

# Surely

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[Note: Bible texts are quoted from the New King James Version.]

“Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

## Introduction

What a powerful verse! What assurance for tomorrow and the next day! What a loving and caring picture of our Lord God! We face no surprise quizzes, exams, or assignments. The Lord God informs us, He tells us, He shares with us events that will occur and affect our lives. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”

Why does God do this? Because He loves us. His love drives Him to reach across the sin barrier using His prophets, people like us. Through them He calls us to repentance for our sins and tells us what is coming so that we will be prepared. The prophets are on a mission of love from the Father Himself. Their purpose is to see that as many people as possible will be saved in His kingdom. This is why “He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”

Today we will look at how this has worked in Bible times and beyond.

## **By His prophets, God warned ancient Israel and other nations of their danger and tried to draw them to Himself.**

Amos opens with warnings of coming punishment on the nations surrounding Israel and Judah for their sins. But Amos’s message soon turns to Judah and then to his main concern, the northern kingdom of Israel. A careful reading of Amos reveals the sins of the people: pride, selfishness, and oppression, to name a few, were visible in both the northern and southern kingdoms. The situation was worse in Israel because of calf worship, instituted by its first king, Jeroboam I (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). God commissioned both Amos and Hosea to prophesy especially against the northern kingdom, but Amos gives more attention to the details and circumstances of the sins of the people than Hosea does. Graphically he reveals transgressions in the events of the people’s daily lives. No evil practice seems to have escaped his notice. He counted it his duty to warn Israel, Judah, as well as the surrounding nations, of the divine judgments that were sure to come upon them if they persisted in sin. Amos closed his book with a glorious picture of the ultimate triumph of righteousness over iniquity.

Please notice a pattern—God is love. He gives us a chance to confess and forsake our sins. Amos 5:4, 6 says, “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, ‘Seek Me and live; . . . Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of

Joseph.” In love, God gives His warnings so that people may come to Him and live. Ezekiel 33:11 says, “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” Even in their sternest messages of warning, God’s prophets are giving His message of love, hoping to secure their repentance and salvation. This is why He pulls back the curtain on the future and shows what will result if people do not change. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

But if God pronounces a coming judgment on a nation or people, is it already too late for them to repent? God’s answer of love is that He will change the outcome if they repent. Jeremiah 18:7-10 gives God’s word on this: “The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.” Ellen G. White wrote regarding this principle that “the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 67).

Before destroying Nineveh, God sent Jonah to warn the people, and give them an opportunity to repent (Jonah 1:1, 2). “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” Though Jonah’s message as given in Scripture did not mention that God might change the outcome, the people turned to God and He did avert the disaster (Jonah 3:5-10). God gives us an opportunity to confess and forsake our sins.

That is what God was doing through Amos, as well. Because of the people’s religious formalism and moral degeneracy, God gave Amos the mandate to tell the Northern Kingdom that disaster was coming. In chapter 7, God appeared to Amos standing on a wall, with a plumb line in His hand (verses 7, 8). Builders at that time used a string with a weight on it to tell if a wall was going up straight and not leaning. Now God was examining Israel. If the nation proved not to be upright and true, judgments would come. Amos called for repentance and a change of behavior. The people must not trust to offerings and religious actions without a thorough reformation: “But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

So we see that through His prophets, God in love warned Israel and the other nations of their danger and tried to draw them to Himself. Look carefully and you will discover, our God is always looking out for us, to warn us and woo us. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

**II. By His prophets, God told us in advance of His central redeeming act to bring us to Himself—that He would send a Savior to live and die for us.**

The first hint of God's plan came to Adam and Eve just after their sin. God Himself told the serpent in their hearing, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Abraham, who is called a prophet in Genesis 20:7, was commanded to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22). Though at the last moment he was spared the agony of giving his own son, he got a glimpse of what God would later do when He gave His only Son on the cross.

Moses lifted up the bronze serpent on a pole in the wilderness, so that any who looked at the serpent in faith could be healed of their deadly snake bites (Numbers 21:6-9). John 3:14, 15 indicates that this prefigured Jesus' death on the cross for us. Micah 5:2 said that the coming Ruler in Israel, who was "from everlasting," would come forth from Bethlehem. Daniel 9:24-27 predicted when "Messiah the Prince" would make His appearance, and when He would be "cut off, but not for Himself." Isaiah 53 told of the Suffering Servant who would bear the sins of the people. Psalm 22 described some of the sufferings Jesus would endure on the cross.

As the time approached for Jesus to make His appearance, God raised up a prophet, John the Baptist, to call the people to repentance and to proclaim of Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). To John's Jewish hearers, the clear meaning was that here was the One whom all the sacrificial lambs through the ages had represented. Jesus' blood would be shed to reconcile sinners to God. His death alone could provide forgiveness for sin.

Jesus' death on Calvary is the ultimate indicator of God's love for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God gave His Son to die so that we might have an opportunity to live with Him eternally in the home that He is preparing for us. What greater proof of His love could there be! And because He wanted us to receive His Son and believe on Him, He sent those prophetic messages far ahead of time, so we would recognize the Savior when He came. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets."

But why did God raise up another prophet, John the Baptist, to announce the coming King just then? This major event of all the ages could not go unheralded! God would once more use a prophet to call the attention of the people to the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." "Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." God enabled John to recognize who Jesus really was and to announce what God was doing to fulfill all the earlier prophecies.

So by His prophets, God warned ancient Israel and other nations of their danger and tried to draw them to Himself. By His prophets, God also told us in advance of His central act in redeeming us, in bringing us to Himself—that He would send a Savior to live and die for us.

Now we are nearing the time when Jesus will return, when God will bring the sin problem on this earth to a close. How does Amos's statement apply to this age?

### **III. By His prophets, God has told us of His plan to bring sin to an end and to rescue His people.**

The Bible gives us wonderful prophecies of Jesus' return. Daniel interpreted the last part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, where the stone struck the image of the nations and replaced them: "In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which . . . shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). In chapter 7, Daniel tells us that "One like the Son of Man" receives this kingdom and rules it (vv. 13, 14). Malachi 4 points to the day when the evildoers will be destroyed, but the "Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His wings," to deliver His people (vv. 1- 3).

As Jesus ascended back to heaven, angels gave His disciples the wonderful assurance, "This same Jesus . . . will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Peter wrote of the "coming of the day of God," and that we should "be diligent to be found by Him in peace" (2 Pet. 3:12, 14). Paul wrote that "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout," will raise the dead in Christ, and catch up into the clouds His followers who are alive when He comes.

Of course, Jesus Himself, the greatest Prophet of all, told us, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). He gave signs of His coming, found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. These included signs in the sun, moon, and stars, "and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity" (Luke 21:25).

Jesus warned about the appearance of false christs and false prophets who would deceive many (Matt. 24:24). He did not warn His followers against receiving any christ, for He, the true Christ, would come. So He warned against receiving false christs. Similarly, He did not warn against receiving any prophet, but against receiving false ones, whom we would know by their fruits (Matt. 7:15, 16). The prophet Joel had predicted that in the time just before "the great and awesome day of the Lord," when certain signs would take place in the heavens (darkened sun, and the moon becoming like blood), one should also expect the prophetic gift to be seen. And in Revelation 12:17 and 19:10, John would later foretell that the remnant of God's true people, down at the end, would "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," which is "the spirit of prophecy," the Holy Spirit bringing the prophetic gift again to God's people.

"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." God would have a prophetic voice again, in preparation for the greatest event of the ages—the return of Jesus. That voice would help guide the people of God through the treacherous days at the end for their own salvation, and it would help them

see how God wants them to tell others and bring them to Him as well. As John the Baptist helped prepare people for the first coming of Jesus, so God would use the gift of prophecy to help prepare people for Jesus' second coming.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White manifested that gift of prophecy. Her prophetic ministry came at the right time in the progression of events, according to the Scriptures. Her messages helped us to unify on correct Bible doctrines. She pointed out evils that needed to be corrected. God gave her instruction for the church about organization, about health, about publishing, about education, and many other topics that have helped to make our Christian living vibrant, our church strong, and our outreach effective. Most of all, she points us to our soon-coming Savior and Redeemer, urging us not only to "be diligent to be found by Him in peace" (2 Pet. 3:14) ourselves, but to use the time we have remaining to bring as many people as we can to know Jesus and honor Him in their obedient worship and daily living. God has used her to help prepare us for what will come. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."

The coming of Jesus in glory will be the great crisis time for the whole earth. Those who have not made Him their Savior will be destroyed. There was one other time when our whole world faced such a crisis. The biblical record in Genesis 6 says sin had reached a level that caused God to determine to destroy the entire earth. Nevertheless verse eight reads, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." God called Noah to be His witness, and to build an ark. For 120 years, God, through His representative Noah, revealed what was going to happen.

Ellen G. White gave us insights such as these about those days:

1. "The sin of the antediluvians was in perverting that which in itself was lawful. They corrupted God's gifts by using them to minister to their selfish desires. The indulgence of appetite and base passion made their imaginations altogether corrupt. The antediluvians were slaves of Satan, led and controlled by him" (Ellen G. White comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1090).
2. "The inhabitants of the Noachian world were destroyed because they were corrupted through the indulgence of perverted appetite" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 162).
3. "They worshipped selfish indulgence—eating, drinking, and merry-making—and resorted to acts of violence and crime if their desires and passions were interfered with. In the days of Noah the overwhelming majority was opposed to the truth, and enamored with a tissue of falsehoods. The land was filled with violence. War, crime, and murder was the order of the day" (Ellen G. White comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1090).
4. "Just so will it be before Christ's second coming"(Ibid.).

5. "Those who believed when Noah began to build the ark lost their faith through association with unbelievers who aroused all the old passion for amusement and display" (Review and Herald, September 15, 1904).
6. "For one hundred and twenty years Noah proclaimed the message of warning to the antediluvian world; but only a few repented. Some of the carpenters he employed in building the ark believed the message, but died before the Flood; others of Noah's converts backslid" (Ellen G. White comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1088).
7. "God granted them one hundred and twenty years of probation, and during that time preached to them through Methuselah, Noah, and many others of His servants. Had they listened to the testimony of these faithful witnesses, had they repented and returned to their loyalty, God would not have destroyed them" (Review and Herald, April 23, 1901).

The characteristics of Noah's day are very much with us today. "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

Through the Bible and the gift of prophecy God will continue to reveal His secrets about all things that will keep us from repentance and from doing His will. As we go to tell the world that Jesus is coming again, we do so knowing that God is with us. God is eternal, this is to say, He always was and always will be. There was never a time when He did not exist, and there will never be a time when He ceases to exist. David reminds us, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2). God is holy. Isaiah 6:3 informs us, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Think with me. God who does not change, who is dependable, God who is infinite, God who is just, God who is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, surely "does nothing unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

## Summary and Appeal

**Surely:** *The state of being sure; a) sure knowledge; certainty; b) confidence in a manner or behavior, fulfillment of an undertaking: guarantee; ground of confidence or security.*

From Genesis to Revelation we find that God has warned people and the nation. But before destruction, He gives an opportunity to repent. Today in our contemporary setting He still speaks to us through the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. We who have responded to His invitation, to teach and preach and to tell our communities about His second coming, can proclaim with passion and hope the certainty of His return.

People need to know. It is their right to know. People are all around us who do not understand clearly the times in which they are living. They need to have a sure word from the Lord. They need “surely.” They need to know about a loving and caring God who wants them to be ready for the final exam. Will you go and tell the world? Will you recommit your life to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to direct your life in witnessing?

Go and tell family, neighbors, and everyone everywhere. Tell them not to give up, not to despair; tell them that God is able to save them from doubt, from fear, from eternal separation from Him. Tell them to reach out to God, because He is reaching out to them. Tell them that they can receive help on their journey because God will not forsake them. Tell them, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).