



# Born to Win

## The Minor Prophets #3

by: Ronald L. Dart

I've said this before but please bear with me while I'll say it again. Sometimes when I'm reading the Old Testament prophets I feel like they're been reading our mail or watching our television. There's a reason for this of course, people don't change much and God, well He doesn't change at all. So when we do the same stupid things that men of old have done, we have to expect something like the same results. When God called the prophet Amos he was a mere sheep herder and a fruit picker. He didn't need a degree in theology to tell Israel what God had to say to them. In fact what he had to say is not unlike a takeoff made on another famous song, *You Ain't My Brother, You're Just Heavy*. Israel had broken the covenant with God again and again, and He was, if I can put it this way, getting tired of carrying them.

The message from Amos Chapter 2 Verse 13 was, "Behold, I am pressed under you, like a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." It isn't possible for God to break down but that's the image presented, you've got this cart stacked full of stuff, that you can't move any longer. Now we're not today, where Israel was when Amos wrote these words. but we're headed that way at breakneck speed.

For example, here is what God said about Israel's fighting men; Amos 2 verse 14, "Therefore flight shall perish before the swift, and the strong will not strengthen his force, neither shall the mighty deliver himself: neither shall he stand who handles the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself: neither shall he that rides the horse deliver himself. And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD."

What a thing to consider, all these things have to do with the warfare of the time. Men who were swift of foot who could run down an enemy if they had to do so, who could dodge an enemy if they needed to do so. The men who could handle the bow, the most and best long distant weapon any army ever had back in those days. The man who was fast couldn't get away. The horse was the armor of the day, the tanks of their day. The horses were for war, not for agriculture, and in those days the fighting men of Israel like ours were among the best in the world. They were courageous, they would stand and fight. Their enemy came out against them in a single column and ended the day fleeing in seven directions. The Israel to which Amos was sent was about to get a role reversal, and it wasn't because God would make it happen. This is really an important thing to understand.

You read the prophets and you almost feel like God is saying "I'm going to come down on you." In reality what God is saying is, "I'm going to give up on you, I'm going to let you go, I'm going to let you do this your own way and I'm going to stand back and watch." It isn't because God made it happen, it was the natural end game on the board they were playing. How could that ever happen to a nation?

Well we're seeing something like that developing right now in front of our very eyes. The elite of this country are becoming so anti military that the colleges, the universities, and the big media, will wreck our military if there is any way they can bring it about. For some reason they hate the military. They hate the idea of war, which don't we all.

The fact is, if you don't have a strong arm, if you don't have a big club, the enemy and the animals of this world will run right over you. We've got a whole new generation coming through our educational system with an entirely different set of values than my generation. Where are they going to take us do you suppose? Well perhaps we can listen to what the ol' sheep herder heard from God. Like I said, you don't need a degree to preach this message, you just tell them what God said to tell them.

Amos 3: "Here is the word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying, this {2} 'You only I have known of all the families of the earth. You had a privileged position and look what you done, so I'm going to punish you for all your iniquities. {3} Can two walk together except they be agreed?'" And this would seem to be the punishment; God would no longer walk with them. You know it's not as though God is going to rain fire and brimstone on them, all He is going to do is refuse to walk alongside of people who no longer love Him, no longer respect Him, and will no longer listen to His advice or His instructions.

Amos 3 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's taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no snare is laid for him; shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people be not afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD has not done it?"

Now that is kind of a shocking statement, isn't it? You have to understand though that when the Bible uses the word 'evil', a better synonym for it is 'bad' or 'bad things' not necessarily evil in the sense of moral people but evil in the sense of disaster. Now he says, "Is there going to be a disaster in this city and the Lord has not done it?"

You think it's an accident; you just think its bad luck, don't just sit there in New Orleans and say that hurricane Katrina was just bad luck, and don't sit over there in Atlanta and muse on what a bad city New Orleans must have been.

Jesus underlined the principal here one day. He was talking with a group of people that were present at that time. Some people that told him about what happened to some people from Galilee where He was from and that may be why they bothered to tell him. "You're a Galilean and you should know what Pilate did to some of your brothers," it's in Luke 13, verse 1. Pilate had actually come up upon them while they were making sacrifices and he killed them, mingling their blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing. Jesus answered and said to them, {2} "Do you suppose that these Galilean were sinners, above all the people from Galilee, because they're the ones who suffered this? {3} I tell you no, but except you repent you shall all likewise perish." In other words, what happened to these people, you deserve as well. It just hasn't gotten around to you, it hasn't caught up with you yet. {3} "Do you suppose those 18 who were up on the tower in Siloam when it fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all the men who dwelt in Jerusalem?" They were from Galilee and look what happened to them. {5} "I tell you, no! Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish". It was not just bad luck, there was a reason why those things happened to those people and you are no better than they are. Your turn is coming.

Well why would that happen? Because God says two can't walk together except they be agreed and if you expect me to walk with you, you're going to have to make some significant changes. If I'm not walking with you then you're on your own. Now Jesus didn't stop right there, He kept talking, still in Luke 13 Verse 6. He spoke also this parable. "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found nothing. {7} He said to the dresser of his vineyard, 'Look I've been here for three years looking for fruit on this fig tree and found none, cut it down. Why it is wasting the ground?' {8} And he answered and said, 'Well Lord let it alone this year also, till I dig about it and dung it {9} and if it bears fruit, well, if not after that you can cut it down.'" What Jesus is saying to the people listening to Him on that day is, there is a limit to Gods patience, He will go so far with you but there comes a time where he will cut you down.

The parable places the prophet in the position of the vine dresser who intercedes with God and goes out and warns the people, but who is resigned to cutting down the vines if they still won't bear fruit. And the sad thing about it you know, God doesn't have to lift a finger to make it happen, he has to lift a finger to keep it from happening to us.

What follows in Amos is one of the most riveting statements anywhere in the prophets. Its Chapter 3 Verse 7. "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets. {9} The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken, who can but prophesy?" Now this is really fascinating because it suggests that God never acts in human affairs without revealing it first to a prophet.

God has been silent for a long time. I don't mean there aren't prophets, at least false prophets, and people who claim to be prophets standing on the street corner with a sign saying, "Flee from the wrath to come," or "Beware the end is near." There has not been a serious prophet, because in ancient times, prophets like Amos, prophets like Elijah, like Isaiah, these people spoke to kings, they were talking to heads of state, and they were talking to congress. They weren't exactly people congress wanted to hear, so God spoke to these people. We have not had anyone in ages to whom God has spoken, whom He sent down to the public courthouse to pronounce to a people, in a way that could not be ignored. Does that mean He isn't going to do anything? That life is just going to go on, nothing is going to happen, and God has gone off to another galaxy somewhere else in this universe and doesn't even care what's goes on here anymore. Don't bet on it!

The fact is, God has already spoken, after all, Amos is the first of the writing prophets. Why did this need to be written down? Well I don't know. All I know is that I am not allowed to sit quietly when I know what God has said and when it applies. And so here I am reading the prophets and looking at the news and saying, "Uh Oh, maybe God isn't saying anything to us today because He already said it a long time ago." He has seen to it that there is hardly a home in this country that doesn't have a Bible somewhere in it, in many cases prominently displayed, so how can you say you don't know what's coming when it's been written down generations before.

He goes on in Amos 3 verse 9 to say: "Publish in the palaces at Ashdod, the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, 'Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and take a look at the great riots in the midst of these towns, and the oppressed in the middle of it.' {10} 'They don't know how to do right,' saith the LORD, 'They store up violence and robbery in their palaces, right from the highest people.'" Now the imaginary is that God called the surrounding nations to bear witness to what they see in Israel. Look at all the riots, look at the oppression of the people and bear in mind that the rioting we have seen in our own country. They burn down their own

neighborhood and oppress their own people. You really wonder where all this is coming from. One thing is very clear, violence and robbery are deeply offensive to God.

He even calls the Egyptians to come and look and see what my people are doing to one another. “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; an adversary there shall be even round about the land; he shall bring down your strength from you, and your palaces that you filled with blood shall be spoiled. {12} Thus saith the LORD; as a 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 in a couch. {13} Hear you, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts.” The image here is of a people totally at ease, who end up being like a sheep, where a lion has invaded the flock and He has taken a sheep, carried it off and eaten it, and when the shepherd comes along he finds two legs or a piece of an ear are all that’s left, just bits and pieces of body parts remaining, a total destruction that comes upon a people who are living at ease. “That in the day that I shall visit my transgressions of Israel upon him, I will also visit the altars of Beth-el; and the horns of the altar shall be cut off, and fall to the ground. And 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, saith the LORD.” You know it’s really sobering to me.

I forget what museum I was in, maybe a British museum, it may have been the museum of Aya Sofya in Istanbul, and there was a display case which had broken shards of ivory that had been taken from the excavations of Samaria in ancient Israel. The houses of ivory were there, they were broken up, the ivory carried off and nothing but shard left behind. These altars by the way are the altars Jeroboam built which began to separate the people from God.

If you know the story, this was after the death of Solomon and because of Solomon sins in building idols for his pagan wives. God separated 10 tribes and gave them to a man named Jeroboam. This left only Judah, Benjamin and Levi together in the south as a part of the house of Judah. So Jeroboam sets up the house of Israel in the north with his capital in the northern part of Israel and he sits in his palace one day and looks out and says, “you know what’s going to happen to me. These people are going to go to Jerusalem three times a year as the law commands them to do to keep the Feasts. Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles and their heart will go back to the house of David and they will end up killing me and restoring the kingdom to one again.”

So here is what I’m going to do, he put an altar, a high place in Bethel and another in Dan far to the north. Bethel was between Samaria and Jerusalem and he said to his people, “It’s too much for you to have to go up to Jerusalem all the time. Let’s go to Dan and Bethel.” And he set up local ministries, local worship centers, away from Jerusalem so the people would not go there. He set up altars in those places for sacrifices and worship.

Then he took another step, He set up a feast, which the scriptures says “He devised out of his own heart. On the 15th day of the 8th month which was similar to the Feast of Tabernacles which was on the 15th day of the 7th month. And he said to the people, ‘It’s too much for you to go up to Jerusalem for that. Let’s just keep the feast here closer to home.’” and he set in up a month later than the one in Jerusalem.

This all was the beginning of the end for Israel. Although they continued another 200 years, their decline was steady, violent, and vile as king after king turned the hearts of people away from God and as they went to the worship of Baal.

This destruction of these altars is what Amos is talking about. And in Chapter 4 he says: “Hear the word of God, you cows of Bashan, on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who

crush the needy, who say to their masters, come on, bring out here, and let us drink.” I look at this and I think to myself, the leaders of our country today might say to the masters of our workers, “Come on lets meet together down at the best restaurant in town, let us eat and drink and be merry.” And they actually crush under their feet, the poor, the working class, the ordinary man who has to work for a living.

“The Lord God has sworn by his holiness, ‘The day shall come upon you, I will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks, {3} and you will go out at the breaches in the wall, every cow at that which is before them, and you shall cast them into the palace,’ saith the LORD. {4} ‘Come on down to Bethel and transgress; at Gilgal multiply your transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: {5} and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish free offerings: for this is what you like you to do, O children of Israel,’ saith the Lord GOD.”

This is incredible, because what he is saying is, OK go ahead and go to your worship center, go ahead and bring your sacrifices on your offering every morning, and your sacrifice that you offer with leavened which symbolically means corruption.

The whole idea of Gods sacrifice was always to be done with unleavened bread. Go ahead and proclaim and publish your free offerings, this is kind of like you. It’s a people who go through the motions of religion, but it’s their religion. They perform all the rights but then they go out of church and oppress the poor and do violence against the weak.

“And {6} ‘I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: but you have not returned to me,’ saith the LORD.” Famine, starvation and they still didn't get the point.

What follows in Amos' prophecy is a sequence of 5 sets, all set off with the same expression, “yet you have not returned to me, says the LORD.” He starts off with, in Amos 4 verse 6, “I’ve given you cleanness of teeth,” that means you don’t have anything to eat, “want of bread in all your places, yet you have not returned to me says the LORD.”

Now one thing I think is worth us stopping to think about here is, not every disaster that comes upon us is caused by God. Some of them are just caused by life, but it’s a wise thing for us, anytime we are overtaken by a disaster, for us to take a moment to sit back and rethink our lives. Say “wait a minute, maybe I have drifted away from God, maybe I do need to turn my heart to him again, and maybe I do need to spend more time with God than I have been, because after all, one of the ways God gets our attention, is with those calamities that hit our lives small and great.”

Does God do them Himself or does he let life do them to us, I don’t know, I don’t think I have to know.

Amos continues in chapter 4 verse 7, “Also I have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest, when you really need the rain, I cause it to rain on one city, and cause it not to rain upon another city, one place was rained upon, and the other one was not rained upon and it withered. {8} So Two or three cities wander into one city to drink water but they were not satisfied, yet you have not returned to me saith the LORD. {9} I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: in your gardens, and your vineyards, locusts have devoured your fig trees, and your olive trees and when they did: yet you have not returned to me.” I’ve destroyed crops, I’ve given you droughts, I’ve given you famine, I’ve given you all these curses and you

will not turn around, you won't even stop to think of where it's coming from.

Verse 10, "I've sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men I've killed with the sword, I've taken away your horses, I made the stink of your camps come up into your nostrils: yet you have not returned to me, saith the LORD. {11} I have overthrown some of you, as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: and yet you have not returned to me, saith the LORD." How many times does God have to smack us before we will listen, before we will pay attention, before we will try to make the changes that we already know we need to make in our lives?

When you look at a country that is headed down the wrong road, what will it take? You know for a short time after 911 this country really did change, church attendance increased, people started to think about God, but it didn't take long for it to drift away again.

So God says in Amos 4 verse 12, "I'm going to do this to you Israel and because it's coming, prepare to meet your God, O Israel: {13} For, lo, he that formed the mountains, and created the wind, and declares unto man what is his thoughts, and that makes the morning darkness, and treads the high places of the earth. Jehovah the God of hosts is his name." Something to remember.

Amos 5: "Hear this word that I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. {2} The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up. {3} For thus saith the Lord God; the city that went out by a thousand, shall leave a hundred, and that which went forth by hundred shall leave ten, of the house of Israel." Your people, your armies will be decimated. One in ten left.

Verse 4, "Thus saith the Lord to the house of Israel, seek me, and you shall live. {5} If you just keep on going to Bethel, keep on going to Gilgal, you don't pass on through, Gilgal shall go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. {6} Seek the LORD, and you shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be nobody to put the fire out. {7} You who turn judgment to wormwood, and cast righteousness to the earth." You better turn and {8} "seek him that makes the seven stars and Orion." Seek the Lord and you shall live.

See what I mean when I say you don't have to have a degree in theology to preach this message. A sheep herder, a fruit picker, can get it straight. What you have to have is the courage to stand up and preach it. Seek the LORD and you'll live. {8} "Seek him who calls to the water of the seas and pours them out on the face of the earth: Jehovah is his name."

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