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THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL IDEALS OF ISRAEL. II

BY HERBERT L. WILLETT

AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

At no time in the history of the world has the attention of Christian people been drawn so critically and sympathetically to the teaching of Jesus and the partial failure of Christian people to incorporate the principles of his religion into social and individual life.

The principles and teaching of Jesus were definitely related to the religious and social ideals which he inherited from his Hebrew ancestors and from his spiritual predecessors, the prophets. There is no better way of emphasizing and assimilating the teaching of Jesus than by the study of the work of the prophets.

This course is published in nine leaflets issued on the 15th of each month from September, 1915, to June, 1916. To all members of the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE enrolling for the course, these leaflets are sent without charge. The membership fee is \$0.50, plus 4 cents for postage. The amount may be sent to the headquarters of the Institute at the University of Chicago. Suggestions for leaders of classes follow each study.

STUDY II

AMOS AND HIS IDEAL OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The creative work of Moses made of the homeless and unorganized Hebrews a nation with the beginnings of self-consciousness and loyalty. Through the efforts of this great leader, Jehovah came to be accepted, theoretically at least, as their sole God, their protector, and the giver of their national institutions.

The occupation of Canaan, and still more the establishment of the monarchy in the age of Samuel and later, brought to reality the idea of national unity and power. Earlier tendencies to nature-worship long survived. Religious values were attached to places and objects inherited from former times, such as sacred stones, trees, and wells. Gifts were made to deity, in the form of blood offerings, and even human sacrifice was not unknown. Feasts were held in celebration of the important seasons of the year.

But along with these features of religious custom and practice shared with other peoples, Israel held to the belief in Jehovah, who had revealed himself to their fathers, delivered them from Egypt, guided them through the wilderness, and at last, in token of his continued interest, changed his own residence from Sinai to their new home in Canaan. The conception of a God who is just, who instructs

his people by the events of history, punishing the evil and blessing the good, was fostered by the moral leaders who gave to Israel the first lessons in ethics and religion.

The local shrines were accepted as proper places of worship, and even images were tolerated as aids to popular religion. But we have seen how the invasion of Baalism, patronized by the court in the days of Ahab, roused the active and resolute opposition of the prophets of Jehovah, led by Elijah and Elisha.

The limitations of the Hebrew religion in this age lay in the idea of its restriction to Israel, to the present life, to the nation rather than the individual, and its tendency to rely upon ritual rather than moral interests.

A distinctly higher level of religious leadership is reached in the lives and ministries of Amos and his successors. They were men of the word rather than of militant action. They were writing prophets, as contrasted with their predecessors, because in addition to the spoken word they employed written messages in order to reach wider communities, and to serve as the basis of religious education.

Theirs was a wider outlook, for they perceived that the entire world, not Israel alone, is the sphere of Jehovah's authority. They emphasized the fact that the divine selection of Israel was not for favor but for service, and imposed obligations which could not be met by national boasting or priestly rites. Above all, they insisted that Jehovah is ethically pure, and that he demands of his worshipers the same qualities which he himself possesses. These were new and vital elements in the development of Israel's morals and religion.

First day.—§ 31. *Superscription and text:* Amos 1:1; 7:14, 15; II Sam. 14:1, 2; Neh. 3:5, 27; II Kings 14:23-29; Isa. 5:25. Read Amos 1:1 and note that this verse introduces the prophet by occupation and native place. See further Amos 7:14, 15 for the prophet's own statement concerning himself. (For other references to Tekoa, see II Sam. 14:1, 2; Neh. 3:5, 27.) Read the story of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II in II Kings 14:23-29. Note that in Amos 1:1 an earthquake is referred to, perhaps the same one as in Isa. 5:25. Read vs. 2, which is really the text of all that Amos preached, his customary utterance, a warning of judgments to come.

Second day.—§ 32. *Israel's guilty neighbors:* Amos 1:3-8, 2:6; II Sam. 12:26-31. Read Amos 1:3-8, and note that two of Israel's neighbors, Damascus and Gaza, the chief cities of Syria and Philistia, are threatened with destruction. Locate these places, and the others mentioned, on the map, and note the recurring expressions characteristic of these two paragraphs and of all the others down to 2:6. What was it for which the two nations were condemned? Had not the Hebrews formerly been guilty of just as savage deeds? Read II Sam. 12:26-31 for an instance of this in David's life. Does not this show that a higher standard of conduct was demanded by Amos?

Third day.—§ 33. *Tyre and Edom:* Amos 1:9-12. Read the passage and note that the slave trade and deep-seated hatred of a brother tribe (Judah) are the charges made. Locate the places on the map. Observe that it is intimated that

only a part of the sins that could be mentioned are named. Note also that the brutalities cited are such as the prophet believes any right-minded people ought to abhor.

Fourth day.—§ 34. *Ammon and Moab:* Read Amos 1:13-2:3 and note again the recurring phrases in which the oracles are given. What acts of savagery and sacrilege are charged in this case? Locate the places on the map. Observe that not one of these nations is accused of sinning against divine instruction, but only against the common laws of decency and humanity. See how in every oracle the world-wide authority of Jehovah is assumed.

Fifth day.—§ 35. *Judah's sin:* Amos 2:4, 5. Read and note that Judah completes the list of seven neighboring nations that are to suffer for their sins. Was it a good device for the prophet to secure attention by speaking first of the surrounding people? Note that in the case of Judah, at least, their sins are mentioned. Are they of the ordinary crude and brutal sort? Or are they rather sins against divine instruction? The judgment thus comes closer to Israel.

Sixth day.—§ 36. *Israel denounced:* Amos 2:6-8; I Kings 12:26-30. Read and see how Amos at last brings home to his hearers on the streets of Bethel, one of the religious capitals of Israel (see I Kings 12:36-30), the evils which are bringing their prosperous state to ruin. Four sins are named: injustice, avarice, immorality, and drunkenness. Heathen nations are in danger because of the crude sins of a savage state. How much more may Israel expect to suffer, since she knows the will of God from her prophetic teachers.

Seventh day.—§ 37. *Amorite and Hebrew:* Amos 2:9-16; Deut. 1:6-8. Note that in this passage the prophet, speaking for God, says that the Amorites, a people much superior to Israel in civilization, who were sometimes spoken of, like the Canaanites, as the former possessors of Palestine (see Deut. 1:6-8), were driven out and destroyed to make room for Israel. What other providential assistance does Amos say that Jehovah has rendered his people? Yet how had they treated the prophets and holy men? Note the threat of national calamities in vss. 13-16.

Eighth day.—§ 38. *The prophet's commission:* Amos 3:1-8. Read and consider that in the prosperous times in which Amos was living, the people were sure to regard the words of the prophet as those of an alarmist and to insist that the favor of Jehovah assured them immunity from danger. "No," says Amos. "The very fact that God has chosen you from among the nations is the reason he will expect from you a higher order of obedience." When they asked of Amos a reason for his rebukes, he boldly told them he could not refrain from preaching. God had spoken to him; he must utter his message. What light does this passage throw on the way in which Amos was led to undertake the task of a preacher? Is it not suggested that the moral conditions which he observed among the people of Northern Israel, where he came with his products to the market, aroused in his soul a sense of the divine call to speak the needed message of rebuke?

Ninth day.—§ 39. *The luxuries of Israel:* Amos 3:9-15. Read and note the picture Amos 3:9-15 presents of the wealth acquired by men who have not scrupled to exploit their fellow-citizens for their own advantage. Note that heathen places like Ashdod and Egypt are ironically summoned to see how some of the people of Israel can outdo them in the oppression of the poor. Consider

the references to summer and winter houses, and houses ornamented with ivory, as signs of newly gotten wealth. How does this condition compare with that of our own age? Note the denunciation of the shrine at Bethel.

Tenth day.—§ 40. *The women of Samaria:* Amos 4:1-3; Isa. 3:16-4:1. Mark in the first passage the prophet's seemingly contemptuous reference to the women of Israel as "cows of Bashan." For an interesting parallel, read Isaiah's denunciation of the women of Jerusalem in Isa. 3:16-4:1. Neither of these prophets was a woman-hater, offended by the folly of feminine fashions. But they both saw that womanhood in every nation sets the standard of morals. If women were content to enjoy luxuries secured by their husbands at the expense of social injustice, what promise was there of reform? What parallels do you find in present-day social conditions? What would you say of the responsibility of right-minded women in a social order like our own? What threat is uttered against these women of Samaria?

Eleventh day.—§ 41. *Useless sacrifices:* Amos 4:4, 5; I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:22, 23; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8; Amos 5:21-24. Notice how the prophet sarcastically summons his hearers to go to Bethel and Gilgal, two of the chief shrines of Northern Israel, and watch the useless and wearying process of sacrifices and ceremonial. He even declares that these external rites only "multiply transgressions," because they satisfy the consciences of the people. Read in the same connection, I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:22, 23; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8, and a further word of Amos himself, 5:21-24, as the words of the prophets regarding the folly of depending on outward rites as a means of securing the divine favor.

Twelfth day.—§ 42. *Warnings received:* Amos 4:6-11. Read Amos 4:6-11 and see how the prophet insists that God has not failed to send the people warnings. What calamities are mentioned as having fallen upon various parts of the land? Do you understand that these disasters have come in swift succession, or is the reference to events within memory that might be construed as divine warnings? What has been the result?

Thirteenth day.—§ 43. *The mysterious threat:* Amos 4:12, 13. Read the verses and note that something not named, but certain and threatening, is predicted, as the result of which Israel will be brought face to face with God. Remember that Amos preached in Bethel about 750 B.C., and that about 30 years later, in 721 B.C., the Northern Kingdom was overrun by the Assyrians, and many of the people carried away to the east. Is it likely that this is the danger spoken of? If so, how would Amos be able to forecast it? Read also vs. 12 for a splendid tribute to the creative power and world-wide rule of Jehovah.

Fourteenth day.—§ 44. *Idolatrous shrines:* Amos 5:1-9. Read Amos 5:1-3 and note that the overthrow of Israel is so surely anticipated as to be treated as already experienced. Observe that in vss. 4, 7, Beersheba far to the south is added to Bethel and Gilgal, and they are spoken of as shrines so given over to formal and idolatrous worship as to be avoided by the faithful. Locate these places on the map. Study the fine description of Jehovah's majesty in vss. 8, 9, and compare it with vs. 13, and 9:5, 6.

Fifteenth day.—§ 45. *The social sins of Israel:* Amos 5:10-15. Read and observe the frequent references to the "gate" of the city, as the open space in

which business was transacted and courts were held. What kinds of injustice are mentioned in this paragraph? What forms of wealth and luxury does the prophet name? Note the people's claim that Jehovah is with them, and the prophet's dissent from that view. In spite of the prosperity of the period, what does Amos say of it? Can you restate the meaning of this passage substituting modern law courts and twentieth-century conditions?

Sixteenth day.—§ 46. *The day of Jehovah:* Amos 5:16-20; 3:11; 4:12; 5:27; 6:1, 7. Read 5:16-20 and note the word "therefore." Read the other references and find in each case a summing up of the reasons for punishment, the result of the social sins mentioned. Note also the "woe" of vs. 18, and the later one in 6:1. The "day of Jehovah" meant, in the popular mind, the time when God would give his people complete victory over their enemies. The prophet affirms that it will be rather a time of chastisement for their sins. In their present evil condition, they should fear rather than wish it.

Seventeenth day.—§ 47. *Worthless ritual:* Amos 5:21-27. Observe in this passage the strong words in which Amos asserts Jehovah's disgust at the popular worship. Would you regard these words as literally true or as a strong statement of the prophetic protest against merely formal service? Of what acts of idolatry have the people been guilty? Can there be any doubt that in vs. 27 the prophet refers to the coming Assyrian invasion and deportation?

Eighteenth day.—§ 48. *The revels of political leaders:* Read Amos 6:1-6, in which the chief men of Samaria are denounced for the selfishness, heartlessness, and luxury of their behavior, while the victims of their injustice suffer and the welfare of the state is neglected. Their city is as wealthy and strong as the cities the prophet names in other lands. Yet they have no wish to use their large opportunity for wise government and enlightened leadership. Locate the cities named. Note that in vs. 1 the nobles of Zion (Jerusalem) are named with those of Samaria as lords of misrule. Note also the use of the name "Joseph" as the title of the Northern Kingdom. Contrast the picture of effeminacy and self-indulgence with the older simplicity of Israel's life. Note also the reference to David as traditionally associated with music. Is the prophet including all of Palestine in his picture of selfishness and of coming destruction?

Nineteenth day.—§ 49. *The coming terror:* Amos 6:7-14. The threats of approaching disaster reach their climax in this sixth chapter. Note the recurring "therefore." Jehovah is weary of the sins of his people; their wealth and selfishness are an affront to him. Observe the gruesome picture in vss. 9, 10, where pestilence is doing its terrible work, and no one dares mention the name of Jehovah for fear of incurring his further wrath. The crash is coming (vs. 11) like an earthquake shock. Note the prophet's illustrations of attempting the impossible, in vs. 12. What impossibilities had Israel been attempting? What is the nation that is to afflict the land? Locate the places mentioned and note that they are the extreme limits of Palestine.

Twentieth day.—§ 50. *Three visions:* Amos 7:1-9; Joel 1:1-12. Amos 7:1-9 contains graphic pictures of approaching trouble. (Read also Joel 1:1-12 for a description of a locust plague, not an unfamiliar visitation in Palestine.) Observe that it is the prophet's plea that averts the threatened destruction by locusts and fire. Read again vss. 7-9, and see that there is a deepening of the note of doom.

The prophet is unable longer to stay the hand of judgment. Does it seem strange that in a time of such prosperity, under the popular rule of the strong and successful king, Jeroboam II, the words of Amos, the unknown farmer and preacher from Judah, should have seemed idle and foolish?

Twenty-first day.—§ 51. *Amos and Amaziah:* Amos 7:10-17. Read now the story of Amos' reception at Bethel; note the contrast between the prophet, a stranger, without friends or authority, and the powerful priest, the head of the group of ministers at the temple in which calf-worship instituted by the first Jeroboam was carried on, wearing the brilliant robes of his office, and irritated by the ominous words of the man from the south. Observe that the priest insinuates that Amos is only interested in getting a living out of his preaching and that he would do better to return to his own land to ply his trade (vss. 12, 13). Notice the resentment with which Amos denies the implied insult (vss. 14, 15), and his assertion that he does not belong to the group of professional prophets ("sons of the prophets") but is a plain herdsman and farmer, summoned of God to bear a message to Israel. In what manner do you understand God to have called Amos to this task? Note the severity of the prophet's threat against the priest and the nation. Why did not the king himself enforce the orders of his priest against Amos? or do you understand that Amos did obey and return to Tekoa?

Twenty-second day.—§ 52. *Vision and warning:* Amos 8:1-6. Is it possible that Amos returned to his home after the episode of 7:10-17, and there gathered the substance of his former messages into writing, and added these later sections? Is it probable that we owe the making of this collection of sermons or oracles to the prophet's desire to reach a wider audience with his message? Read Amos 8:1-6, and note that in vss. 1-3 there is given a fourth vision of the prophet, following the three in 7:1-9. Observe the obvious meaning of Amos that Samaria is ripe for the destruction which came only a few years later. In vss. 4-6, see how pointed is the rebuke to the traders who grudge the time required for religious service because they want to be busy at money-making. What dishonest practices are mentioned? How does this apply to some types of modern commercialism?

Twenty-third day.—§ 53. *Days of trouble ahead:* Amos 8:7-14. See with what sinister words the prophet predicts the distress that is to come upon the land, like the overflow of the Euphrates or the Nile. Read 8:7, 8. Observe the pictures of eclipse and public lamentation in vss. 9, 10. But note in vss. 11, 12, the fact that the worst calamity will not be the physical disaster that is to come, but the loss of that prophetic direction and counsel which now they despise. See how Amos refers to the leading shrines and their images as "the sin of Samaria," "thy god, O Dan," and "the Way of Beer-sheba."

Twenty-fourth day.—§ 54. *The shrine of sin:* Amos 9:1-4; I Kings 13:1-10; Isa. 5:14; 27:1. Read Amos 9:1-4, in which the prophet has a vision of the divine wrath upon the sanctuary and the altar, presumably at Bethel, where idolatrous rites have been celebrated. Pillars, capitals, and foundations are to be shattered. Read I Kings 13:1-10 for a story illustrating the hatred of the prophets for the sanctuary set up by Jeroboam at Bethel. Note that the prophet sees in his vision the total destruction of the devotees of the sinful worship. They can find no escape in heaven or in the abyss. The thick forests of Mount Carmel cannot conceal them. Even in the depths of the sea the great serpent shall find

them. Read Isa. 5:14 and 27:1 for references to the mythological serpent or dragon of the deep.

Twenty-fifth day.—§ 55. *The God of the nations:* Amos 9:5-9; 4:13; 5:8, 9; 8:8. Read Amos 9:5-8 and note the majesty of the divine patron of Israel, already referred to in similar words in 4:13 and 5:8, 9. Note also in vs. 5, the recurrence of the words already met in 8:8. But particularly observe the claim that Jehovah as truly controls the destinies of other nations, like the Ethiopians, the Philistines, and the Syrians, as he does those of Israel. They who call themselves the people of Jehovah cannot escape the results of their misdeeds through any favoritism on his part. What was the basis of the claim of the Hebrews that they were "the chosen people of God"? Find on the map the nations and the localities referred to.

Twenty-sixth day.—§ 56. *Final words of hope:* Amos 9:9-15. Do you see in Amos 9:9-15 an entire change of tone? Is it possible that some other prophet, who felt that the messages of the book were too somber and hopeless, has added these final lines to lighten the picture, and open a door of hope? Would you even begin this section with the last clause of vs. 8? Contrast the promise of return from captivity with the constant note of destruction that has preceded. Observe the beautiful picture of returning prosperity and of permanent happiness. Did these predictions find fulfilment in the actual history of Israel? What is the condition of Israel today?

Twenty-seventh day.—*The Book of Amos.* Read once more the entire book and picture to yourself, as well as you are able, the way in which it took form. It is evidently a series of public addresses, or is based upon them. Did Amos probably write them down in connection with their delivery or at a later time? May he have had disciples, as we know Isaiah had (see Isa. 8:16, 17) who set down the things he was accustomed to say? Is the literary style of the book impressive?

Twenty-eighth day.—*The prophet Amos.* Recall what we are told of Amos, his home, his occupation, the fact that he was not connected with the guild of prophets. Remember that though he lived in Judah, he went to Israel, across the border, to give his message. What does he say led him to begin preaching? In what part of the northern kingdom did he preach? Do you infer that he stayed there long? What do you suppose was the success of his work? What kind of a man do you think he was, as to age and disposition? How important a place would you give him among the prophets so far as you know them? In what manner does he illustrate the use which the Spirit of God makes of human lives?

Twenty-ninth day.—§ 57. *The times of Amos:* II Kings 14:23-29; 15:1-7. Read again the record of the reign of Jeroboam II in II Kings 14:23-29. His contemporary in Judah was Azariah (Uzziah). Read the account of his reign in II Kings 15:1-7. In both kingdoms, north and south, great prosperity prevailed. The people were passing from the simpler life of shepherds and farmers to the more complex and exciting opportunities of city life. Are such changes taking place today? The distance between the rich and poor was growing wider. Social injustice was more common. To what extent do these evils exist in our own times? Religion was identified with ritual services at the shrines where idol worship prevailed in the name of the ancestral faith, and where practices both

luxurious and immoral were indulged. Priests and prophets were numerous, but few were concerned for the moral and spiritual life of the people.

Thirtieth day.—The message of Amos. The herdsman, who probably came to Bethel from Tekoa for purposes of trade, aroused by what he saw to express plainly his convictions, put himself on the side of the prophets of the past in rebuking the sins of the times. (Recall Elijah's conflict with Ahab.) He was sensitive to the social wrongs under which many of the people suffered. He insisted that Jehovah would bring corrupt and dishonest men to judgment. And when the people told him that they had no fear, since Jehovah was their national God, and would take care of their security, he startled them by the new doctrine of God's universal rule, and his impartial vindication of righteousness. Amos was a foreign missionary, the first of the order. Read Matt. 3:1-12, and note that Amos was in some degree like John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of a selfish and pleasure-loving age the uselessness of ceremonial rites and of claims to national privilege, and the need of repentance. Yet Amos believed profoundly in the divine mission of Israel, only he insisted that it brought responsibility and not license. His is consistently a message of divine righteousness, and judgment upon the sins that defeat the ends of social justice. Note particularly the advances in morals and ideals, national and social, reached by Amos, over those of earlier prophets.

Thirty-first day.—The message of Amos for today. The value of these moral leaders of ancient Israel is the fact that they deal with the *ever-recurring* aspects of individual and social life. Never were the sermons of Amos more timely than today. Consider the social conditions of our times and find many parallels. Can you make a list of them? His rebuke of greed, dishonesty, self-indulgence, injustice, and misrule might be repeated with unfailing advantage in most communities. To enter into the spirit of these older teachers of the race, by careful study of their times and their messages, is to find in their counsels many principles which if applied to the situation in our own time will become the means by which interpreters of the truth today may be used by the Spirit of God in reaching the life of the present age as were the prophets of Israel in lifting the ideals and influencing the acts of their countrymen.

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS OF CLASSES USING THE FOREGOING COURSE

BY GEORGIA L. CHAMBERLIN

INTRODUCTORY

It is essential that if the message of the prophets is to impress itself upon the members of a study group, the prophets themselves should be seen by them as living men. The only way to secure such a result is to train the historical imagination of the members of the class so that they may enter into complete sympathy with the word pictures of the times which they find in their own study, and through the illumination of the leader. An opportunity should be given, therefore, for the