

Advent Devotional November 30, 2021

Scripture

Amos 3:1-11

1 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: 2 You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. 3 Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment? 4 Does a lion roar in the forest, when it has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from its den, if it has caught nothing? 5 Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? 6 Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster befall a city, unless the LORD has done it? 7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. 8 The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy? 9 Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod, and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, "Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria, and see what great tumults are within it, and what oppressions are in its midst." 10 They do not know how to do right, says the LORD, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. 11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: An adversary shall surround the land, and strip you of your defense; and your strongholds shall be plundered.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Graham Deans '06

As a Scotsman, I am aware that a great deal has often been made of the "special relationship" between the U.K. and the U.S. Similarly, a great deal has been made of the special relationship between the Lord GOD and the people of Israel.

But it cuts no ice with Amos, the rank "outsider" who, despite his lack of official prophetic credentials (7:14), demonstrates that the proclamation of theological truth is often far too serious a matter to be left solely to the professional theologians. He lives in an age of wealth and prosperity but is rightly dismayed by the moral complacency and spiritual bankruptcy of his times. This situation leads him to launch a powerful and passionate polemic against the shortcomings of God's people, as he proclaims an uncompromising theology of judgment.

His message is reinforced by a series of rhetorical questions, drawn from his experience of life and his observations of nature. Certain things happen because people have arranged to make them happen (3:1), and nothing that does happen is ever without significance. All actions have consequences, and each example he cites illustrates the principle of cause and effect. Appalled by the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, Amos declares that the lion has roared and is even now leaping on its prey. Through the crisis of contemporary events, judgment is inevitable. Those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds are therefore living on borrowed time and will be rendered defenseless before the Lord.

There is no possibility of calling in imagined favors to influence or, worse, pervert the course of divine justice. As commentator William Neil succinctly puts it in his *One Volume Bible Commentary*, "Nothing can prevent the collapse of a civilization that violates divine law. Religion is no insurance, nor is tradition, nor any racial privilege."

Advent is a time for us to get our lives in order before it is too late. In short, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." This is of supreme importance for everyone, whether one is a Scotsman writing for St. Andrew's Day(!) or a member of the beloved "whole family" that God brought out of the land of

Egypt and who can trace their ancestry all the way back to Abraham. For ultimately, the only “special relationship” that counts is the one we are enabled, by grace, to cultivate with Almighty God—the Judge who alone is holy and wholly just.

Prayer

Great Judge of all the earth,
whose ways are always just,
and with whom perfect righteousness is found;
subdue our rebellious spirits,
and point us in the proper paths
that will lead us at the last
to our eternal home in Heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.