

Amos 5 And The Feast Of Tabernacles

Properly Keeping the Feast
John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)
Given 26-Sep-98; Sermon #361

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 You shall truly tithe all the increase of your seed, that the field brings forth year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

Deuteronomy 16:15 Seven days shall you keep a solemn feast unto the Lord your God in the place which the Lord shall choose; because the Lord your God shall bless you in all your increase, and in all the works of your hands, therefore you shall surely rejoice.

All of the feasts of the Lord are events that we look forward to with a great deal of positive anticipation, and well we should because they are very enjoyable and they can be very spiritually rewarding. It is interesting that Adam Clark made this comment in regard to one of these verses. I do not remember which one it was but he said "the Mosaic law made ample provision for the comfort and happiness of the people." And that is surely true. We all seem to enjoy the feasts - especially the Feast of Tabernacles - very much.

But there is kind of an enjoyable dark side to Tabernacles because it can easily be perceived as a vacation, or a substitute for Christmas. There is also a share of trouble in preparing for them, and traveling to them, and that contributes a measure of stress to the keeping of them. Tabernacles especially, of all of the Feasts, can be wearying and sometimes people have even gotten quite sick from the stress of it and have had a miserable time. I know that in my keeping of it, or let us say even since we have had the Church of the Great God, I know of a couple of people who went to the Feast and maybe never left their rooms because of being sick with something that was pretty contagious.

Sometimes the Feast of Tabernacles seems to be a catalyst for family problems as well. But overall most of the time we enjoy them immensely. We cherish the memories we have of the activities, eating fine meals together, nice locations, or spending time with our family that we might not feel we have the time to do when we are at home.

But we do have to be somewhat cautious of this (I mean all this enjoyment) because it is possible to have enjoyment doing similar kinds of things apart from the Feast, I mean at home. "We're going on a vacation." The enjoyment of positive experiences apart from the Feast, I feel, happens very frequently.

The danger inherent here is that though God wants us to rejoice in keeping His feasts, it is very easy to think that because the Feast was indeed enjoyable, that we had a good Feast. But judgment of things of that nature is highly variable. Several people can attend the same site, hear the same messages, take part in the same activities, and still have quite a different evaluation of the Feast.

We know this is true because I think that everyone of us has experienced this. This happens because of personal preferences and perspectives that we have of what we feel is enjoyable. There might be disappointments with accommodations, or maybe we ran into a bad meal or bad service somewhere. Maybe we had a wreck on the way to or from the Feast. Maybe we were offended by somebody or we offended somebody. There are a multitude of reasons that can ruin the Feast or, let us say, color it in such a way as to make it not a very memorable one.

I know that there is one particular Feast that I did not enjoy very much. It was all the way back in 1974. We kept it at St. Petersburg, Florida and it was the all-time low for Feasts, as far as I am concerned, and I think that the major reason is because I did nothing to make it a good Feast.

I was just there. I attended and I was served. The weather was good. I guess we had some good meals. We met some people we had not seen for quite a long time who were from the Pittsburgh area who had moved there. It was good to see them again. And I guess the music that the choir sang was good and I guess that there was a measure of teaching from the sermons as well.

But for some reason that Feast was not enjoyable and I think it was because it was the first Feast I ever attended that I did nothing to serve in any capacity.

I chose these two verses in Deuteronomy because they seem to be the ones that we turn to most frequently when we make reference to the Feast. (By "we" I mean the ministry.) But the emphasis in these contexts is mostly on the enjoyable physical aspects of the Feast of Tabernacles.

But other scriptures touch on the spiritual aspects of the Feast and they are considerable in number. Even though they give a great deal of specific detail or they fail to give a great deal of specific detail, there is enough to know what God expects of the Feast of Tabernacles. I think that I can tell you without finding contradiction in the Bible that God expects the Feast of Tabernacles to be the spiritual high of the year.

Leviticus 23:36 Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord. It is a solemn assembly; and you shall do no servile work therein.

I did not read any of the other verses before that because I think that you understand that this is talking about the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Leviticus 23:37 These are the feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon this day.

The mention of offerings in a setting like this is indicative of worship. They represent the spiritual part of observing the days. I do not mean that there were no sermons. I do not mean that at all, but God's Word keeps words to a minimum, and offerings indicate spiritual things that have to do with the worship of God.

Numbers 28:1-2 And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and My bread for My sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savor unto Me, shall you observe to offer unto Me in their due season.

That is the opening verse for the instructions as to when and what was to be offered to God every year. The offering was not limited to this, but these were commanded offerings. It included sacrifices that were made every day plus special ones that were made on the weekly Sabbath, and then in addition to that, special instructions for each and every holy day.

Numbers 29:12 And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no servile work, and you shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days.

Not one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, or six days. **Seven** days. And if we do not keep it for seven days, plus the Eighth Day, we have not kept the Feast of Tabernacles. We have not fulfilled that commandment.

Numbers 29:13-14 And you shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord: thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish. And their meal offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto every bullock of the thirteen bullocks, two tenth deals to each ram of the two rams.

This is the meal offering that always went on top of the burnt offering and it goes right on through that. That is the offerings for the first day. Verse 17 introduces the offerings for the second day, and this continues all the way up to and including verse 34.

If you have enough time on your hands and you care to search this out by counting all of the offerings required by God, you will find that there are more offerings required for the Feast of Tabernacles than all the others **combined**. Remember what I said. The offerings indicate the spiritual aspect of the Feast. There is more required spiritually of the Feast of Tabernacles than all the others combined.

That ought to tell us something about what God expects the Feast of Tabernacles to be spiritually. It should be both a spiritual and a physical Feast whose fruit is the rejoicing of both. If we go to the Feast purely to enjoy, I do not think we are going to have a very good spiritual Feast. If we go to the Feast to really worship the Lord and allow the enjoyment to be the fruit, I think we will have a good Feast. I mean a truly good Feast.

It may be that we would not consider it because our perception of enjoyment tends to be hard on the physical side, but I will tell you this, I think on the authority of God: whether you *feel* it was a good Feast, if you go there to have a good Feast by putting your efforts into the spiritual things, you **are** going to have one whether you *feel* it or not. Feelings are highly variable and what we are looking for is spiritual profit.

What I am talking about here is something that cannot be forced. The rejoicing is the fruit of the right approach and use. I think that the emphasis is clearly on the spiritual.

Let us turn to an example in Nehemiah 8. While we are reading I want you to notice the emphasis on understanding. God does not want mindless observance. The seeking of enjoyment for enjoyment's sake is not what God has in mind for any of His feasts.

Nehemiah 8:1-7 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. [So here we are at Trumpets at this point in time in this chapter.] And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his

left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up. [Notice the respect that was there, the fear of God, and the respect for His Word.] And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. . . . and the Levites caused the people to understand the law; and the people stood in their place.

I wonder if we could just reflect back for a minute to the sermons I gave on coming out of the world (that were extracted from Matthew 6) where it says that they eye is the light or the window of the body. What is it that gives vision to the mind? It is understanding. Understanding gives light to the mind, and if we do not understand what is going on, what good is it going to be? It will not. Mark that down in your mind. You go to the Feast of Tabernacles (any of God's feasts, but we are heading towards the Feast of Tabernacles now) for understanding.

Nehemiah 8:8-12 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, [they were expounding it] and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha [that means Governor], and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. [Can you imagine that?] Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be you grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

This occasion began on the Feast of Trumpets during the re-establishment and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the wall by those Jews who chose to

emigrate back there from their Babylonian captivity. So, it just seems that there was undoubtedly good reason for the people's emotional response to keeping this particular Feast of Trumpets in this particular location at this particular time under the stresses that they had gone through up to that time and certainly were not over yet.

Nehemiah 8:13-18 And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

"Not since the days of Joshua the son of Nun." Now I take this to mean that they were not kept prior to this time with all the combination of all of the elements in the right proportion. They were obedient in the right place in the right attitude with the right emphasis.

I know what I have said is true because both Kings and Chronicles give us a record of feasts being kept by the Israelites during the period between Joshua and Ezra, but they did not keep them consistently, nor when they did keep them did they always keep them correctly, especially in regard to attitude and purpose in observing them.

You can tell these people were in a very receptive attitude to hear the Word of God and God gave them understanding.

Let us keep advancing through the book here to Isaiah 1. We are advancing through the book up to our time, at least as far as it appears, but actually the time of Isaiah is before what happened in Nehemiah.

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

To whom is he speaking? He is speaking to Israelites there and it is very likely that he is doing it in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 1:11-12 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? says the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

"Get your dirty feet off my carpet," I guess you might say. Were they literally dirty? Probably not. What was wrong here? We get a pretty good indication from Him calling them Sodom and Gomorrah, two of the most sinful places that ever existed on the face of the earth.

Isaiah 1:13-17 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me [Their prayers did not mean a thing to God]; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

This was spoken about one hundred years before the Jews went into captivity to Babylon. There is no reason to believe that just because God says "your new moons" or "your feasts" that they were not the ones He appointed, at least in terms of the time that they were being kept. Because He could rightly call them "yours" because their keeping of them was so abominable it bore no reference to His intent and His command for them to observe them. These people were completely out of sync with His character, as the list of their sins show.

We could go on further because He called the giving of their offerings which were part of the spiritual aspect of keeping the Feast as being vain. That means useless. And trampling in His courts, treading in His house, their prayers were an abomination. Their keeping of the Feast made Him weary. God had "had it up to here," we might say, with them.

I think that there is no doubt that they were going through the motions but their attitude in keeping the feasts combined with the conduct in daily life did not even come close to what God wanted and therein was the problem.

We are going to leave this and go to the book of Amos. Remember Isaiah was about one hundred years before Judah went into captivity and during that one hundred years Judah had at least one really good king. That was Josiah and he restored the worship of God. That is how I know that they kept the feasts and it is very likely that they were keeping them at the time of Isaiah too.

The book of Amos is written/spoken by a Jew, but he spoke it to Israel.

Amos 5:21-23 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies [smell the offerings, either the incense offering or the burnt offerings]. Though you offer me burnt offerings and your meal offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take you away from Me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols.

This was spoken about, I would say, forty years or so before Isaiah, at least that much. I do not know whether this involved God's feast days, but the chapter, when you read the whole thing in its context, seems to indicate that God might have accepted whatever it was that they were keeping and their offerings if everything else were okay. They seemed to be, whatever it was they were keeping, at least somewhat patterned after God's, but my strongest feeling about this is that they were not God's feasts because Israel went down the tubes long before Judah did, even though Judah ended up lower according to Ezekiel. "You've done worse than Israel did."

But this occurred after Jeroboam I was king and you will read there in II Kings that Jeroboam was the one who changed the feasts in the seventh month and he put it in the eighth month. He did away with Sabbath worship and I think what he did is that he copied the pattern, but he had them observed at different times so that the people then would be attending the feast at different times than the Jews and they would not be wanting to go down to Judah, down to Jerusalem to keep the holy days.

When we read the chapter you will find again it is not against the feasts *per se* that He is railing against here, but the attitude, the character, and the conduct of the people keeping them that receives the brunt of His anger. Whether or not 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 times.

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. We are going to search this out with a bit more detail in the hope that it will help us to keep the feast a little bit better.

Amos 5:1-3 Hear you this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise; she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God: The city that went out by a thousand shall leave a hundred, and that which went forth by a hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel.

This chapter begins with a funeral dirge. It was a song. It was a lament that Amos sang before these people. What he sang there had not occurred yet, but it is sung in the past tense as though it had already happened. I want you to get that because it sets part of the tone for the chapter and what we have here is a listing of why Israel's fate (if I can put it that way), was already sealed. God was just waiting for the time to bring it to pass and I am sure if He wanted to see if they really would do anything. So it is read in the past tense.

Well, they did not do anything. They never repented and forty years later Assyria came down and they defeated Israel and took them off into captivity and the words of Amos were fulfilled.

Amos 5:4-15 For thus said the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek you Me, and you shall live. But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba. For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek the Lord, and you 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. You who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek Him that makes the seven stars and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night. That calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the face of the earth. The Lord is His name; that strengthens the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress. They hate him that rebukes in the gate, and they abhor him that speaks uprightly. For as much therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and you take from him burdens of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins. They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that you may live. And so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate; it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

The first element central to understanding this section is the word "seek." It appears four times - three in relation to God Himself and one in relation to seeking good.

The second important element is the listing of their sins. Every one of them is what we would call "social sins." The poor are mentioned twice. Here "poor" does not mean a person without money at all. Maybe they do and maybe they do not have any money. In this social context it means weak, the defenseless, those who have no clout, those who have no political pull, those who are not part of a clique, business or political. What we have here is a matter of the strong taking advantage of the weak.

He mentions other sins that afflict: bribery, the rejection of fair judgments in the courts, those of having truth ridiculed and their testimony being unacceptable. So we see also a corrupt court system. But undoubtedly the most important element, the centerpiece of this whole chapter, is the mention of Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal. That is all in verse 5. They were mentioned because that is where they were holding the feasts. Do not seek Bethel, seek God. Do not seek Beersheba, seek God. Do not seek Gilgal, seek God. Is there a clue there that He is telling them that when they go there He will not be there? I think a pretty strong clue.

The mention of those cities has to do with why He will not be there. There is something about those cities that is important to their understanding. So do not go there. Seek God instead.

Now the rest of the information in the chapter is telling why God is not there; why what they are doing is unacceptable to Him and what He is going to do about it. Why specifically mention Bethel, other than they were holding feasts there? There was a reason they chose Bethel as a feast site. Why did they not go to Bethshea? Or why did they not go to Dan? Why did they not go to Meggido, Jezreel, nice areas, but instead they chose to have the feasts in Bethel, in Gilgal, and in Beersheba?

The reason was because those three cities were shrines. They were shrine cities that were very important to the history of Israel. Significant things took place in those cities, especially those things that were significant in terms of worshipping God - important to religion.

So why not have a feast at a place that was important in Israel's past where something spiritual occurred and it occurred to somebody as significant in the history of Israel? Bethel was important in the life of Jacob and Jacob was one of the patriarchs of Israel. I want you to turn with me back to Genesis 28. I have to read more than usual here because we are looking at something historical rather than just pulling a principle out.

Genesis 28:10-22 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God 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 whereon you liest, to you will I give it, and to your seed; and your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places whither you goest, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. [And incidentally that is what Bethel means—house of God.] And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God. And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto you.

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

Genesis 35:7 And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel; because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

Genesis 35:9-10 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. And he called his name Israel.

Genesis 35:13 And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.

Genesis 35:15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

On the first occasion that Jacob went to Bethel he was fleeing for his life. He had just pulled that dirty deed on Esau, taking advantage of Esau's weakness. He got the birthright and the blessing and Esau was rip-roaring angry and wanted to kill his brother and so Jacob was fleeing for his life when he came across Bethel. I do not know whether Jacob knew it at the time, whether Isaac had ever told him about the strange circumstances of their birth, but God had made His choice of the twins - Jacob, from the very beginning.

Bethel is significant not merely because God appeared to be dwelling there, but because of what happened to Jacob there. Jacob came to Bethel as a man

with a past, a bad past, a rotten past. He was a sneaking, deceitful, conniving, grasping person, a great sinner.

Bethel represents Jacob's calling. It was the turning point of his life. So significant was the impact of his calling there that this conniving, grasping man said he was going to tithe! This was the man who wanted to grab everything and pull it into himself, but already a change was beginning to take place within him. Undoubtedly, some of the instruction of his father and grandfather suddenly came into his mind and God was much more real to him now than He had ever been before and he left there convinced that God was going to be with him.

Jacob was far from perfect. He still had a great deal of the old nature within him. He had a lot to learn and I believe that twenty-one years later he was on his way back. He had just had a reconciliation with Esau another chapter before this when God told him to go to Bethel again. And when he got to Bethel the second time, God spoke to him, He appeared to him, and He changed his name.

Now what this was, it was confirmation that Jacob was growing, he was overcoming, he was growing to the stature of the kind of man that God wanted him to be. Very significant to Jacob, one of the fathers of Israel and it of course became important to the Israelites.

What is Bethel then noted for? It is noted for transformation, meeting with God, and a person changes because of meeting with God. So Bethel then became associated in the Israelites minds as a place of renewal, a place of reorientation, of transformation that comes from God working through a person.

That helps us to understand why Bethel is named there in Amos 5. God is asking, "Why aren't you Israelites being transformed in the conduct of your life when you keep the feasts?" That is what God expected. That when a person goes to keep His feast, transformation takes place. It does not mean that there is some great sudden alteration in a person's life, but there is enough experience there that it fills the person at least with resolve to overcome.

He says, "You people go to Bethel and you keep the feast, but no transformation occurs." And so He asks, "Are you going there to seek God, or are you going there to seek enjoyment and having a good time?" One of the primary evidences that God is making a difference in a person's life, that a transformation is taking place, is that he loves God's law. The carnal mind is at enmity against God for it is not subject to the law of God, but if a transformation is taking place, the attitude toward the law of God changes, and the person begins to see it in an entirely different light.

Look what happened to Jacob. From a grasping, conniving man, he suddenly decides he is going to give God a tithe. His attitude toward the tithing law changed. His attitude toward money was changed. He was still very vigorous in the accumulation of it, but a lot of the grasping and conniving was leaving from him. So there was a change in attitude toward law.

You look back there at Amos 5 and what do we see? We see people breaking laws all over the place, especially those things that had to do with the treatment of a brother, those things that had to do with the operations of the courts. It was virtually impossible to get a fair trial in Israel in those days. I am sure that they had a lot of lawyers then who were playing semantical games with words, like we see going on in the United States here today, shaving the truth, and shaving the meanings of words so that all of their sin would somehow be hidden.

So these people were going to the feasts and they were returning to their homes still ungoverned by God's truth. But when Jacob met God, his life began changing immediately. So these people's lives should have changed according to the dictates, principles, and examples of God's Word. They should have come home singing and exemplifying, "Oh how love I your law. It is ever with me. It is my meditation all the day." But they were not.

I think that we can reach some sort of a conclusion here that these people had turned the Bethel feasts into nothing more than a vacation. God's command, "Do not seek Bethel, seek Me, seek the Lord and live." The Bethel approach signifies death, not life. God is the God of the living.

Now, what about Beersheba? Beersheba played a role in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though the events in each case were a little bit

different, each one had something significant occur to their lives in those places and maybe we will find this important to some of the sermons that I have been giving recently.

Let us go to Genesis 21. In one sense this is the most insignificant of the three examples that I am going to give you and it is one that occurred to Abraham.

Genesis 21:22-24 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captains of his host spoke unto Abraham, saying, God is with you in all that you do. Now therefore swear unto me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but according to the kindness that I have done unto you, you shall do unto me, and to the land wherein you have sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear.

They bargained back and forth there awhile, but it is interesting here that a pagan king utters the words that become central to what Beersheba came to represent to the Israelites. "[I] am with you in all that you do." This pagan king recognized that Abraham was a different kind of man and he acknowledged Abraham's godliness by saying that the Lord is with you in all that you do. Abraham's life was one that reflected godliness.

The central figure in this next set of verses is Isaac.

Genesis 26:23-25 And he went up from thence to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you, and will bless you, and multiply your seed for My servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Here we have Isaac. In this instance, it was God Himself who appeared and uttered an assurance needful to him at that time, and it is needful for us too. We need to know that God is with us in what we do. We need to believe that God is with us or it is going to be awfully difficult to trust Him.

In chapter 46 this one happened to Jacob, but this one in a way reflects back on Isaac because in the earlier part of chapter 26 Isaac was in a quandary about what to do about something and he was thinking about going down to Egypt and God stopped him from going there. We know what happened to Abraham there. God let him go down there and he got into a bushel of trouble. But in this case God intervened and He stopped Isaac from going there and He reoriented him and said, Instead go to Beersheba, which is where he went. And there He appeared to him to reassure him that he had done the right thing.

Genesis 46:1-3 And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. [You can already see that by the time of Jacob, Beersheba is a place of importance within the family of Israel.] And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I." And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation:"

Jacob was on his way to meet with Joseph and I am sure that he had second thoughts about going there because he knew what happened to Isaac when he went there and he knew what kind of a land Egypt was and he was not all that sure that was a good move for him to go there. It is interesting that he went to Beersheba apparently because he felt that there would be some contact with God in that place, and sure enough God appeared to him in a vision.

So three patriarchs received the assurance of the companionship of God. What might have been the reaction of the Israelites when Amos said unto them, "*Don't* cross into Beersheba, this holy place"? I am sure that it caused them to scoff. It might have caused some of them to wonder what Amos was driving at.

But it is a pastor's responsibility, and that is what Amos was, to not only try to help build people's trust in God, but from time to time to sow doubt about their condition or their standing before God because it is very easy for us to assume that everything is okay in our relationship with God.

Let me give you an example. In Paul's writings there were times when he just about battered the opposition's positions on something, and other times he asks questions, and usually preceded by, or followed by, some well-placed and incisive questions, and with good solid logical reason. In other words, Paul varied the approach of his teaching. It was not always given in exactly the same manner all the time. It depended upon the circumstance.

That is what Amos has done here. He has suddenly stuck a knife, as it were, into the thinking apparatus of these people by asking them, or telling them, actually commanding them, "Do not cross over into this holy place, Beersheba." Why? Well, let us ask a question. Is it possible, thinking about what Beersheba is noted for, that these people had assumed that God was with them in all they did given the evidence of their sinfulness, even as they were keeping a festival in Beersheba? This was something that they needed to think about.

These things were uttered to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob. All was well between them and God, but all was not well between Israel and God. The essence of the "God is with you" promise is that all is well and that there is peace between them. We can easily see from chapter 5 that there was not peace on God's side.

So the thinking of the Israelites was an assumption. It was a presumption that everything was okay all the while they were committing the sins that were listed there in the center part of the chapter. Everything was not well. When things are well, there is no barrier between God and the person. There is no constraint. All is well and harmony reigns. When such a thing occurs two can walk together because they have an understanding. In fact, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had a covenant, but these people Amos had every right to believe were on very shaky ground.

We will not look at it but in Amos 5:6, Amos mentions the fire of judgment, God's judgment. It is a veiled reference to the Day of the Lord. Then in verse 18 he tells them something pretty shocking and that I want you to see. -

Amos 5:18 Woe unto you [look at how these people thought of themselves] that desire the day of the Lord! [They felt so confident

with their standing with God they could not wait for the day of the Lord because they thought they were so righteous, so good, they were going to sail right through it. They were on shaky ground - [presumption unlimited here.] To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.

Amos said, "Hey, you had better rethink your position." "God is not with you," is what he is saying. Very interesting because it reveals that they did not really know the God that they claimed to be walking with. Look at verse 14 through 16. This is a prelude to verse 18.

Amos 5:14-16 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; [What did he say in verse 18? If things continued as they were, they were going to die. It is a day of darkness, not light] and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken. [They thought that God was with them.] Hate the evil, and love the good, [it was the other way around] and establish judgment in the gate; it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skillful of lamentation to wailing.

Amos was making a very strong point by drawing their attention three times to the sovereign, omnipotent God of armies who is so far above us He is out of sight, as the saying goes, and these complacent people might choose to believe that they were walking with God, but the real question to ask is, Did this great God want to walk with them the way that they were? Well Amos tells us, No.

Adam would have happily remained in the Garden of Eden provided he could hide and not be exposed to the holiness of God. But God knew such a condition could not continue because it would not be any good for Adam. Complacency has been telling these people in Amos that when the Day of the Lord arrived, God would side with them and it would be a day of great glory for them. Do you know what we call these people today? Laodiceans.

That is why I spent so much time on it. They said to themselves, "We are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." God was saying through Amos, "You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." He was not walking with them. They had deceived themselves through self-righteousness.

Remember all of this is within the context of the Feast. They were going to face wailing and disaster. They thought that they were going to breeze right through. So the instruction to them is, "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as you have spoken" (Amos 5:14).

God is telling them to seek holiness, and that is not just a way of life or a rule of life, but in this context the way that God put it, it is a means of life, eternal life. Did not the rich, young ruler ask Jesus, "What must I do to have life?" And Jesus said, "Obey God." I am paraphrasing, but that is what He said.

Let us jump to Gilgal. Gilgal has a storied history with Israel and I will just give you the scriptures because I do not want to take us overtime here. Gilgal's position was established in Joshua 5 through 14.

It was Gilgal that Israel first came to when they came out of the wilderness. They crossed the Jordan and they went to Gilgal. It was in Gilgal that they were circumcised because all those were uncircumcised during the wilderness journey. It was there that they entered into the covenant again, reconfirmed it, and in effect became the nation of God. It was there that they kept Passover for the first time in the land. It was there that they ate the fruit of the land.

Chapters 9, 10, and 14 of Joshua show that it was from there that Joshua launched his military attacks against the people of the land in order to secure it for Israelite habitation. And I Samuel 11:14-15 reveals that it was in Gilgal that Saul, Israel's first king, was confirmed as king.

In Israelite history, Gilgal then came to be the shrine that proclaimed inheritance and possession of the land. But again, Amos hit them with another sharply honed thunderbolt because he says in Amos 5:5 that Gilgal

shall surely go into captivity, into exile. In Amos 5:27, Amos proclaims that Israel will go into captivity beyond Damascus. In other words, even though they were observing a festival in the shrine that commemorated possession of the land, they were going to lose the land and be taken into captivity.

It is from this knowledge then that we can begin to understand the attitude that Amos was confronting. There is no doubt that generally apathy or complacency was the overriding issue. It is a generalization of the problem. But specifically the problem was much more narrow.

The Bethel problem, as Amos pointed out, was that they were mistaken in believing that God was in this place and therefore their hope for life was a hollow one because He was not there. The Beersheba problem was that they assumed that God was with them, but He was not walking with them. There was a barrier between them and God. They should have been asking whether God was pleased to walk with them, but their pride was almost boundless.

The Gilgal problem revolves around their assumption that because they were in the land and in possession of it, they had it made. That group-think thing again - "The temple, the temple of the Lord." "Oh, I'm in the church and, therefore, I have it made."

It involves what the Protestants today call the doctrine of eternal security and it is very interesting. The context shows in Amos 5:21-23 that they had a wealth of religion. They had festivals. They had sacrifice. They had music. The Israelites went in for religion in a big way and I think that they probably went after it wholeheartedly and it was very likely emotionally satisfying when they went to these feasts.

But what good is it if it does not get through to God? Now brethren, we should be assured that we are going to make it into God's Kingdom on the strength of God's ability to save us, that He can prepare us for that event. So what is the problem here?

Amos 5:24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Modern translations may change the word *judgment* into *justice*. Let *justice* and righteousness roll down. There is a clever play on words here because Gilgal means *rolling*. The people attended the festivals in Gilgal, but when they returned home, justice and righteousness failed to roll out into their everyday life. They went on with life as they had been before. There was no change. But they had a good time, singing, dancing, making sacrifices, indicating eating meals together, traveling there. They were just certain that everything was okay.

Now very briefly, justice is the fruit of righteousness, and when they are linked in the Bible like they are here, justice stands for correct moral and ethical practice, and righteousness stands for the cultivation of correct moral principle. Justice is external, righteousness is internal. The change begins inside.

But if there is a real change there, it will show in the conduct outside. So God gave them the evidence from their social life that nothing was changing. Justice was not rolling out from these people and the trouble was that the people kept their religion in a box with no way for it to be communicated into daily life. Going to Gilgal was just like going to a movie. It was like going to a stage play where the people were entertained. They were there. They enjoyed it. But life never changed. It may as well have been a vacation.

Now you put the three of these things together, Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal, and I think that you will understand that as far as God is concerned our relationship with Him is not a game to Him. He has revealed Himself to us for the purpose of creating His image in us and we are required to use our free moral agency in order to allow Him to work with us to produce what it is that He wants. He has ordained, created, appointed the feasts to be major events where something of this nature can be concentrated upon.

The Feast of Tabernacles is the prime place, the environment - it is almost like a Garden of Eden - where our relationship with God can be enhanced more than at any other time during the year. There is the right fellowship. There is the right circumstance. There is spiritual food every day, sometimes twice a day. There is all the opportunity for eight days, at least, to talk about God, talk about His Word, communicate the blessings with gratitude to one

another. The things that God has done in His life for you in behalf of the church. The things that are taking place that involve His activities in terms of miracles, correction, and instruction in righteousness. It is the high time of the year, every year.

The church exists to serve Him in witnessing the gospel to the world by our lives, and in preaching too, and we cannot witness well without preparation, and the festival plays a very important part in this. So let us resolve to make sure that we go to this year's Feast of Tabernacles with the Spirit having priority in our minds and let rejoicing be its fruit.

I do not think that we should say that we cannot seek any rejoicing. I do not mean that at all. But it is very easy in that circumstance to allow rejoicing to be the thing that dominates our time and attention at the Feast. The Feast is not a vacation. The Feast is not a gospel concert. It is not a social tea party or a substitute for Christmas, or a Christmas shopping binge. And even though some element of each of these may accompany it, do not let these things dominate. Make sure that the Feast is a springboard for significant positive change.