

THE PROPHET AMOS

Amos 8

In this lesson the prophet Amos is studied as an example, but it is really another lesson on the Minor Prophets in general. In all except the youngest class, therefore, the teacher will try to see that the pupils receive the general information first.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord seems to punish, but it is really evil that punishes itself. Part of the purpose of the Word is to warn us of the results of our evils.

Thirst pictures lack of truth.

Famine pictures lack of goodness.

Notes for Parents

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called the Minor Prophets. They are called “Minor” only because they are very short books, for their message is just as important as any other part of the Word. All the prophets were sent by the Lord to point out to the people the evils into which they had fallen and to warn them what the results would be, and also to encourage the faithful and assure them of salvation. The visions given to some of the prophets were to be written down, even though the prophets themselves did not understand fully what they saw. The words the prophets spoke were chosen by the Lord. They did not speak from themselves. This all the prophets tell us again and again. And what the Lord speaks is meant for all people in all times. So the messages of the prophets are messages from the Lord to each one of us.

Sometimes these messages are clear to us and sometimes we have to study hard to understand them. There are two clear messages in our chapter from the prophet Amos. One is the condemnation of the things the Israelites were doing, which are all things

which people today are still doing. They were oppressing the poor, they were cheating in their business, and they were thinking about their worldly schemes even while they were pretending to worship the Lord. The prophet tells us that all these things are evil and will lead to the destruction of our souls.

The other clear lesson is that there is a kind of hunger and thirst which has nothing to do with material food and drink. It is hunger and thirst of the soul and it is even more demanding than that of the body. And the only thing which can satisfy this spiritual hunger and thirst is “hearing the words of the Lord.” Hearing in the Bible—and even with us—means more than just receiving sounds by means of our ears. When you say to one of the children, “Do you hear me?” what you really mean is, “I expect you to mind!” Hearing always involves obedience. If you remember this verse from Amos, you can understand why the Lord tells us, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,” and why He said to the woman of Samaria, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

Let us remember how often the Lord said, when He had been talking to the multitude, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Primary

Show the children the books of the Major and Minor Prophets in the Bible and talk to them about the prophet’s mission. Then take up the chapter for today, distinguishing between the vision in the first verse and the message that follows.

Ask your teacher to show you in your Bible the books of the Prophets. The first four of these are long books and so they are called the Major Prophets. These four are named Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Then there are twelve short books. These are called the Minor Prophets. Let us read their names so that you will recognize them when you hear them again.

All the prophets knew that the words they spoke were the Lord's—not their own.

They were messages given them by the Lord to pass on to the people.

They had strange visions, too.

They did not understand what the visions meant, but they knew they were to write them down.

Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets, as the books come in our Bible.

He tells us himself that he was a shepherd who lived in Tekoa, a village near Bethlehem.

He lived in the days of king Uzziah of Judah.

This was some years before king Hezekiah.

In our chapter what did Amos see in vision?

Then what was he told would happen to the people of Israel?

What bad things were they doing?

People today are still tempted to do these very same bad things. Perhaps even you have sometimes wanted to take more than your share of things and to take things that belonged to other children, and to stay at home and play instead of going to Sunday school and church. So you see the Lord is warning us all.

Now read verse 11.

We say sometimes that someone is hungry for love.

And we speak of a thirst for knowledge.

What kind of food and drink does verse 11 tell us our souls need?

Junior

The Juniors may be given much more general information, but the lesson from Amos is also a useful one, both as an example of the prophetic mission and for the basis which verse 11 affords for the presentation of the principle of correspondence. Be sure the children look up all the Bible references in their notes.

Let us look at the prophet Amos as an example of the so-called Minor Prophets. Amos, as we learn from Amos 1:1, lived in the time of king Uzziah of Judah, the third king before Hezekiah (see Isaiah 1:1). Amos came from Tekoa, a village about six miles south of Bethlehem, and he was a shepherd and not one of those men brought up in the schools of the prophets (Amos 7:14-15). But the Lord called him, and gave him words to say to the people

of Israel and of Judah and also to the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites.

Most of the prophets were given visions as well as messages. They did not know what they meant, but they did know that they were to write down just what they saw. The chapter we have for today begins with a vision.

What did Amos see?

What prophecy is in verse 2?

Then the Lord pointed out through Amos several of the sins which the people of Israel were committing.

See how many of these sins you can write down.

Notice that the first part of verse 5 shows that the people still observed outwardly some of the laws given through Moses for their worship. Look up the laws about the beginning of the months—the new moon—in Numbers 10:10 and 28:11. You know, of course, what the law of the sabbath was. But they were observing these laws unwillingly and with their minds full of thoughts of their dishonest plans, like people who go to church on Sunday because it makes them appear respectable, but think about their business or their social plans instead of about the service and the sermon, and during the week pay no attention to the commandments. In verse 5 the *ephah* is the name of a dry measure, somewhere between two and three pecks as we measure today. The *shekel* was a weight used for weighing uncoined money. So you can see just how they managed to falsify the balances or scales. Dishonest storekeepers sometimes do the same thing today.

There is one especially interesting verse in our chapter, and that is verse 11. You have been told that all of the Word of God has a “spiritual sense,” that is, an inside meaning relating to our souls. Sometimes this meaning is showed us even in the letter, as it is in this verse. You know that a famine is a great and widespread scarcity of food, and we all know what thirst is. But here we read that the Lord is not speaking of physical hunger and thirst, but of another kind. Look up Matthew 5:6 and John 4:13-14 and see how this verse from Amos helps us to understand them. Did you

ever stop to think why we speak of being “hungry for love” or of a “thirst for knowledge”? It is a form of speech which has come down to us and to people of other languages all over the world from the earliest times, when people knew that everything we see in the world about us is just a working out or expression in nature of things which go on in men’s souls. When a nation—like the Israelites, for example—becomes so selfish and disobedient to the Lord that its religion is a mere sham, the few good people who are left have no way of finding out what the Lord really wants them to do. This is the famine that is not “of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” Read Matthew 15:1-6 and see how the Lord describes what had happened to Judaism by the time He came into the world. But we know from the Gospel story that even then there were good people left—the ones who welcomed the Lord because they wanted to know how to live.



Intermediate

The correspondence of the basket of summer fruit and the nature of the evils which were destroying the church are the principal lessons for this class, but the Intermediates should be impressed by verse 11 as an example of the places in the Word where the spiritual sense is stated in the letter. As other examples the teacher may read to them Revelation 5:8 and 19:8.

When we remember that a prophet is one who speaks for the Lord, we realize that there are things we need to know hidden within all the messages given to the Prophets to speak to the children of Israel, as well as within the visions they saw and recorded. There were, of course, things in the letter which had meaning for the Jews of long ago, but since the spiritual message was always meant to be for all people, there was much which they did not understand. The Prophets themselves had at best only the most external idea of what their visions and words meant—they knew merely that they were given them by the Lord and that they must be spoken and recorded. We ourselves often cannot get more than a glimpse of the inner meaning of the Prophets without a great

deal of study, but in all of them there are some clear statements which apply to our spiritual states and needs as well as to our outward conduct, and in the writings of Swedenborg the Lord in His Second Coming has given us the means of studying further and finding as much of the inner truth as we are prepared to use.

In this lesson we are studying a chapter from Amos as an example. Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets as they appear in our Bible. He lived and prophesied in the time of Uzziah king of Judah (Amos 1:1), who was the third king before Hezekiah. We learn from Isaiah 1:1 that Isaiah also began to prophesy in the days of Uzziah, and the same is said of Hosea in Hosea 1:1. It is thought that Joel and probably Jonah belong to the same period. There is one thing which distinguishes Amos from many of the prophets. He was neither a priest nor one of those brought up in the “schools” of the prophets—called the “sons of the prophets”—but was a herdsman or shepherd (Amos 7:14-15) living, at the time when he was called by the Lord, in the village of Tekoa which was about six miles south of Bethlehem. He was given visions and messages for the people of both Judah and Israel, as well as concerning Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Like all the prophets, he pointed out the evils into which the people had fallen and prophesied the destruction which these evils would bring upon the nation, and he also encouraged the faithful with promises of eventual restoration and happiness.

This last promise comes at the close of the book (Amos 9:11-15), but it is foreshadowed by the vision described in the first verse of chapter 8, which we have for today. Swedenborg tells us that this vision of a basket of summer fruit means that “a new thing of the church comes into existence,” and that the next two verses mean that “the old church comes to an end.” A basket—which was a regular kind of container for bread and fruit—pictures our will part, which is the part in which we are to hold good. Fruit pictures good works. Summer represents the times when our hearts are warm with charity or love for the neighbor. This vision of the basket of summer fruit is given to show us what the true church is,

so that we may understand how completely the Israelites had perverted their religion and why they could not be allowed to continue as the representative of the Lord's church in the world.

If we study the things said about them in verses 4 to 6, we find that, while they still observed the sabbath and some of the other religious statutes, they were impatient under them and that their hearts were given to greed and oppression. Our worship does us no good if our hearts and minds are not in it and if we do not try in our everyday affairs to act in the spirit of love to the Lord and the neighbor.

Verse 11 of our chapter is one of the places where the spiritual sense comes out in the letter. In giving the Word the Lord saw to it that those who really wanted to understand and do His will would have glimpses of the deeper meaning within the letter. So here He tells us plainly that there is a spiritual hunger and thirst which can be satisfied only by "hearing the words of the Lord." Hearing represents obedience. When your mother says, "Do you hear me?" she means "I expect you to obey." The spiritual famine and thirst were for the means of learning and obeying the truths of the Word. You remember that one of the Blessings is "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Anyone who keeps this verse from Amos in mind can understand something of the deeper meaning in every passage in the Word in which hunger, thirst, food, and drink are mentioned. We know, too, that the people of the Ancient Church, because they understood the spiritual correspondence of natural things, spoke and wrote to a great extent in the language of correspondence in which the Word is written. That is why so many correspondential expressions have come down into the common speech of all peoples. We all say so naturally "I see," "He has high ideals," "She has a warm heart," "He has a thirst for knowledge," and such things that it does not even occur to us that we are actually using correspondences.

This little study of just one chapter of the book of Amos shows us how much we can get by a little effort with the help of Swedenborg from the books of the Prophets, which may seem to us at first

strange and hard to understand.

Basic Correspondences

- a basket = the will part of man as a containant of good
 - summer = a state of charity
 - thirst = desire for truth
 - the ear and hearing = obedience
-

Senior

The final lesson for the Seniors should be the possibility of understanding the Prophets if one is willing to study, and the practical value to us of such study.

We are taking Amos as an example of what can be found in the Minor Prophets which is of immediate practical value for our daily lives. We know that the books of the twelve Minor Prophets are all short, that with the exception of the book of Jonah there is very little “story” in them, and that they seem to be for the most part denunciations of the Israelites and others, with a sprinkling of prophecies of the Advent of the Lord. The study of many scholars has been largely an effort to place the books historically by trying to relate their statements to known historical events. But we know that the message of the Lord in the Word is not primarily a message to any one nation or time and is concerned with spiritual rather than with natural events.

The fact, for example, that Amos prophesied in the time of king Uzziah of Judah (Amos 1:1) is included in the text of the Word not for the purpose of identifying the man Amos but to show us that his prophecy relates to the particular stage in the decline of a church or an individual represented by the events and conditions of Uzziah’s reign. The fact that he was originally neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but a “herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit” (Amos 7:14) shows us the states of heart and mind which, in such a degenerating period, are open to receive the Word. In such a period the prophets and sons of the prophets are the official spokesmen for the perverted church who, as we read in Isaiah 30:10

(and we note that Isaiah was a contemporary of Amos), are called upon to “speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits,” but a herdsman and gatherer of sycamore fruit represents one who is trying to preserve what goodness he has and to do right in his daily life.

In our chapter Amos is first given a vision of a basket of summer fruit. The rest of the chapter, with its denunciation of the people of Israel and the prophecy of their destruction, is such a contrast to this simple, lovely vision that we may not see in the letter any reason for the vision itself at first. Swedenborg in his summary interpretation of the chapter in *Prophets and Psalms* says of verse 1: “A new thing of the church comes into existence,” and relates this verse to the general topic “A new church in place of the former.” Of verses 2 and 3 he says: “The old church comes to an end,” and this is related to the topic “The church totally devastated, and its destruction.” The person who is trying to be a true servant of the Lord is first shown the bright promise of what is to come which may support him through the dark days ahead, just as we are given a knowledge of the spiritual world to sustain us when our lives here are difficult. The basket of summer fruit pictures a heart full of charity leading to good works. This is what the true church in a person is.

The evil practices of the Israelites were in direct contrast to this. They oppressed the poor, were dishonest in their business practices, and even while observing the forms of worship they were not thinking of the Lord but inwardly planning evil. Such a life leads to spiritual destruction and death. In the Gospels the Lord tells us the same thing when He says of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:25) that they “make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.”

In the same chapter of Matthew the Lord calls the scribes and Pharisees “blind guides” and says to them, “Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” This is a description of the time foretold in Amos 8:11, when the good would be spiritually

hungry and thirsty because they had no access to the Word of the Lord. Those who possessed and could read it and were supposed to teach it made it “of none effect through their tradition.” Each of the successive churches ended in this way, and each time the Lord raised up among the remnant of good people a new church. We saw this at the end of the Most Ancient Church in the story of the flood and the preservation of Noah, and at the end of the Ancient Church in the story of the Tower of Babel and the call of Abram. The Prophets give us in much greater detail the account of the vastation of the ancient Jewish Church, which was followed by the Advent of the Lord. And the book of Revelation describes the decline of the first Christian Church, the final judgment, and the establishment of the New Jerusalem.

You young people, like Amos, have been given to see the vision of the basket of summer fruit. As you go out into the world, be on your guard against being drawn into the selfish and profane practices of the world, and keep your hearts pure and your minds open to hear the Word of the Lord.



Adult

After a brief statement concerning the Minor Prophets as a whole and Amos in particular, the class time may well be spent in discussing the means the Lord has given us for understanding all parts of the Word and the importance to us of learning to use those means. The chapter from Amos may be discussed as an example, and the teacher may find it helpful at some point to read the passage from AE 386¹¹ printed with this lesson. Too many New Church people today take their Scripture and their doctrines secondhand. Consequently much of the truth which is taken into their minds never becomes their own or does them any lasting good.

The twelve books from Hosea through Malachi, with which the Old Testament ends, are called the Minor Prophets. Most of us are not very familiar with them, although we all know a few verses from them by heart and we know at least part of the story of Jonah. Perhaps because the books are so short we do not easily identify them individually as we do the four Major Prophets. The

study of scholars has been principally devoted to the effort to place the twelve historically, and one rather widely held conclusion is that with the possible exception of Obadiah the order in our Bible, which is the order established by the Israelites, is chronologically substantially correct. Some of the books place themselves. Others are judged on the basis of their references to known historical or natural events. For the New Churchman, however, it is the inner message which is of interest and importance, and this message is timeless. The chapter we have chosen from Amos offers a good example of the problems connected with the study of the meaning of the Minor Prophets, as well as of the general tenor of their prophecies and the practical lessons they contain for us.

Amos is one of those who gives us in the letter some information about himself. In the first verse of the book he says that he was among the herdsmen of Tekoa and received his call to prophesy during the reign of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel. This places him as an early contemporary of Isaiah as well as of Hosea, and as an inhabitant of Judah, since Tekoa was a village about six miles south of Bethlehem, although the greater part of his message was directed against Israel. In verses 14 and 15 of the seventh chapter he tells us: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock." In the same chapter there is also a brief passage telling how Amaziah the priest of Bethel tried to discredit him with king Jeroboam. On the basis of these few statements a commercial film for the use of Sunday schools has been developed. While such films are no doubt prepared with the sincere intention of interesting children in the Bible, we should realize that, in common with most Bible story books as well as with the more pretentious religious movies which are shown in theaters, such films introduce so much purely imaginary material that the mind is completely confused as to what is actually in the Bible. We are sometimes so glad to see anything of a religious nature offered in the entertainment field that we may not stop to estimate whether its effect is actually good or bad. The Lord

Himself in His divine love and wisdom gave the Word. It does not need bolstering by our very limited understanding and imagination. The personal data given us in the letter are not there for the purpose of helping us construct a picture of the individual through whom the prophetic message was given, but, like all the rest of the book, for their spiritual meaning.

In His Second Coming the Lord gave us sufficient means for the study of the Word, so that with sincere effort we can receive some spiritual enlightenment even from the most obscure passages in the Prophets. An example of this is the vision recorded in the first verse of our chapter. The effort to find a meaning in this vision without the help of Swedenborg has been made. For example, a note on this verse in the *International Bible Commentary* reads: “summer fruit. i.e. fruit fully ripe, which soon rots; representing Israel as ripe for judgment: cp. Rev. 14:15, 18.” This is perhaps as good and faithful an inference as the finite imagination could make from the verse in its letter. But in *Prophets and Psalms* Swedenborg summarizes the verse for us as follows: “A new thing of the church comes into existence,” and relates the verse to the general topic, “A new church in place of the former.” So we see that the vision has a good correspondence instead of a bad one, and although Swedenborg does not make any comment on the verse anywhere else, we can follow through with the help of the *Arcana*. From the story of Joseph and the dream of the chief baker we learn that a basket, as a container for food, represents the will or voluntary part. From the interpretation of the Lord’s promise to Noah in Genesis 8:22 we learn that summer represents a state of charity. So we see the basket of summer fruit as picturing a new church in which the will would produce good works done in charity. The contrast between this true church and the state of the Israelitish Church as described in verses 4 to 6 makes clear why the end of that church was inevitable.

Throughout the Prophets, denunciations of evil are always accompanied sooner or later by promises of salvation for the good. These promises are not actually expressed by Amos until the latter

part of the ninth chapter, but the condition which necessitates the coming of a new church with salvation is described in verses 11 to 13 of chapter 8. We should compare these verses with some of the Lord's statements when He came into the world, notably Matthew 23:13, 16. Verse 11 of our chapter is one of those passages in which the spiritual sense appears clearly in the letter and so helps to enlighten the sincere Bible reader as to the meaning of many other passages, such as the Lord's statement to the woman of Samaria in John 4:14. We recall Swedenborg's statement that the Word is like a man clothed but with his face and hands bare.

There are many quotations from Amos 8 in the writings. For example, we learn from AC 3693 that in verse 9 "to cause the sun to go down at noon" denotes obscurity as to truth with those who are in the knowledges of good and truth," and from AC 4779 that in verse 10 "to bring up sackcloth upon all loins" signifies "mourning over destroyed goods." In several places, notably AE 386¹¹, verses 11 to 13 are interpreted, and AC 3923⁶ gives the meaning of verse 14.

The Prophets are not beyond our understanding if we are willing to study and avail ourselves of the means the Lord has provided. And we know that the states of heart and mind to which the Lord addresses His message in the Prophets are not only states of churches and of nations but of individuals—of any one of us at one time or another. We need to read and understand the Prophets as we do all other parts of the Word. Remembering that the neck is the link between the head and the body, through which all the nerves pass which connect the two, let us take to ourselves the Lord's rebuke (Jeremiah 7:25-26): "Unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 386¹¹: "A famine for bread is not meant, nor a

thirst for waters, but for hearing the word of Jehovah, thus that it is a lack of the knowledges of good and truth that is meant; and that these are not in the church or in its doctrine is described by the words, 'they shall go from sea to sea, and from the north to the sunrise, seeking the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it,' 'from sea to sea' signifying on every side, for the outmost boundaries in the spiritual world, where truths and goods begin and terminate appear like seas; consequently 'seas' in the Word signify the cognitions of truth and good, also knowledges [*scientifica*] in general; 'from the north to the sunrise' signifies also on every side where truth and good are, 'the north' meaning where truth is in obscurity, and 'the sunrise' where good is. Because 'famine and thirst' signify a lack of the knowledges of good and truth, therefore it is also said 'in that day shall the beautiful virgins and the youths faint for thirst,' 'the beautiful virgins' meaning the affections of truth from good, and 'youths' the truths themselves that are from good, 'the thirst from which they shall faint' meaning the lack of these."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How many "Minor Prophets" are there? *twelve*
J. Why are they called "Minor"? *short books*
J. When did the earliest of them live? *about 800 B.C.*
J. What is the period of the last three? *about 400 B.C.*
P. Which one in the series is Amos? *third*
J. When did he live? *time of Uzziah (about 800 B.C.)*
J. Where was his home? *Tekoa*
P. What was his occupation? *shepherd*
J. To whom did he prophesy? *Israel (also Edom, Ammon, Moab)*
P. With what vision does our chapter begin? *basket of fruit*
P. What bad things were the Israelites doing? *cheating, stealing*
J. What does the Lord say is to happen to them? *nation will end*
I. Of what kind of hunger and thirst does verse 11 speak? *of hearing the Word*
I. Which of the Blessings speaks of the same thing? *fourth*
S. How can we satisfy this kind of hunger and thirst? *keep hearts pure, minds open to hear the Word*