

Amos 5 And The Feast

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 15-Oct-16; Sermon #1347

I have heard of an unusually large number of people having problems. Not major problems but the kind of problems that are irritants—they bother you, they upset the schedule that you are working on, they make you have to do a great deal more work than you plan on having to do when you got here, they get in the way—that has something to do with the theme of this sermon. It is one of the stresses that we have to deal with as time goes on. I think you will be able to relate to the things that I am going to be saying in the sermon here.

Deuteronomy 16:12-14 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the first born of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

The feasts of God are events that we look forward to with a great deal of positive anticipation. Even before they are over we already have things set in our minds that we are going to do, or not going to do, the next feast. We begin to plan, to some degree, about the next feast. That is how much it means to us, because we enjoy it here and we want to continue to enjoy it as part of our fellowship with God.

We are intended by God to have our time of annual enjoyment, along with the spiritual purposes and rewards for keeping the feast. We must be cautious here because there is an enjoyable dark side, especially to the Feast of Tabernacles, because it is easily perceived as a vacation, a godly substitute for Christmas, or a family reunion. There is also a share of trouble preparing for them and traveling to them that frequently gives us a great deal of stress.

The Feast of Tabernacles, especially, can be wearying. Sometimes people have gotten sick from the stresses associated with it, they experience a truly miserable time. I remember one of the first couple of feasts we kept as the Church of The Great God, in San Antonio, one lady spent the entire feast in bed! She did not get out of her room for anything as far as I know. It was stressful for her. I heard from a relative that she was angry for what she was having to go through.

Sometimes the stresses of God's holy days seem to be a catalyst for motivating family problems, but over all, most of the time we enjoy them immensely and we cherish the memories we have of the activities, eating fine meals in fine restaurants, and spending time with the family that we might not always have time to do when we are at home.

Again, we have to be somewhat cautious of this because it is possible to have enjoyment doing similar things, the kind of things that we may do at the feast, but we have this enjoyable circumstance completely apart from the feast, so who needs the feast to have a good time? Who needs the feast to have a family reunion? Who needs the feast to take a nice trip? You get my drift. There are things that you can do in the world, there are things that you can do with the church, and they might be quite similar in the kind, and even the level of enjoyment that we might have.

The enjoyment of positive experiences completely apart from the feast actually may happen more frequently than they happen at the feast, if only because of the amount of time, the difference between the two. In fact, these occasions can happen very frequently simply because of the extra time that we have at home apart from the feast and have the liberties to be able to have them.

The danger inherent here is, though God wants us to enjoy the keeping of, and rejoicing at the feast, it is very easy to think that because the feast was enjoyable, that we had a *good* feast. Did we really have a good feast? How do you think God would have rated it compared to your estimation? Judgment of things of this nature are highly variable. Several people can attend the same feast site, hear the same messages, take part in the same activities, and all have quite different evaluations of the quality of the feast.

We know this is true because we have experienced it. I have experienced it. I can look back at one feast in particular. It was 1974 and my family kept the feast in St. Petersburg, Florida. It is an all time low for me of feasts, as far as I am concerned. I think the major reason was because I did little or nothing to make it a great feast. The feast has to be made to be something over and above a normal occasion. My conclusion was, it was my fault, because I did nothing to make it a good feast. I was

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

simply there observing the twelve thousand other people who were there.

I chose those two verses in Deuteronomy at the beginning of the sermon because they seem to be the ones that we turn to most frequently when we make reference to the feast. The emphasis in those contexts seem mostly on the enjoyable, physical aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles. Did you notice how many times the word 'rejoice' came up?

Other scriptures besides those touch on the spiritual aspects of the Feast of Tabernacles and the number of them is considerable. Even though a great deal of specific details is not given at any specific place, enough is given to know that God expects the Feast of Tabernacles to be the high spiritual water mark of the year.

Leviticus 23:36-37 For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it. These are the feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day.

There are specific directions regarding offerings. The offerings that are mentioned here are indicative of the people's active participation in worship during their times as God established it for them then. They are representative of the spiritual aspects of the Feast of Tabernacles for observing those days.

Deuteronomy 16:12 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

God wants us to remember when we keep His feasts that you were a slave in Egypt. God is telling us something specific, He wants us to take away from the feast as part of our spiritual enjoyment, rejoicing, an increase of knowledge, understanding. He wants us to leave the feast comparing what we have now with before, when we were ignorant, and slaves of Satan and the world.

Are we really better off? Did you really enjoy the feast in a way that pleased God? You may have had a bang-up time. I know for many years I went to the Feast of Tabernacles and so frequently all I thought of was playing softball, because we had those big tournaments, and we did win a lot. This was in Jekyll Island and it was very enjoyable,

but did that softball really add to the feast?

Deuteronomy 14:24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you . . .

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herd and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

God wants to see us leave the Feast of Tabernacles with a great deal more respect for Him than we ever had before. He wants that thought to be put together with us leaving the feast with the concept that we used to be a slave, and now we respect God for His mercy, His kindness, His goodness, for what He has freely given me. My respect for Him has risen greatly.

Is the feast appreciated in that way? Read Numbers 28:1 through Numbers 29:12-17. If you have enough time on your hands, and you care to search what I am about to tell you, search it out by counting all the offerings required for *all* of the feasts, not just Tabernacles. You will find there were more offerings required for the Feast of Tabernacles than all of the other festivals combined.

The listing of the offerings at the beginning of this were representative of the spiritual aspects of the people's participation during the feast. There is more spiritual participation, if we are using that as a gauge, that God expects of us during the Feast of Tabernacles than all the others combined.

I hope you will put that together with Gary's [Garrett] sermonette: The fellowship, the quality and the type of fellowship that we have, whether it is in a restaurant, or dance, what kind of contribution are you making to the quality of what is going on there. All of those things can be spiritual aspects of the feast.

This ought to tell us something about what God expects the Feast of Tabernacles to be spiritually. It should be a spiritual regeneration and an increase of knowledge and understanding through active participation and fellowship in the spiritual aspects of the feast. Something else to consider: All this is done in the presence of God, in such a way that even though He is present in our lives (we are in the presence of God, we have Sabbath services every Sabbath), but the Feast of Tabernacles is all crammed together,

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

a concentrated dose of being in the presence of God. So the rejoicing, the fellowship, and the physical fun, can and should be, the fruit resulting from the right approach.

This level of experience is not something that can be forced, it must be voluntarily given with understanding, knowing sacrifice is involved. Our lives really revolve around sacrifice. That is why Christ came. He is our leader.

Nehemiah 8:1-12 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. [This was in Israel.] So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. [Feast of Trumpets] Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. [The majority of them were standing from morning to midday, listening to somebody preach!] So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaselah and at his left hand Pediah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshulam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. [Some of them were sitting, probably on the ground. They had respect for what they were witnessing and participating in at that time.] And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep," For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. [Today we have a hard time feeling that. We did not grow up that way, we did not learn to have that kind of respect, we are now cynical. We have heard it all, what new thing are you going to tell me.] Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly because they understood the words that were declared to them.

This was quite a way to begin the Feast of Trumpets. As far as I know this was the very first occasion they had a service like this, following their return from their Babylonian captivity. At this time they were still rebuilding the wall. They were also trying to do what they could to repair the Temple so that it could be used for services, but everything was still in a pretty broken down state.

There was undoubtedly a reasonable cause for the people’s emotional response to keep this particular Feast of Trumpets, in this particular location, at this particular time, considering the stresses they had already gone through and were not yet over.

Nehemiah 8:13 Now on the second day the heads of the father’s houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

They heard some of the law preached to them, but how much understanding did they actually have? They had to come together. These people were seventy years in Babylon, and there was an awful lot that was forgotten, things they needed to get back in service doing once again.

Nehemiah 8:14 And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

Now we have Feast of Tabernacles. It is not Tabernacles time yet in the course of this adventure these people were having here. They had to do this:

Nehemiah 8:15-18 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written.” Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each on the roof

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

I said they were in Babylon seventy years, but this verse lets us know that even from the time of Joshua, Israel had not experienced anything like this as a nation.

It is very easily seen that Ezra understood the Feast of Tabernacles as a spiritual bonanza whose fruit was rejoicing. However, it does add what it says there regarding the days of Joshua. I think it would be good to clarify this, as to why it is so obvious that Israel turned away from God so easily.

I take what Ezra said there to mean that the days were not kept with the combination of all of the elements in their right proportion. From the time of Joshua until the time of Ezra, you know how long of a period of time that was? About four hundred years. Do you know how many generations that is? (Divide twenty five into four hundred.) This nation is only about two hundred and forty years old. Look what has happened to the church even in the last fifty or sixty years. How many people have passed through it, came and went, and turned their back on God?

You can see why when a man like Joshua died, that nothing had been done to the extent with the right kind of attitude, the right kind of approach, at the right time for everything to come together so that God was really pleased about what they were doing. How could they rejoice when rejoicing in something like this is something that God gives? It is very easy to begin to see how easy it is to fall away when there is not anybody who is out there preaching.

Now you might wonder what was going on in the wilderness when Moses was alive, he was traveling toward Israel, the Promised Land, and he was right with them. You will be surprised what the scripture says. Turn to Joshua. This is a conclusion that has to be reached.

Joshua 5:2-5 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.” So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.

All the men of war died (there was six hundred and some thousand men of war when they took their first counting after they got out) but the Israelites had already stopped circumcising long before that. Under that circumstance that would be the equivalent of not being baptized. All of those millions of people who were in the wilderness, even though Moses was there, and Aaron was there, were not circumcised. As soon as they got into the land Joshua took care of that.

Here is what I think happened. The Israelites were always calling Moses into account for this or that, but Aaron and Moses, and the group that had gathered around them, continued to keep the law of God. The key to this is, when you go back to Nehemiah 9, God makes clear that we understand that Moses and Aaron were not at fault. It was the nation of Israel that simply went off on their own and ignored the law of God. No wonder Moses lost his temper from time to time with those people, they were not following God, they were not following Moses, except they walked behind him and bickered.

Please turn to Isaiah. We are going to see that doing something like this is not at all uncommon. It is something that we always have to be on guard for. If we are not careful the Feast of Tabernacles can be a place where we have an enjoyable time, doing enjoyable things, but we do not get out of it the things that God points out that He wants us to get out of it, and that He wants to reward us with.

Judah went into captivity under Nebuchadnezzar's forces, roughly around 586 BC. It was roughly seventy years later that we were reading of the return of the Israelites from that captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. Isaiah took place about two hundred years earlier than Ezra. Isaiah is the one speaking. In Isaiah 1 he was speaking to the Jews about one hundred years before they went into captivity to Babylon.

Isaiah 1:10-17 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the laws of our God, you people of Gomorrah [Israel]: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The new Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

They were still going to church, in their mind they were sacrificing to God. This is what is happening in U.S. People go to church on Sunday believing they are sacrificing before God, but they are not. They do not keep the commandments of God. Is the United States turning into Sodom and Gomorrah? Is Jerusalem called Sodom in the book of Revelation? Yes it is. God calls the capital city of Jerusalem, Sodom. I mentioned those things because I want you to see the character of their minds.

One thing I would like to clarify is this: as we went through there He says, the new moons, the Sabbaths, and then in verse 14, *your* new moons and *your* appointed feasts, My soul hates. There is no reason to believe that just because God says, your new moons, your feasts, that they were not the ones He appointed—both in name, and at the calendar time.

I am going to give these people the benefit of the doubt. We will say they were keeping what they thought were God's Sabbaths, or that they were keeping the new moons, but when we look at where this appears, what the context is like here, He could rightly call them yours, because their manner of keeping them was so abominable to Him. It bore no reference to His intent in commanding them to observe them. They were so completely out of sync with His character as the list of their sins there clearly shows.

We will give them the benefit of the doubt. They were observing the festivals at the right time, but we can see from what I just said there, that God was not at all pleased with the character of the people keeping them. He called the giving of offerings, which were part of the spiritual aspect of keeping the feasts, as vain, useless, worth nothing, trampling His courts. And their prayers were an abomination, coming out of filthy hearts. They were there, but they had an awful lot to hide. Their keeping of the feasts made God

weary, we might say today. He had it up to here with them.

Why am I giving this instruction to you? I want you to see that we can observe the times and have what we might call a good time, an enjoyable time, and yet still not be in harmony with God's intent. That is why I began with what God wants. He wants us to leave the feast respecting Him more highly than we ever did before, and the only way we can do that is when we are thinking about Him as we are keeping the feast and doing all that we can to bring honor and glory in the way that we are conducting our lives, as well as our attitudes while we are there.

It can be done when we go to God and ask for the forgiveness that we need, and ask for the strength, the right mind, the right heart, the right attitude to glorify Him while we are here, because we want to be in harmony with God's intent.

Before we go into Amos 5, I want to say a little bit about the man, Amos. He is unique. Amos was not a Levite, he was not a priest. Amos was a Jew. He was not employed at the Temple, he was not a helper there. Amos is what we would call today an orchardist, he grew sycamore trees. He worked on a farm, he worked in an orchard, and he was a shepherd. In addition to that Amos was also very well schooled.

I have read up on the book of Amos, and almost all of those people who are skilled in the Hebrew language say it is the most beautifully written Old Testament book there is. Amos was not hired as a prophet by God, he was sent by God, but Amos pretty much effectively said this: "I was just sitting there one day tending my own business and God came by and said, 'I want you to go to Israel, and you are going to represent Me.'"

This was no man schooled in a Levitical school, he did not go to a priesthood school. He was a layman and God came by and said I want you to go up to Israel for Me. Israel was Judah's enemy, but God said to Amos, "I want you to go to those Israelites, I want you to give them some of My mind for them to think about," and Amos went.

The book of Amos is addressed to Israel; therefore I do not know if what we are going to read is God's feast day. Remember Judah and Israel split and became two nations. In Israel the northern ten tribes was by far the most irreligious of the two. At times Judah was pretty submissive to God, but the context of this chapter seems to indicate that God might have accepted whatever they were keeping and their offerings if everything else was ok. They were not really worshipping God. They may have been sincere. This is one reason I believe God sent Amos up there, to straighten these people out and maybe there is a chance they could really become part of Him again.

I want to remind you that God's truths were not ever entirely lost, even at this time. Even though Jeroboam, Solomon's son, who Israel rebelled against, tried his best to drive God's truth from these peoples' minds because he desired complete control over their lives. He was fearful that if they heard somebody speaking the truth from God's Word he might lose them, and they would all go back to Judah and live there.

We know that the truth was never completely lost in Israel because we find from time to time, usually in the books of I and II Chronicles, that Israelites went to Judah to keep the feast with the Jews. That is why I am not really sure about the days themselves, whether they were really God's days, they are called feasts here, but I know they were not keeping them where God said to keep them. These were not really God's holy days, but there was still religion being practiced. At the same time the people dedicated the feast to God, and they still retained some true knowledge of Him. As in the Isaiah reference it is not the days per se that God is against, but the attitude, the character, and the conduct of the people while keeping them that He rails against.

So whether they were actually God's holy days is less important than the principles that are contained within their context, because the whole chapter revolves around keeping feast time. This is a very interesting and instructive chapter in relation to what God expects the keeping of the feast days to do to and for His people in our time.

We are going to search it out in as much detail as I can give you in the amount of time that remains to me. Incidentally the booklet that we published "Prepare to Meet Your God" this chapter was kind of the center of that entire booklet.

Amos 5:4-15 For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel; "Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel—You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth! He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the Lord is His name. He rains upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress. They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins; afflicting the just and taking bribes;

Amos 5 and The Feast by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

diverting the poor from justice at the gate. Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

I want to remind you that this was the tribe of Joseph that is generally aimed at here. Ephraim and Manasseh were the ones who were primarily targets. The chapter begins ominously with a funeral dirge, a lament for Israel that is in reality a prophecy of what would fairly soon happen to them. Remember I told you that it seemed God had had it with the Israelites, so he inspires Amos to begin this way.

Amos 5:1-3 Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: The virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God; "The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel." [God is going to tithe His very own people.]

If you want the conclusion of this lament that Amos makes read the book of Lamentations because Jeremiah carries it right on. A lament for Israel is a reality, a prophecy of what will happen real soon in Israel, it is sung as though it had already happened, even though it would literally occur about forty years after Amos sang it till they fell to Assyria. They did not repent at the preaching at Assyria, and in 521-22, Israel fell to the Assyrians.

Amos 5:4-6 For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel; "Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing, Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel.

These people were keeping feasts to the Lord. Crucial to the rest of the chapter is the charge beginning in verse 4 from God through Amos to seek God. You know very well these people were keeping the feast but they were not seeking God. That sets the tone for everything else that follows here. They were not seeking good, which we will get to in a little bit.

If we look at their sins carefully we would find that they were all what we would call social sins. The poor are mentioned twice. Here poor does not necessarily imply a person with no money at all. Here it means the weak, those who are weak. Who is getting pushed around in the United States? Where is all the power? The power is not evenly distributed amongst the people, we are so powerful in the head they pretty much do whatever they want to do. The people in government who are supposed to be serving us now simply use us.

This is what he is complaining about here. The poor, the weak, those who have no power are not being taken care of because they have no clout. Why do you think that all those people are going to the foundation raided by Hilary Clinton and her husband? They want more clout than they already have, they want access to the power, greater power than they already have. The Clintons are being used and we are seeing a living example of the government running the people into the ground.

It is a matter of the strong taking advantage of the weak. He also mentions in these six or seven verses sins that afflict others. You know what they are? Their name, bribery, rejection of fair judgments in the courts. Can a Christian get a fair break in the courts anymore? They are so liberal, something as simple as people refusing to bake a cake on the basis of religion are thrown in jail and the court fines them. That is the kind of thing that was happening on a greater scale than it is United States of America, but we are going to reach this again—those having truth being ridiculed, their testimony being unacceptable. God is complaining about a corrupt court system, and these people are keeping a feast to the Lord.

The most important element in this section in terms of giving understanding, because it has impact on most of the instruction in the entire chapter, is the mention in verse 5 that they are not to seek Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal. They are all mentioned because that is where they were holding the festivals. Why were they holding the festivals at Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal? The warning is to those people, do not go there. If you are seeking God do not go there because God is not there.

They were keeping feasts dedicated to the Lord, but He was not there, there was no fellowship with Him there. He has Amos telling these people even before they left to keep the feast, do not go to those cities because God will not be there, He will not be fellowshiping with you. A second reason that what they were doing is unacceptable to Him.

The third thing is, He is telling them what He is going to do about it. All of that is encompassed within this chapter. It had to start with a warning, do not go to Bethel,

Beersheba, Gilgal. That is where the festivals were going to be held.

The next thing is, why specifically mention Bethel? Because that is where they were holding the feast. Is there a reason why they chose Bethel as a feast sight? Yes there was. It is because Bethel played an important role in Israel's history. Twice Jacob had significant things happen to him there.

Before we turn to something about Bethel, look at verse 8.

Amos 5:8 He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the Lord is His name.

Why did Amos say these things? It is not that any of these acts that God did are all that important. It was to bring to them a lesson that they needed to understand about Jacob's connection to Bethel. It is this: the God who makes a difference as with such things as night and day, who makes things like the Pleiades and Orion (which are star groupings), is supposed to instruct you and me as to what it instructed to those people. That is, God is a transforming God. He changes unconverted people into converted people.

What happened to Jacob when he went to Bethel? It was the beginning of his change into a converted man.

What Amos is saying here without directly saying it is, if you go to Bethel and keep the feast there, God is not going to transform you, because He is not there. They did not listen.

Genesis 28:11 So he [Jacob] came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.

Do you know what Jacob is doing at this time? He was fleeing for his life! He had just wormed away the birthright from Esau, because of Esau's carelessness, and as a result of Isaac's blindness. So we have this crook, Jacob, who lays down on his fleeing away from his family, his mother told him to flee before he is killed. I wonder if he ever saw his mother again? In order to get ahead with God, he had to make that sacrifice. When he got there he was dog tired and on the run.

Genesis 28:12-13 Then he dreamed, and behold a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

God, in order to do this is going to have to change Jacob into a godly man. God is the transforming God. That is the concept that goes with the city of Bethel, whenever Jacob's conversion began.

Genesis 28:14-15 "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

That was the beginning of Jacob's conversion.

Genesis 35:1-4 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother." And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone." So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

On the first occasion, when Jacob arrived he was a homeless wanderer, a man on the run, a man with a past, he was fearful. God revealed Himself to him, and the transformation of Jacob began. Then he left Bethel, a man with a future. The second time he arrived as Jacob and he left as Israel. That is where he wrestled with the angel. When the match was over, the 'angel,' Jesus Christ, gave him a new name, Israel.

That new name was the assurance from God of the reality that he was a new man, he

had been transformed. Thus, Bethel became associated in the Israelites' minds as a place of renewal, reorienting, and transformation by God. Amos has already told them do not go there, God is not there. If you go seeking God in Bethel, you might have a good time, it might be really enjoyable, but you will not become transformed, because God was not there to transform you.

What I am trying to get across here is our attitude toward God and the Feast of Tabernacles. In making the effort to make everyone else have a good feast, that is what is going to put the quality in the time that we spend there.

That enables us to understand why Bethel is named. "Why are you Israelites not being transformed in the conduct of your life when you keep the feast?" He is saying, "You go and no transformation occurs. Are you really going there to seek God? To learn to fear Him? To remember that at one time we were a slave in this worldly Egypt?"

One of the primary evidences that God is making a difference in a person's life is that He loves God's law. Jacob did not love God's law—he was a thief, he was a bad man when he fled for his life. When he came back, the way he sought reconciliation with his brother Esau was the act of a godly man. Even though Esau did not want it, even though Esau felt that he did not deserve it, Jacob nonetheless felt it needful for him to press it on his brother because that is the way he now felt about his brother.

God had changed his heart to something that was far different. The lesson for us is, it began in Bethel. A location, but what happened to Jacob after God met him there is what made the difference in Jacob's life.

These people who Amos was speaking to were going to the feast in Bethel, and they were returning home with their lives still ungoverned by God's truth. When Jacob met God, his life began changing immediately. It took a little while, the evil in him was deep.

The lives of these people that Amos was speaking to should have changed according to the dictates, principles, and examples of God's Word. They should have returned home singing and exemplifying, "O! How love I thy law it is ever with me, my meditation is all the day long."

These people must have turned the Bethel feast into nothing more than a vacation. Do not seek Bethel, seek the Lord and live. The Bethel approach signifies death, not life.