



# Born to Win

## The Minor Prophets #2

by: Ronald L. Dart

When I read the prophets, I can't help thinking how vulnerable we are. We are always just a hair's breath from the next disaster. Remember Hurricane Katrina, and remember how we all thought we were ready for hurricanes. The fact is, and we learned it, nature can throw stuff at us and there's no way you can prepare for it.

I saw an article about an asteroid that's supposed to pass way too close to the earth in the year 2036. Now that's not a major worry for me. I would be 102 years old at that date if I live that long. You, however, might want to keep this in mind. There is a 1 in 45,000 chance that the asteroid will hit the earth and frankly it's very likely if it does, that it would take care of all intelligent life. They're saying, by the way, that our best hope on this is for the United Nations to do something about this asteroid. Forgive me, but if I thought I would live that long, I would start worrying about it right now. I would rather take my chances with everyone leaving that thing alone because the UN is just as likely to cause it to hit us.

I saw a headline a few weeks ago that blew the trumpet, "United Nations is powerless to stop the Iranian nuclear program." They might as well have stopped with this, "The United Nations is powerless."

One thing seems clear to me, the only reason we're still here is God's sufferance and we have ample witness that it is not unbounded. The prophets are absolutely loaded with examples of where God's patience runs out.

When you read the prophets you can get the feeling, reading through the Bible, that God is down on people, He's always mad. The Bible seems to compress time and you don't realize it as you read it, that they had long periods of unparallel prosperity and peace. In some cases two or three generations would pass without anything terrible happening at all. As long they were doing fine we don't hear from the prophets, because as I have pointed out before, God does not send a prophet to tell us how well we're doing.

So it does seem that peace and prosperity are not always good for people. The human creature seems to do far better in times of adversity. In times of prosperity we get lazy, we get materialistic and we no longer care about God. Who needs God, everything is working without Him. Taken by itself this condition might not be such a big deal but it doesn't stop there.

Remember those two great commandments. One of the Pharisees, a lawyer, ask Jesus (Matthew 22:34-40) "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said, {37} 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and {39} the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Now the reason the first is the greatest commandment is, that the second would not hold without it. If you can't maintain the love of God, you'll never be able to handle the love of your neighbor. As someone said (1 John 4:20), "He who can't love his neighbor who he can see, how can he say he loves God whom he can't see?"

When men forget God their society heads for ruin and so at critical junctures, here comes a prophet to call us to our senses. That's the good news, the prophet comes. The bad news is that people hardly ever listen to the prophets, they're just like a voice crying in the wilderness.

God rarely picks a Billy Graham to serve as a prophet, the reason I think is quite simple, it is the message that is the thing, not the messenger. Be careful not to despise the messenger, if God ever does decide to send us a message, it will likely come from someone we don't respect.

Take the prophet Amos as an example, he was about as unlikely a prophet as you would ever find. He was a sheep herder and a fruit picker with no formal training as a preacher. He had no degree after his name and no obvious qualifications for the job. It was just that one day, God decided it was time to say something, so he reached into his tool box and selected the man he wanted for the job.

Amos began his prophecy with a fascinating theme. He used a Hebrew idiom: "For three transgressions and for four," and then he began to outline what was coming and why it was coming. I don't know if the numbers are symbolic in this case or just a way of saying, "for an abundance of transgressions I'm going to visit these people." It's a passing interest that both three and four and the sum of these, seven, is suggestive of a whole. They say that 3 and 4 are the number of sides necessary to close a geometric figure, thus 7 also closes something permanently. I don't know if that was God's intent but it's clear enough what He was saying, because transgressions are getting out of hand and some things are going to happen.

At the time Amos wrote this, the house of Israel was at its prime, but the Assyrian Empire was on the rise and Assyria was going to bring a lot of grief to the Middle East. Israel and the nations around them had been at peace and prosperity for so long that they no longer had the power to resist the force like the one that was coming. Their self indulgence, and their sin had eaten the heart right out of them.

Thus Amos brackets all the nations around Israel and warns what is coming upon them. In Chapter 1 he starts with Damascus, then he goes to Gaza, then he comes back to Tyre. Each one of them actually coming out with this "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four." If you plot these locations on the map, a pattern emerges. It's kind of like the game 'Battleship' where a salvo brackets a ship walking in on it till it actually strikes.

Amos 2: "Thus saith the LORD, 'For three transgressions of Moab and for four, I will not turn away the punishments thereof, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime. {2} I'm going to send a fire on Moab, that shall devour the palaces of Kerioth, Moab shall die with tumult, and with shouting and the sound of a trumpet. {3} And I will cut off the judge from the middle of it, and I will slay all the princes thereof with him,' says the LORD."

So he started in the northeast with Damascus, went to the southwest to Gaza, back to the north with Tyre, representing Lebanon, then crosses to the east to Moab. We have bracketed all the nations around Israel, well almost.

Verse 4, "Thus saith the LORD, 'For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn

away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, they have not kept his commandments and their lies cause them to err, after which their fathers have walked: {5} But I will send a fire on Judah, and it's going to devour the palaces of Jerusalem.”

There are two big things that have gone sour in Judah. They despised God's law, banning it from the court house as it were. They had become a nation of liars and their lies have caused them to err, you know it's not at all unlike the situation we have today.

In the elections of 2004, CBS ran a story about George Bush's national guard service. It turned out to be based on forged documents, it was a lie, and it might well have elected John Kerry as President of the United States. This is how being a 'nation of lies' can cause us to make big mistakes. Remember the mantra of the left, “Bush lied and people died,” but the left and the right will get on television and lie through their teeth, they call it spin. We have come to a place in this country where we are surrounded by such a web of lies, we can't tell where we are any longer. Have you ever wondered how it came to this?

There is a scene toward the end of the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* starring Spencer Tracy. I'll never forget it, there is a German judge who has been convicted of war crimes and he's telling the American judge (Spencer Tracy) who came by his cell at his request, “You have to believe me, I never thought it would come to this.” He knew he had been wrong but he was defending his good intentions and Spencer Tracy replies, “Sir, it came to this the first time you condemned a man you knew was innocent.”

You see, when you abandon the Creator God, the only one who can grant us our rights; you have nothing left except expediency and power. If lying works, if lying will acquire power, then what is there to stop you from lying. There are people in positions of power, and that includes the media, which is virtually a fourth division of government, who think nothing of lying to advance the 'greater good.'

You know it isn't just a matter of venal lying to advance their own personal good, these people often think they can see something that the rest of us can't see and in order to get to the 'greater good,' they will violate principle. We know what's best for you so we will lie to you to retain power so we can do you good. And just about anything we do is justified because of the goal that we are pursuing.

They can't see that in lying to us they have already done us evil. They are really not any better than the German judges who, thinking that they were doing what was best for society, condemned the innocent.

Fox News thinks they're getting it right, being fair and balanced, when they present us with a liar from the left and a liar from the right at the same time. This serves no useful purpose beyond cementing people in their beliefs and making them angry at one another.

I don't know what to tell you, how can we defend ourselves against the onslaught of lies? I can't think of a better way to put it.

I have only two things to suggest, One, read the Bible every day. Two, stop watching television news. Now I don't mean to suggest that people won't lie to you in print, the newspaper and news magazines. But you are less likely to believe it, if you have time to consider it. Television doesn't give you that time. The fact that Fox News is beating the drum and moving forward the whole time, you don't have a chance to breathe.

Reading the Bible helps you tune up your lie detector, we are all born with a built in lie detector but it's got to have good data to work with. We have to understand what is truth, we have to understand that there is truth and we have to learn to tell the truth ourselves, even when it hurts, because every lie you tell degrades your own lie detector.

The prophecy of Amos is apparently directed at the house of Israel for that is where the prophet now turns. Amos 2 and verse 6, "Thus saith the LORD; for three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes."

Unbridled greed, oppression of the poor. They will do whatever it takes to sell the product at whatever price.

Verse 7, "They trampled on the heads of the poor, as upon the dust of the ground, and they denied justice to the oppressed, father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name."

The judicial system has been corrupted and so it must inevitably be. The sexual immorality was breath taking in its scope in Israel at that time and why wouldn't it be. Given the power of the libido, the freedom granted for sexual pleasure without regards to love and marriage, why wouldn't it be out of control. Why shouldn't a father and son go to a same temple prostitute, who's to tell them they can't?

What made the movie *Judgment in Nuremberg* so compelling, it was about the judges, not the usual run of war criminals. You cannot corrupt the people without it reaching the courts and in my opinion that is where we have come.

Continuing in Amos 2 Verse 8: "They lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their God."

What in the world does that mean? Well it refers back to a law found back in Deuteronomy 24 verse 12 which says, "You're going to be lending money to a man and the man happens to be poor, you shall not sleep with his pledge."

In other words, he comes along and he give you his cloak as a pledge for a loan, it says you're not to sleep with that. You're to give it back to him "when the sun goes down so he can sleep in his own raiment and be warm and bless you. It shall be righteousness to you before the LORD your GOD."

So what were they doing? They were taking the man's garment and pledge and then they were going home and sleeping on it. They weren't giving it back to him.

The NIV. has, "In the house of their God they drink wine taken as fines."

What's wrong with this? The fines doesn't belong to the judges. They belong to the treasury. It's another form of judicial corruption and it is inevitable when a society falls away from God, it is mathematical in its precision, that is where you will go.

One reflection of it today is the confiscation of property under the laws of public domain. It's prohibited by the constitution, but private property is being taken, for other people's private use. Oh sure, hopefully it will get a bigger tax base for the town but that is not what the constitution had in mind.

What the elders of Israel really didn't grasp was, that they had become no better than the heathen nations they had displaced from the land in the days of Joshua. These were the Amorites. The Amorites were in the days of Abraham, a powerful people and they had not at that point in time, degraded themselves as far as they would do in the years ahead of them. By the time Joshua and the Israelites arrived, the Amorites had become completely debased.

God says you need to remember this, Amos 2 verse 2, "I destroyed the Amorites from before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; I destroyed his fruit from above, and his vines from beneath."

One wonders when you hear this, what God is saying here? How Israel thought they could commit precisely the same crimes the Amorites committed, how they could serve the same gods the Amorites served and escape the same punishment from God.

You drag this all the way down to today and you have to ask the question, why on earth should we think we can do the same thing that Israel of old did, make the same mistakes and escape the same punishment?

Amos 2 verse 10: "Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt; I led you for forty years from the land of the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorites. I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites, is it not even thus, O you children of Israel? The LORD is Speaking! But you gave the Nazarites wine to drink and commanded the prophets saying don't prophesy."

The Nazarites were men who had set themselves apart for God's service. They let their hair grow long as a sign of submission, they drank no wine or ate any grapes or raisins, and they were holy to the service of the tabernacle. In this situation their religious faith was denigrated. They gave them wine to drink, and said, "Ah you can have this wine, there is no reason for you to keep faith with your god," and the prophets were told to shut up, they were told not to preach.

You may not have heard this, but two Christians in Australia have been indicted for criticizing Islam, another for criticizing Zionism. A filmmaker has been threatened with arrest for using the word homosexual instead of gay. Now a German priest faces jail time for publicly criticizing abortionists, and in Holland fornicators and adulteresses are protected classes and cannot be criticized, but that's overseas right? Yeah so far, but you probably need to take a look at some legislation pending in congress. It's called HR 254 or the 'David Ray Hate Crimes Prevention Act.' It's going to start involving the courts in this country and inhibiting speech and you and I probably would agree that they should shut some people up; the problem is, it won't stop there. It will finally come to much more.

God was, to be honest, beginning to weary of Israel, He says in Amos 2 verse 13: "Look, I am pressed under you, like a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves, I feel like an overloaded wagon, {14} 'Therefore the flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: {15} neither shall he stand that handles the bow, and he that is swift of foot shall not get away, neither shall he that rides the horse. {16} And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day' saith the LORD."

How on earth could a nation with their position in the world, with their power and with their influence come to that? Well we are seeing something like it really beginning to develop in our own country, right here, right now.

Some of the elite in this country are becoming so anti-military that the colleges and universities don't want ROTC or military recruiters on their campuses, they are trying their best to keep them away from high school students. The leaders of the media and others will wreck our military if they can bring it about and it almost seems like they're getting help from congress. A whole new generation is coming through our educational system with an entirely different set of values and in many cases they are being taught to despise the military. Where will that generation take us in the future and how will they be able to stand up and fight for us, or will they run away naked? God walked with Moses and the people of Israel but they had forgotten who God was, they couldn't walk together unless they were in agreement. So will they walk alone and be destroyed?

Amos continues in Chapter 3 Verse 1: "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt saying, {2} 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: so I'm going to punish you for your iniquities.' {3} 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?'"

So Israel and God had certainly come to a parting of the ways.

Verse 4, "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has taken nothing?"

He is saying basically, there is a cause for things that are going bad.

Verse 5, "Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, when nobody laid a snare for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth with nothing in it? {6} Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people be not afraid? Shall there be evil in the city, and the LORD has not done it?"

You know we have a hard time with evil happenings. I can cast my mind back briefly to Hurricane Katrina. You are kind of torn when something like that happens, because you don't want to say that God did it and yet this prophet comes very close to saying precisely that.

He goes on to say, {7} "Surely the LORD GOD will do nothing, but he reveals his secrets to his servants the prophets. {8} The lion has roared, who will not fear? The LORD GOD has spoken, who can but prophesy?"

When I hearken back to that statement, "Shall there be evil in the city and the Lord has not done it?" I don't want to suggest, it would be a terrible mistake to suggest the people in New Orleans were worse sinners than anybody else in the United States, because of what happened to them. Jesus made it very clear we're not to think that way. New Orleans just happened to experience perhaps, the anger of God against the entirety of this country. None of us should point the finger at them, we should point the finger at ourselves and consider what the prophet says, "The lion has roared who will not fear?"

Verse 11, "Therefore thus saith the LORD GOD; 'An adversary there shall be even around about the land; and he shall bring down your strength from you, and your palaces shall be spoiled.' {12} Thus saith the LORD; 'As the shepherd takes out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus on a couch.' He references their wealth and their laziness. {13} 'Hear you, and testify in the house of Jacob,' saith the LORD GOD, the Lord of hosts, {14} 'In the day I will visit the transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also visit the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. {15} I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end.'"

I have actually looked at pieces of ivory found in the ruins of the old city of Samaria.

Until next time.

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