



[Amos 5:6](#)

(6) Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

King James Version

[God](#) threatens to send fire, symbolizing divine rejection and purification ([Malachi 4:1](#)), upon Israel because of her false religion. The Bible, though ultimately written for His spiritual children, focuses on ancient Israel because she is comprised of God's chosen people. We can see our own lives in their examples. Amos proves through the Israelites' disobedience and corruption that they had no relationship with God. They had not allowed their privileged position under the covenant to transform them into godly people. Thus, God must send a purifying destruction upon them.

Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were places of pilgrimage, places people went to observe the feasts. But God says, "I hate, I despise your feast days" ([Amos 5:21](#))! Verses 22-23 show that the Israelites loved all the rituals and entertainments of the feasts, but they did not leave the feasts better people (verse 24). They returned to their homes unchanged, unrepentant, after what was supposed to be a rededication of their lives to God!

Our attitudes in attending the feasts today tell God just as much as the Israelites' did during Amos' ministry. Do we go to the [Feast of Tabernacles](#) to [seek God](#) and learn to fear Him, as He says in [Deuteronomy 14:23](#)? Our reasons for attending God's feasts are very important. Do we go to get [love](#) and enjoy *ourselves*? The feasts should be enjoyable, but those who go there to *give* love and *serve others* profit the most from them. Those who go to get love usually become offended and leave the feast, telling anyone who will listen how "cold" others were to them.

From the biblical events that occurred in these places, Bethel pictures *reorientation and hope*; Gilgal, *possession of the promises*; and Beersheba, *fellowship with God*. We can have these things in [Christ](#) if we abide under the terms of our covenant with Him. In the example of Israel, we can see that hearing and knowing the way of God intellectually is not enough. The lives of the people of Israel did not match what they knew.

The lesson we can learn from the events in Bethel are particularly illustrative of God's transforming influence. At Bethel, Jacob had his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven and angels walking up and down on it ([Genesis 28:12](#)). When he woke up from his dream, Jacob reckoned that God was surely in that place and named it "Bethel" or "house of God." The ascending and descending angels, messengers of God, depict God, not man, initiating communication. In other words, the ladder brought God to Bethel. When God arrives on the scene and descends to communicate with a man, He makes a difference in his life.

Certainly, Jacob's life quickly began to change, especially his attitude. He had been fleeing for his life, but when he got to Bethel, his future changed dramatically because God made contact with him. God reconfirmed to Jacob His [promises to Abraham](#) and [Isaac](#). A transformation began then that did not end as long as he lived.

On the run from Esau, a man to be feared, Jacob felt at any moment his brother would appear around the next rock. He arrived at Bethel hopeless, but he left a man with a future—God said that He would be with him. So Jacob arose and made a covenant with God that if He would bless him, then he would give a tenth, a tithe, to God ([Genesis 28:18-22](#)).

When Jacob returned to Bethel after serving Laban for some twenty years, God appeared to him again, changing his name to Israel ([Genesis 35:1-15](#)). In the biblical record, a name change, normally occurring during a period of crisis in a person's conversion, signifies a change in his heart. Undoubtedly, a significant change happened here and another at Peniel where Jacob wrestled with Christ ([Genesis 32:24-30](#)). Peniel was a stepping stone to what occurred at his return to Bethel and between them, we see Jacob's spiritual conversion.

To Israel and Amos, then, Bethel represented reorientation and hope. There the old life and the old man became new. This idea is later reflected in New Testament teaching about our spiritual transformation into the [image of God](#) ([II Corinthians 3:18](#); [Ephesians 4:12-15](#), 20-24; [I John 3:2](#)).

[Contact with God](#) causes transformation, and Bethel represents this hopeful reorientation. Israelites may have journeyed to Bethel, but Amos shows that *no transformation occurred*. There was no change in [holiness](#) or morality. They enjoyed the fellowship and good times of the feasts, but they returned to their homes, and it was "business as usual." Unlike Jacob, they had not repented.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Prepare to Meet Your God! \(The Book of Amos\) \(Part Two\)](#)

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