

THE WARNING NOTICE

(A Peshar Midrash Bible Study of Amos 3.7, Looking at Whether God Still Gives His People Advance Warning of Future Trials)

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Amos 3:7

“Surely the Lord God will do nothing until He reveals His secret plans and designs to His servants the Prophets.”

Thought Starter

It is better to be prepared for a disaster, which does not strike than to be unprepared for one that does.

: Exposition of Amos 3.7

In Amos 3.7. God's Word states, *"Surely the Lord God will do nothing until He reveals His secret plans and designs to His servants the Prophets."* Both the first and eighth verses make it clear that it is, *"The Lord God [who] has spoken."* The rest of the book of Amos confirms that these words were addressed to the 'Royal Chapel' of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and that a herdsman gave them from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They consisted mainly of warnings and threats of judgement to a Nation where social injustice was rife. (Amos 4.1) Hardly surprisingly, Amos's words met with outright rejection, (as described in Amos 7.10-14.) On a more topical note, Amos 3.7 raises the question as to whether God can still reveal hitherto hidden plans and purposes to His servants. For reasons that will become increasingly clear the Biblical answer is both 'yes' and 'no.' However, before examining this issue it will be helpful to look at Amos 3.7 in more depth.

The first thing to grasp is the actual principle of this passage. It states that *'God will do nothing until He reveals His plans to the Prophets.'* In other words, before the Lord intervenes mightily in any situation He will graciously reveal His future plans to His faithful servants. Present here is a two-stage process whereby advance notice by the Holy Spirit is followed by Divine action. This model still applies no matter whether the Divine action concerned is revival or judgement. This pattern holds up throughout Scripture. In Genesis 18.17, the Lord shared with Abraham the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. He actually said, *"Shall I hide from Abraham the thing I [intend to] do [to wicked Sodom and Gomorrah]?"* Undeniably, through the fulfilment of this word Abraham's faith was strengthened and was later able to survive the time of testing that was to come with the sacrifice of Isaac. (Genesis 22.1) Moreover, even a harsh pagan king steeped in the idolatrous system of Babylon believed that God could give insight into His future purposes. In this particular case, the media employed by God was a dream that foretold the future course of World history to King Nebuchadnezzar. The results of this preview into God's purposes were humility and praise. This is shown in Daniel 2.47 where *"The King [of Babylon] answered Daniel and said 'Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods and a Lord of Kings, and a revealer of secrets; seeing how you could reveal this secret.'* If a pagan King could recognise that God can give insight into His future purposes then why cannot many Christians today? The only answer that suggests itself is unbelief.

This pattern of advance notice followed by Divine action continues into the New Testament. The first three Chapters of Luke are replete with prophecies foretelling the work that God would do through Christ. Jesus Himself gave His disciples a forty-year advance notice of the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. (Matthew 24.2 & Luke 21.21-20) However, two examples will be taken from after the time of Christ's first earthly ministry. That way it will be clear that we will be talking about the New rather than the Old dispensation. The first example of God doing nothing, *"until He reveals His secret plans and designs to His servants the Prophets,"* is the Prophecy of severe famine given by the Prophet Agabus near the end of Acts 11. Thanks to this warning the Church was well prepared to offer relief, thereby saving many lives. As it states in Acts 11.28f, *"There stood one of them a prophet named Agabus who warned by the Spirit that there would be a great dearth [of food], throughout the World. This happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren who dwelt in Judaea. This also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."* The second example is Revelation 1.1 where the explicit purpose was for God *"to show His servants things which might shortly come to pass."* In the very last book of Scripture there is again the pattern of advance notice by the Holy Spirit being followed by Divine action. There is no suggestion that this pattern would cease after the Apostolic era. As Romans 11.29 makes clear, *"the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."* Therefore, any attempt to misuse 1 Corinthians 13.8 in order to suggest that the gifts of the Spirit died with the Apostles violates a clear principle of Bible interpretation. This states, *"Always build your teaching on the plainer rather than the more obscure texts of Scripture."* A failure to observe this all-important principle means that any doctrine can be invented no matter how patently ridiculous it might be. Also, rather like the foolish virgins described in Matthew 25.1-13, one is left unprepared for those times when the Lord does choose to act decisively. Without sound principles of Bible interpretation, it becomes very difficult to discern the Lord's specific will for a particular situation.

Whilst touching upon Prophetic matters a word of caution must be added. It is of the utmost importance to note the difference between the inspired sacred text of Scripture and the type of Prophetic gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. As Paul highlighted in 2 Timothy 3.16 *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* However, although the Gift of Prophecy is likewise a *"manifestation of the Holy Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 12.7) its purpose is more modest. As 1 Corinthians 14.3b shows, it is for *"edification exhortation, and comfort."* Admittedly, Acts 19.6 and 21.9-11 demonstrates that this gift could also be used to commission and warn people. However, the fact remains that Scripture is the only source of doctrinal and moral instruction. This should never be left to prophecy alone. Prophecy's greatest usefulness lies in its ability to help people to live out and apply the teachings of God's Word. For instance, the warning prophecies recorded in Acts would help enable involved parties to apply Proverbs 22.3a, which reads, *"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself."* Therefore, to view prophetic utterances, as a source of doctrine is to try and use them to accomplish a purpose for which they were not created; it must always be remembered that although the inspiration of

the Holy Spirit lies behind both Scripture and all true prophetic utterances these two means of Divine communication fulfil two very different but complementary roles. At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to state that Scripture's main concern is with doctrine whereas that of Prophecy is with application. It must also be stated that the former provides an objective standard to measure the latter. This means that in the event of any conflict between Scripture and a prophetic utterance it is always Scripture that must 'carry the day.' Sadly, a failure to consistently follow this principle has led to the shipwreck of many Church assemblies. Prophetic utterances have their place, but only in strict subordination to Scripture. Any failure to see this point is the equivalent of mistaking the roof of a building for its foundation.

With regard to Scripture and Prophecy, a wise policy is perhaps enshrined in the following meditation. Entitled '*Progression*,' it was first drafted on Monday 9th October 1989, and stressed the need of having a sound foundation in Scripture first, before hearing God speak through other media.

'Progression'

*"First, learn to hear God speak in Scripture, (Hebrews 1.1-2)
Second, learn to hear God speak through other people,
Third, learn to hear God speak through circumstances and
Then you will be ready to hear God speak
Through direct Spiritual Revelations," (Ephesians 1.17)*

Incidentally, any attempt to regularly hear God speak directly whilst remaining ignorant of the Scriptures is a recipe for spiritual deception. Admittedly, during times of great need the Lord may on occasion speak directly to the Biblically untaught; however, the fact remains that He expects all Christians with normal faculties to grow in the knowledge of His Word. The gift of Prophecy is no substitute for sound Bible Study. Indeed, where this gift is truly manifested love for the Scriptures should abound. Those Church Assemblies that disdain His Word are unlikely to hear from God, though they may hear plenty from deceptive spirits.

Bearing this contrast between Scripture and the Gift of Prophecy in mind, it is possible to resolve the question of whether God can still reveal hitherto hidden plans and purposes to His Servants. As was previously stated, the answer is both 'yes' and 'no.' 'Yes' in the sense that God still warns His Servants of future dangers and situations, (See Revelation 18.3f where a remnant of God's children are told to get out of some future Babylonian system before judgement is applied. Here again, advance notice by the Holy Spirit is followed by Divine action. This pattern continues right up to Christ's return which features in Revelation 19.) Alternatively the answer is a resounding 'no' in the sense that God will not, this side of the Second Coming reveal any further secret doctrine or new moral teaching. Those who look for any Spiritual or Theological teachings outside Scripture are behaving like the blind person who is looking in a darkened cellar for a black cat, which isn't there – such people risk opening themselves up to the severest deceptions of Satan. Please do not look for any doctrine or moral code outside the Word of God. Also, be wary of those who claim to receive some higher knowledge or new revelation. Scratch the surface beneath such people and what you often have is a 'demonised' charlatan. As I can testify from first-hand experience, such folk are not very pleasant to deal with. Indeed, my advice is to actively avoid them unless you have a direct mandate from Heaven to confront them in some way. If this is the case, the Lord will speak to you with exceptional clarity in a variety of ways.

Usually, when God reveals a future course of action to His people, He is prompting them to make some form of active response. He does not want them to exclaim '*Oh, that's interesting*' and then do nothing. An illustration of this is Pharaoh's dreams found in Genesis 41.1-8. The Lord sent these in order that practical preparations could be made for a terrible seven-year famine. (Genesis 42.47f) Without such preparations nothing could have been done to ensure the survival of God's chosen people. Further illustrating this point is Christ's parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25.1-13. The virgins were expected to be preparing extra oil for their lamps before the Bridegroom arrived. It was no good taking the lazy attitude which assumed, 'There is no need to worry the bridegroom will provide the oil when He comes.' Quite the reverse! This Parable implies that Jesus will not always miraculously provide those necessities we should have gathered by natural means. It is important to remember that when God speaks to us He usually wants us to do something active ~ even if it is only to, "*Hide yourself for a little moment.*" (Isaiah 26.28b) If the response is a casual shrug of the shoulders, then the responsibility for any future suffering lies firmly at our door.

In bringing this discussion to a close, it is worthwhile recalling that God has the best interests of His people at heart. He wants them to avoid unnecessary danger and to stand as faithful servants during periods of trial. In addition, He also wants them to be prepared to handle any real blessings He may send. It is also worth adding that God actively enjoys having fellowship with His servants. All this explains why Amos 3.7 still applies today. Those who overlook this pattern (of advanced warning before Divine action) end up like aircraft pilots trying to fly blind through a storm without any radar ~ sooner or later a crash is inevitable. This is precisely the situation facing certain traditional evangelical Churches', which are often

led by embittered men possessing little or no spiritual vision. If today (1999) many Charismatic Pentecostal Churches: are presently heading in the wrong direction then most traditional Evangelical Assemblies is languishing through having no direction. They are expiring in a wilderness of their own creation. The misplaced dynamism of the Charismatic Churches is matched by a lack of dynamism in the their Evangelical counterparts. Sadly, for many Evangelicals safeguarding a dying tradition seems to be their only purpose in life. You can almost smell the jaded failure of such situations. If nothing else, the Evangelical situation shows that it simply does not pay to neglect the teaching of Amos 3.7.

Two pictures of the future

Having used Scripture to establish that God discloses His future plans to His servants, the question remains, "Will He continue to do so today?" If this is found to be the case, what evidence is there to show it? The first thing to do is to clear away the false hope that there is going to be a global revival in which the Church will victoriously emerge in order to rule the Nations and 'get the World ready for the return of Jesus.' Such a triumphant scenario (picture of the future) does not fit in with the Biblical scenario that warns of wars, persecutions, mass deception and a turning away from the faith. When, in Matthew 24.4 Jesus began talking about the events leading up to His return, He did not say "*Get ready to prepare for revival,*" rather He warned, "*Take heed that no one deceives you.*" We must always be realistic in our view of likely future developments. This is not to deny that there may well be some localised revivals on the way to the Second Coming. However, the popular perception of a triumphant super revival is a delusion. My fear is that, unless checked by some very solid Bible teaching, such a perception is a delusion having many bitter consequences. At the very least, many Christians will not be prepared to face future trials ~ and such misplaced perceptions could cause them to embrace even greater deceptions. As it is, Satan has only to utter the word 'revival' and many gullible Christians come flocking to his cause. His strategy is to build up One World Government with him as leader. Looming ahead is a spiritual tragedy of gigantic proportions. Sadly, many in the Church ~ including supposedly mature leaders ~ are too blind to see that this is the case. They are like children having a teddy bears' tea party on the slopes of a soon-to- erupt volcano.

Totally opposed to this form of superficial revivalism is a more sober picture. This believes that, at least within the English speaking countries, both the Church and Society are shortly to be judged through some form of major Socio-economic collapse. The effect of this collapse would be to accelerate the move to a 'One-World-Order' headed by Antichrist. On the Church scene, it will lead to a highly polarised conflict between the growing 'Apostate Church' and a small (but growing) band of true believers. Their role will be to preserve a Gospel witness in a new 'dark age.' In addition, such believers will have a highly supportive role in relation to God's purposes for Israel. They will also need to know what they believe and why they believe it. Eventually, the 'Apostate Church' will incite the State Authorities to persecute this remnant that will be forced to go underground in order to continue their work.

In England (in the late 1990s) perhaps the most immediate threat is that of Socio-economic collapse, which will be a manifestation of Divine judgement and will come about through largely natural, cultural and technological causes. Is this just paranoid doom mongering or a manifestation of the principle mentioned in Amos 3.7? Only time will tell. At this stage it appears that this latter, sober sounding scenario fits the known facts far better than its triumphant counterpart. For example, having turned its back on even a moderate expression of Christianity, English Society has now reached the point where some form of judgement by devastation is inevitable. If truth were told, the United Kingdom is a highly decadent Nation, which is only being held together by an ephemeral (short lived) prosperity. This point applies even more so to most Churches. People need once again to know what it is to fear and respect Almighty God. In addition, over the last three years (1996-1999) mature people, who are not paranoid doom-mongers, have in various ways been preparing for this very scenario. This study itself falls into this pattern in the sense that it could be used by any remnant 'underground' group as a means of keeping abreast with the faith during times of persecution when sound Theological material will be in short supply. While not wishing to be rashly dogmatic, my own belief is that this latter scenario should be given more serious prayerful consideration, lest believers are caught unprepared when tribulation does strike. Common sense alone would suggest that it is better to be prepared for a disaster, which does not strike than to be unprepared for one that does.

Summary

From this Peshar Midrash Bible Study it is possible to conclude that: -

1. A two stage process exists in which:
 - The Holy Spirit gives faithful servants advance notice of God's future plans.
 - Following what may be a prolonged pause, these plans are then enacted among both God's people and the World at large.
2. Advance notice is given by God because He:
 - Enjoys communicating with His people.
 - May want to strengthen the faith of those who serve Him.
 - May wish to prepare his people to either avoid or to face danger.
3. It is vital to see the difference between the inspired sacred text of Scripture and the type of Prophetic gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Through Scripture the Holy Spirit reveals God's Word, whereas through Prophetic gifts the Holy Spirit shows people how to apply God's Word in a particular situation.
4. Scripture is the only source of doctrinal and moral instruction. It is profitable for:
 - Doctrine.
 - Correction.
 - Instruction in righteousness.
5. In contrast, Prophetic utterances are useful for:
 - Comfort.
 - Commissioning
 - Edification.
 - Exhortation
 - Warning.
6. Always, Prophetic utterances should:
 - Conform to the doctrinal and moral guidelines of Scripture.
 - Help people to apply particular Biblical principles.
 - Never be regarded as a second source of authoritative revelation.
7. The notion of global revival in which the Church will triumphantly emerge to rule the Nations is untrue. This because it fails to accord with Scripture. It is also dangerous because it creates unrealistic expectations which can lead people to:
 - Abandon the faith during times of hardship.
 - Accept spiritual deceptions which may masquerade as revival.
 - Embrace the great delusion of Satan ~ where people will follow another Messiah instead of Jesus.
8. A more sober and realistic picture believes that, within the English speaking Countries both, the Church and Society are shortly to be judged through some form of major socio-economic collapse. The effect of this could be:
 - To accelerate the move towards a One World System.
 - To bring about a greater polarisation between a false Apostate Church and a true Remnant Church.
 - To provide opportunities to witness to the true Gospel and to stand alongside the Jewish people.
 - To eventually create a social climate wherein persecution of the remnant will become socially acceptable.
9. Time alone will confirm or disprove this more sober scenario. However, it is worth taking seriously because:
 - It fits in with the two stage process mentioned in the first point above.
 - It acknowledges that Western Society is becoming ripe for judgement.
 - It makes sense of known facts.
 - It is a view held by mature sober-minded people.

It is better to be prepared for a disaster, which does not strike than to be unprepared for one that does.

Questions

1) What is the relevance of Amos 3.7 for today? Do you think that God will use only one media to reveal His plans to His servants? Give reasons for your answer. Summarise the similarities and differences between Scripture and Prophetic utterances.

2) Contrast the two scenarios in this section. Which one appears the most realistic and why? How can we best prepare spiritually and practically for any future times of trial?