

Lesson Plan: "God's Love in Agony"

January 10, 2010

Course Goal: To introduce students to several major theological themes in the Old Testament prophets and to enable them to compare and contrast these themes in contemporary social commentators and critics.

Class Objective: To deepen students' insight into the anger of God as an element of God's being which has a role in their own faith experience.

Advanced Preparation: Review this lesson plan. Review any commentary available on the assigned chapter. Print copies of Amos 3 so class members are using the same text. Prepare handout sheets with the titles in question 2 and the Heschel quote in question 6.

Class Activities (45 minutes)

1. Read the assigned text: Amos chapter 3 (5 minutes)
2. Read and encourage discussion on the 9 discussion questions (40 minutes)
3. Ask for feedback on how the class went and what students feel they are learning.

Discussion Questions

1. Which title (see below or compose one of your own) best summarizes the core idea of this chapter?
 - a. Israel is shocked with news of what's coming
 - b. Being a special people of God entails enduring the anger of God
 - c. God uses other nations to execute his judgment and anger
 - d. The coming catastrophe will be virtually total
2. What might the readers' feeling state be after reading the rhetorical questions beginning at verse 3 and ending at verse 8. Hint: attempt to answer the questions, perhaps as follows. Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment? No. Who are the two? "Does a lion roar in the forest when it has no prey?" No again. Wait, hasn't Amos called God a "roaring lion"? "Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?" Isn't a trumpet blast a signal of the advance of enemy troops against the city? "Does disaster befall a city, unless the lord has done it?" No again. But if we agree with what this question is implying, maybe we're assenting to disaster coming on our own city. And from the Lord to boot. "The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" This is a hard one, but seems to be a way of signaling that Amos is the one walking together with God, learning in advance of God's judgment and coming catastrophe.
3. Read verse 2 again. What is implied about being chosen and loved by God?
4. Can we really say, after reading this chapter, that God loves his people? Is anger the opposite of love?
5. What has caused this judgment and coming wrath?
6. Quote from Abraham Heschel: "Pathos (caring) includes love, but goes beyond it. God's relation to humanity is not an indiscriminate outpouring of goodness, oblivious to the condition and merit of the recipient, but an intimate accessibility, manifesting itself in God's sensitive and manifold reactions. The word "anger" is charged with connotations of spite, recklessness, and iniquity. The biblical term, on the other hand, denotes what we call righteous indignation, aroused by that which

is considered mean, shameful, or sinful; it is impatience with evil... as a righteous judge, righteous indignation is part of God's being. To be impartial to people, one cannot be impartial to evil. In the Bible, a judge is not merely a person who has the cognitive faculty to examine a case and to pronounce a sentence; he is also a person who is pained and distressed when injustice is done."

7. Is it possible that the chosenness of Christians puts us in a similar situation to be the special objects of God's care and anger?
8. Consider our "contemporary prophets:" Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, John A. Mackay, Paul Farmer, etc. Do these voices give us insight as to what God is feeling about the injustices that they are decrying?
9. If God is angry with us, what might a coming punishment look like?

Amos Chapter Three

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:

²You only have I known
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

³Do two walk together
unless they have made an appointment?

⁴Does 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?

⁵Does 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?

⁶Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?

Does disaster befall a city,
unless the LORD has done it?

⁷Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.

⁸The lion has roared;
who will not fear?

The Lord GOD has spoken;
who can but prophesy?

⁹Proclaim 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.'

¹⁰They do not know how to do right, says the LORD,
those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.

¹¹Therefore, thus says the Lord God:
An adversary shall surround the land,
and strip you of your defense;
and your strongholds shall be plundered.

¹² Thus says the LORD: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part* of a bed.

¹³Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,
says the Lord God, the God of hosts:

¹⁴On the day I punish Israel for its transgressions,
I will punish the altars of Bethel,
and the horns of the altar shall be cut off
and fall to the ground.

¹⁵I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house;
and the houses of ivory shall perish,
and the great houses* shall come to an end,

says the LORD.

Handout Sheet

- a. Israel is shocked with news of what's coming
- b. Being a special people of God entails enduring the anger of God
- c. God uses other nations to execute his judgment and anger
- d. The coming catastrophe will be virtually total

Pathos (caring) includes love, but goes beyond it. God's relation to humanity is not an indiscriminate outpouring of goodness, oblivious to the condition and merit of the recipient, but an intimate accessibility, manifesting itself in God's sensitive and manifold reactions. The word "anger" is charged with connotations of spite, recklessness, and iniquity. The biblical term, on the other hand, denotes what we call righteous indignation, aroused by that which is considered mean, shameful, or sinful; it is impatience with evil... as a righteous judge, righteous indignation is part of God's being. To be impartial to people, one cannot be impartial to evil. In the Bible, a judge is not merely a person who has the cognitive faculty to examine a case and to pronounce a sentence; he is also a person who is pained and distressed when injustice is done.—Abraham Heschel