus] Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”

In verse 11, Jesus is agreeing with what the scribes had told the disciples: “Yes, it is true Elijah is coming first.” Verse 12, though, begins with a “but.” “But” is an adversative. In other words, He is expanding upon what the scribes—in truth—told the disciples: “But I say to you that Elijah has already come.” So He is not only expanding, He is correcting what the scribes said because what the scribes said simply left the statement hanging without pointing out the greatness of the office that John the Baptist held. He actually held the office that was prophesied of Elijah. He already did the work.

Matthew 17:13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy about Elijah. On the one hand, Jesus is giving confirmation that what the scribes said was correct as far as it went; so He added to it and expounded on it, and in effect this is what He is not saying here...that Elijah is yet to come.

Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

That was already written whenever Jesus said what He said there in Matthew 11. He very clearly said that John the Baptist fulfilled the responsibility of Elijah.

This is what I meant when I said earlier there is pretty good chance that the church is actually fulfilling the responsibility of Elijah, because it has become not just something for the church or the Israelitish countries; it has become now a worldwide work. Through the Worldwide Church of God, God's word was spread all over the world, and the Worldwide Church of God was actually proclaiming God's truth, not just to Israel, it was proclaiming God's truth to the whole world. The church was doing the same basic job as Elijah and John the Baptist, restoring the true way, revealing the true God, preaching the certainties of Scripture. So now, at the end time, we find a collective body of individuals representing God, revealing God's will to the entire world.

Every once in a while I hear people say, "We have to get together and we have to preach to the entire world." Brethren, the scattered churches of God are already doing that. They are doing it through the Internet. Did you ever stop to think that the Internet has a larger audience than Mr. Armstrong ever dreamed of? We get letters from all over the world, to this little group we have here. I can imagine that those larger groups like United, Living, maybe even Philadelphia, I do not know, are getting an awfully large response worldwide. Our website has well over a thousand pieces of literature on it.

That is a tremendous witness, and that is why we get letters from all over the place requesting things, mostly they want money. They word it nicely. "Would you be our pastor or come visit with us?"—things like that. Ultimately that is what it comes down to. It is a reality that those people who write in are in Kenya, India; they are all over the place and they do not have any money. They would like to be able to get more and we cannot deliver it. So reluctantly we have to tell them we really cannot help them any more than we already do. Our postage bill is tremendous for such a little work. We send them what we can.

Again, we are building a case here so that we see clearly the responsibilities of a prophet. I sincerely believe that the scattered Churches of God are doing the work of a prophet, but they are doing it collectively as a body of organizations.

Amos 3:1-7 Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O Children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying You only have I known of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together unless they are agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing? Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it? Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is a calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it? Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

Prophecy is both practical and positive; it is not all gloom and doom. Most prophecy begins negatively, but it ends positively; and this is because God is confident that what He prophesies is going to be accomplished to His end, and that is always good. Much of the book of Amos gives us an education for catastrophe.

Amos followed Elijah, time-wise, somewhere about 90 to 100 years later. Israel's sins have continued to mount horribly, but at the same time as a nation, it is become very wealthy, self-indulgent, even

oppressive in their wealth, and still trying to walk a tight rope between God and Baal, though, behaving like a worshiper of Baal but doing it in the name of the Lord.

Amos begins by showing two things that provide a basis for what he is saying in this prophecy. First, and perhaps the most important, is that God and Israel have a special relationship. That is found in that statement “You only have I known.” “Known” indicates the closeness of a sexual relationship. Of all the nations on the face of the earth, Israel was the only nation God married. That is a pretty special relationship. That is also sobering because Jesus said later, “to whom much is given, much more is required.” That special relationship, that closeness between God and Israel is from sharing the experiences of life together. Even though God oversees and does directing on the other nations as well, with Israel it is different. He is right there. That is what He is implying.

Second, is this: Amos wants these people to know that his words carry authority. It is not good ol' Amos speaking to you; it is God speaking through good ol' Amos. Incidentally, they did not like him in the first place. The reason they did not like him is because he was a Jew. The Israelites were not Jews. And God took this Jew and made him go to Israel to talk to these Israelites about their sins. Not only that, he was apparently, though well-educated, just a common man. He said he was a sycamine dresser and a goat herder. What a put down to these Israelites who were so filthy rich; yet here comes this goat herder, telling them what they are supposed to do with their lives. God knows how to puncture balloons.

That second one—Amos's words carry authority—the thought there is they better heed his words because they are not idle. God will not rest following what He says, so he then puts forth this series of challenging questions that can logically only be answered one way, and here they are:

1. People traveling in the same direction toward the same destination at the same time would hardly meet except by appointment. God and Israel had met and God had appointed it. So Amos inserts himself into this; he has been sent by appointment, and he does not speak promiscuously. He is reminding them that what he says began with God.
2. Second, lions do not roar unless they have already taken the prey. The reason they do not roar when they are hunting is that they do not want to scare the prey away. So when they get the prey, they roar because they are so happy their tummies are getting full. He is warning them that God is that close to pouncing on them. He is not roaring. He is stalking them. That is scary all by itself.
3. You cannot snare a bird unless a trap is set, and something has to cause the trap to spring. He is reminding them that “You are in control of your destiny and if you are the bird, do not spring the trap.” And the way they can keep from springing the trap would be to repent.
4. When the alarms go off, people take notice; and this is a reminder to them that God is involved in His creation. He is managing it, governing it, and the calamity (remember where he says a little later in this book, “Prepare to meet your God.”)...the calamity would not come if they were not deserving of it. What Amos is doing here is, he is laying a foundation so that they see their responsibilities clearer. They better repent or else.

The best I have been able to figure out is that Amos came somewhere around 760-762 BC, because he dates it himself; it was forty years after the earthquake. The earthquake came in 762, it was a significant earthquake; and so what did God do? He gave them forty years to make up their minds.

He is really merciful. He gives people a warning and then another warning, sending His prophets and still gives them time to process this.

5. It is illogical to think that God would punish without warning His people. What we are seeing in these points is that this warning is an aspect of God's mercy. So the specific answer to this last one is. Amos is saying that Amos himself was caused to speak by God; that is where the authority for his words come from; and that he is the one that is blowing the trumpet.

We know that they did not repent, and the Assyrians came down upon them in that period of time from 722 through the next year or two; and Israel, for all intents and purposes, as far as the world is concerned, disappeared, and are just a notation in history as the Lost Tribes of Israel.

We need to pick up on that. The same God is on His throne, and He has called us to understand to heed the warnings that He holds out to us, just like He did to the Israelites—the opportunity to be spared from what is coming on the nation. We have to live our life unto God, and to make urgent use of the time that lies before us, so that when He decides the trumpet has blown long enough for us, that we are prepared to follow Jesus Christ wherever He goes.