

Preface To The Prophet Amos

(1532)

Amos fixes his own time. He lived and preached at the time of Hosea and Isaiah, and preached against the same vices and idolatry, or false sanctity, as did Hosea, and also proclaimed the Assyrian captivity.

He is violent, too, and denounces the people of Israel throughout almost the whole book, until the end of the last chapter, where he foretells Christ and His kingdom and closes his book with that. No prophet, as I think, does so little promising and so much denouncing and threatening, so that he may be well named Amos, that is, “a burden,” or “one who is hard to get along with and irritating,” especially since he was a shepherd and not of the order of prophets (as he himself says in Amos 7:17), and came, besides, out of the tribe of Judah, from Tekoa, into the kingdom of Israel, and preached there as a foreigner. Therefore, it is said, the priest Amaziah, whom he rebukes in chapter 7, had him beaten to death with a rod.

In the first chapter he is hard and dark, when he speaks of three and four sins, and many have puzzled vainly over it, and sought far and wide for the meaning. But the text, I believe, clearly shows that these three and four sins are only one sin, for he always names and indicates only one sin. Against Damascus, for example, he names only the sin that “they have threshed Gilead with iron chariots,” etc.

But he calls this sin “three and four” because they do not repent of the sin or recognize it, but rather boast of it and rely upon it, as though it were a good deed, as the false saints always do. For a sin cannot become worse, or greater, or more, than when it would be a holy, godly work, and makes the devil God, and God the devil. So, too, three and four make seven, which is the end of numbers in the Scripture where one turns back and begins to count again both the days and the weeks.

He is quoted twice in the New Testament. The first time is in Acts 7:24, where Stephen quotes the fifth chapter against the Jews and shows by it that the Jews did not keep God’s Law from the time that they came out of Egypt. The second’ time is in Acts 15:16, where St. James quotes from the last chapter as a proof of Christian liberty, that the Gentiles, under the New Testament, are not bound to keep the law of Moses, which the Jews themselves have never kept and cannot keep, as St. Peter preaches in Acts 15:10. These are the. two most important bits in Amos, and they are two very good bits.