

Amos (Part Eight)

Amos 5:1-6

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Let us get back to the book of Amos. I started the last time by telling you about receiving this photograph of a family from another church area. It was a photograph of a family in which I knew that some adultery had taken place, and there was one of the children in that group that did not look exactly the same as the rest of the family. And I used that to illustrate what God found objectionable in chapter 4 of Amos. And that is that whenever He looked at Israel, He did not see a reflection of Himself. And I am sure that the parents in this family, you know, the photograph, that they could look at their children and they could see that one of the children, in a sense, stuck out like a sore thumb because it did not look quite like the other ones.

And so that is what God is saying here. He said that He had sworn by His holiness. And when He looked at the children of Israel, they were children of corruption. The implication is, when you begin to look in other books of the Bible; I went back to the book of Isaiah and showed you how Isaiah used the same kind of illustration in the first chapter, only there he called them children of corruption. And I explained to you how the Bible uses the word child or son, not necessarily in the sense of natural descent, but also in the sense of showing the characteristics of. Thus, the Bible has people that are called sons of Belial. Well, there was no real Belial in that sense, but they showed the characteristics of Belial, which means a son of profanity or a son of foolishness or a son of corruption. So these people were showing those kind of characteristics.

Isaiah showed that the ox and the ass dumbly obey, and they exhibit more of a sense of appreciation than the children of Israel who show unthinkable rebellion against their Creator. And if we look at it in the right way, against their Father. So that if paternity is revealed by character, then God has to scratch His head and say, "Who is this that I'm looking at?" when He looks at Israel. "Am I really the Father here? Are they showing characteristics of My holiness?"

Then I went back into the New Testament in I Corinthians 8 and began to tie that in with Amos the fourth chapter, showing that there is demonism involved here, that there are demons behind the idols. He is talking about Baal, though Baal for all practical purposes, when you were looking at it, was nothing more than a leering statue. They were really demons who were involved in this false religion. And so we then tied together with that John the eighth chapter, where Jesus called the Jews of His day sons of Satan. They were sons of the Devil.

They were showing characteristics of Satan, and He said that the works of their father they wanted to do. They were showing his characteristics, and they wanted to do them. They were not like Abraham who showed the characteristics of God. And when God came into Abraham's presence, Abraham did not do the things that those Jews were doing. They were picking up rocks, getting ready to kill Christ. They already had it in their heart to do it. Well, Abraham never did anything like that.

So I want you to understand this principle about "sons of." See, depending upon the context it may not mean natural descent. It may really mean showing the characteristics of whatever the person is a son of. But when God looked at Israel, He did not see His holiness. He did not see His characteristics.

Then we found beginning in verse 6 that while God was showing Israel that they were busy in their worship at Bethel and Gilgal, you know, He told them in verse 4, come to Bethel and transgress, and to Gilgal and multiply your transgressions. And they have been very busy in their religion while God, beginning in verse 6, shows that He has been very busy as well. He has not been just sitting around twiddling His thumbs. That He withheld the rain, and He caused it to rain upon one city and not on another and so that there was drought in the land.

Verse 9, He blasted them with blight and mildew. And of course, He was doing all that in an effort to try to get the people to come to their senses and to repent and turn to Him, to seek Him. Of course, we can look back on history and understand that they did not do that. But God was working. He was directing. He was active in the management of His creation, and He was

striving to bring about what He wanted to occur. But they were not responding, and it shows how far that they were from Him.

Now, we should understand from that that God is actively working in our lives, and when things occur, we need to ask ourselves, why is this happening? Is there something that needs to be corrected? Is there something that I need to be tested upon? Is there something here that I need to learn in order to improve my witness of God so that I become more like Him and that I have His holiness? And it certainly sort of gives me a very strong indication that nothing happens by accident in our lives.

I showed you how that Christ showed in Matthew the tenth chapter where He said that not one sparrow falls beyond the will of God. And certainly we are worth a great deal more than a sparrow. And if God takes note of a sparrow and He determines that, yes, I am going to allow this sparrow to die, then how much more interested and concerned is He in our life? Well, much, much more! We are worth more than they are by a great deal. And then we began to get upon the things concerning Bethel and Gilgal and why they were important to the context of what Amos is writing here.

Now, just to review—that Bethel is associated with Jacob. Actually, just a sort of a little prelude to this, all three of these cities are associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, either singly or all three of them. Now, Bethel was especially associated with Jacob, and it was in Bethel that Jacob apparently just wandered into when he was fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau. And he lay down and went to sleep, and during the night he had a dream. And when he woke up, he anointed the pillow, the stone that he was using as a pillow. And he said that God is in this place, and he named the place Bethel, you see, the house of God or God is in this place.

It is important for more than that though because that proved to be a turning point in Jacob's life. (Did we go through this? We did. I was seeing some blank faces out there, and I was beginning to wonder whether we had actually gone into it, so I was going to skip over going to the scriptures.) But I really think I ought to go to the scriptures. So let us go back to Genesis, the twenty-eighth chapter, beginning in verse 10.

Genesis 28:10-15 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. [It does not seem to have been any particular direction that he felt that he was taking. It is likely though that God was involved and really led him to that place.] And he took one of the stones of that place and he put it at his head, and went to sleep. 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 to your descendants."

Now, the important thing here, at least at the beginning of this, is that God shows that He is in this place. That becomes a little bit more important as we get into the book of Amos because the place became a shrine. Like today, a lot of Catholics go to Lourdes because something significant took place in the history of the Catholic Church there. And because of the significance of that place, people go there, and they go there with a definite reason in mind. Is it not usually to get something from God, usually a healing or something of that nature? And so people make a pilgrimage.

Well, that is what happened here. That because Jacob had this very significant occurrence, and it was not just the dream, the dream was enough by itself maybe, but it proved to be a turning point in his life because Jacob came there fleeing for his life. That is what was on his mind because Esau had murderous intent. And so here was Jacob seemingly running away from everything that he held dear. He was running away from father and mother. He was running away from what he had been told by Abraham and Isaac was going to be a land that he and his descendants were going to inherit. And here he was going away for his life. He did not know whether he would ever be back. There was no promise of a future or anything of that nature.

And suddenly, boom! he has this arresting experience. You know, the God of creation appears to him, and he sees this ladder. Angels are going up and down, and he was impressed, and he said, wow, you know, God is in this place. And so then he makes a vow. It is important. He says,

Genesis 28:15 "Behold [God says], I am with you, and will keep you [see, guard and protect] 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."

Genesis 28:20-22 Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

So it was a significant thing that occurred to Jacob here because he came a homeless wanderer with an uncertain future. And when he left, you see, he had a future before him, and he had the promise of God that he was going to come back to the land that he thought that he was giving up and running from.

In Genesis 35, quite a number of years have passed now, and Jacob is coming back to the land, a fairly wealthy man. He comes through Bethel again, beginning in verse 1.

Genesis 35:1-2 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; 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, and purify yourselves and change your garments."

What we are beginning to see here is a radical change in Jacob's outlook on life. I believe that what we are seeing here is Jacob's conversion, that all of

these experiences that occurred up until this time were preparation for his actual, literal conversion from a man who was totally and completely physically-oriented to one who is going to be spiritually-oriented in his life.

God then directs him back to the place where they had the encounter before, and Jacob goes and does it.

Genesis 35:9 Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob;. . . but Israel shall be your name."

He changes his name, which is another significant thing. It indicates a new man is appearing. That is why I say that what it looks like here is Jacob's conversion. The change of names, just like the change of Saul's name to Paul indicated his conversion. And so God then reiterates the promise to Jacob, or Israel, and tells him to be fruitful and multiply. And the land again would come to him in verse 12.

Genesis 35:14-15 So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

So we find him again, a man whose outlook on life is completely changed as a result of his encounter with God. And so we find then a general principle arising in regard to Bethel and what significance it had in the mind of a religious Israelite.

Even as in the mind of a religious Catholic Lourdes has a certain association, well, Bethel had a certain association in the mind of a religious Israelite. And that is, it was the place where a person goes to be renewed. It is a place where a person goes to have his life reoriented from one without a future to one with a great future, from one without prosperity to one with prosperity. And it was there, you see, that Jacob encountered the life-giving presence of God. And so that became associated in the Israelites minds, and Bethel became important in regard to that.

Now the next place is Beersheba. There are three shrines. The second one is Beersheba. Now Beersheba is associated with all three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Genesis 21 we find the association with Abraham.

Genesis 21:22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of the army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do."

Now, I really do not believe that we need to go a great deal further in regard to Abraham because this becomes the pivotal point as far as association that the Israelite would have in mind as far as Beersheba was concerned. God is with you in all that you do. Now, it is interesting that Abraham heard that from a pagan king, that this pagan king had eyes and ears, and he was able to think and see and hear, and he observed what was going on in Abraham's life. And he came to the conclusion that this was a man that was in contact with God. And so he made this declaration at Beersheba.

Genesis 21:33 Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.

In chapter 26, verse 23, now here we are dealing with Isaac. Isaac had many problems with people who envied him. They envied his wealth. I am sure that they envied his lifestyle. I am sure that they envied at least what appeared to them to be virtually a trouble-free life. But these people who envied him gave him a lot of trouble. Isaac was apparently a very peaceful man, and I think his name means something happy, laughing. He was a pleasant and happy individual and one who would be easy to get along with. But people found it hard to get along with this nice man.

Genesis 26:20-22 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours."

It was not theirs; it was Isaac's well. He just backed off, and he went and dug another well somewhere else. You know, he was not there to resist evil. He just moved to another place, and God blessed him. Where Isaac dug wells, there was water.

In verse 21, they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one, see, and so Isaac would move somewhere else, and he would sink a well down, and there would be water there.

Genesis 26:22 He moved from there [to Beersheba] and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it.

Genesis 26:24 And the Lord appeared to him on the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

Here we have Abraham and now Isaac and a very similar occurrence that God states in that place in Beersheba that He was with them.

And now in Genesis the forty-sixth chapter, we get to Jacob, and in the story of Jacob's life, he is on his way to Egypt answering the summons of his long-lost son Joseph.

Genesis 46:1 So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

And you see already there was a kind of a reverence or respect for that area because Jacob knew of his family's history. And undoubtedly Isaac had told Jacob what occurred there both in his own life and also in Abraham's life as well.

Genesis 46:2 Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."

So "I will go with you." Now, here comes the key: each one of them was assured of the companionship of God. So Beersheba came to represent

fellowship with God. Bethel was a place of renewing and reorientation, getting your life straightened out, heading off in the right direction. And Beersheba was the shrine you went to if you wanted to be assured of having fellowship with God, that God would be with you wherever you went.

It is interesting. Amos tells the people, do not go there. He says, do not go to Bethel. I mean, he says it sarcastically, but the implication is very clear. He says, yeah, go ahead to Bethel. But you know what he meant? That is not going to do you any good. Yeah, go ahead, go ahead to Gilgal. If you know what he really meant, what good is it going to do for you to go there?

Gilgal, let us look a little more closely at that. This has a very interesting history a little bit later than the history of Bethel and Beersheba. Let us go to Joshua the fourth chapter, verse 19.

Joshua 4:19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

Gilgal was the first place that Israel camped inside their inheritance. When they crossed the Jordan, they set up their first camp at Gilgal, and it was at Gilgal that they set up the monument consisting of those 12 stones. Remember, they brought out of the land of wandering 12 stones that became a monument of their wandering and the monument was established in Gilgal.

Now in chapter 5, beginning in verse 2.

Joshua 5:2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourselves, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time."

Now, this does not mean that this is the second time they are circumcised. It means it is the second time since they left Egypt because they were not circumcising in Egypt. And so they began to circumcise in the wilderness. But once they got on the move, they did not circumcise their male boys and so all those who were born in the wilderness were not circumcised.

Joshua 5:3-5 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 who were born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised.

Well, circumcision was the seal, the affirmation of the covenant, even as today baptism is the parallel, the symbol, the equal of circumcision. And so it shows that you have entered into this relationship with God. So what they were doing here was that they were confirming their faith in God as the covenant God. They were carrying through with their part, the initial part of their agreement, even as we carry through with baptism.

Joshua 5:10-12 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten of the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

That occurred at Gilgal as well. So it was at Gilgal that they first ate the produce of their inheritance, and also the manna stopped falling at Gilgal. Now something is beginning to take place here. It has something to do with a spiritual, a religious idea, something to do with the covenant and the promise that God made.

Now we could continue to build this out because Gilgal was the site of a great deal that had to do with the inheritance of the land. In chapter 9, beginning in verse 6, we find that Gilgal is the headquarters of Joshua's campaigns into the land. You can follow that through in chapter 9, verse 6, chapter 10, verses 6 through 9. And then again in chapter 10, verse 15, and chapter 10, verses 40 through 43. This was the staging area for the conquest of the land.

In I Samuel 11:14-15, Saul was confirmed as king in Gilgal. Now, that was especially important to Israel, the ten northern tribes, because they felt that they had by natural descent, I guess you would say, a closer relationship with Saul than they did with David. And so some of the natural antipathy toward the Jews would tend to come out that way, at least in the northern ten tribes. So Gilgal was important to them in that regard, that Israel's first king, Saul, was confirmed there. And now Gilgal then became associated in the Israelites' mind as the place of inheritance and possession of the land.

Now, these equated into something a little bit more practical than that. And that is that Gilgal by transference of the idea of possession and inheritance was the place you went to seek God for stability and security because it was in this area of Gilgal that God began to literally fulfill His promise within the land.

Back to the book of Amos, chapter 5, and we will pick it up in verse 1.

Amos 5:1-5 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 [Eternal] 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." 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."

What these first five verses are is a lamentation. It is a dirge, a funeral dirge. I do not know whether Amos actually sang it to the people. It is more likely that he gave it in poetical form, in a form, in a meter that the Hebrews would customarily use for a dirge. So whether he actually sang it or not, they would recognize it as a dirge, a lamentation, something what one would say over a dead person. Now that tells you something right there.

It was said by Amos not as something that was *going* to occur, but as far as Amos was concerned, it had *already* occurred. Now, it had not literally yet

happened, but he said it as though he was positive it was going to occur. So we have a death. Now, how did that death come about? Well, it came about according to verses 2 and 3 by military decimation. Of course, we know that that is exactly the way it occurred because Assyria came down in 721 through 718, and they decimated Israel to the extent that they shipped all of the people out, all of those who were left, shipped them off to foreign lands and replaced the people of Israel with people of other nations.

And so then Israel is pictured as a virgin. Now, there is a reason for doing that. Israel was not really spiritually a virgin. God very frequently calls Israel an adulterer or a harlot or a fornicator, whatever happens to fit the context. And so literally, Israel was not a virgin, but yet He uses the word virgin because Israel is being cut off seemingly in the bloom of youth when it had not ever seemingly had an opportunity to produce what it could have produced. And you see, in a literal family that would be children, a happy marriage and children.

But in the case of Israel, even though they were surrounded by this luxurious prosperity, remember God, when He looked down, He did not see any of His characteristics there. So the characteristics that He was looking for was not wealth. What He was looking for were personality characteristics, traits of character, and He did not see those things. So He is saying that Israel is somebody who has not lived up to its potential, never had the opportunity to really produce them because they got cut off in the bloom of life.

You have to see this in the light of Bethel, Beersheba, and Gilgal. He says at the end of verse 4, "Seek Me and live;" but do not seek Bethel." Bethel was the place where you go to meet God and you have your life reoriented. Bethel was a place that gave Jacob a great deal of hope. It gave Jacob a future. But Amos is saying for you to go to Bethel is not going to change the future. There is no hope there. There is no life there. You are not going to meet God there. That is what he is telling them.

Now, what about Beersheba? Well, look at verse 2, "She lies forsaken on her land." What did Beersheba represent? It represented companionship with God. Amos is saying there is no need for you to go to that shrine down there in Beersheba, that place where you want to go to have companionship and fellowship with God. He is telling the Israelites, "It's not working. You're

forsaken. God isn't there." Instead, He says, "Israel, you're going to be carried off without ever knowing the joys of marriage, and you have no one to befriend you because God is not with you, and going to Beersheba is not going to help one bit."

I want to just put something into your mind. Is there any way possible that we might be able to connect this with going to the Feast of Tabernacles where we make these annual pilgrimages to places that may not have any particular religious significance to the fellowship with God that we might have, inheritance and possession and stability and security in the land? Are we going to the Feast of Tabernacles with the same idea and attitude on our mind as the Israelites went to Bethel or to Gilgal or to Beersheba? Is it possible that because of the attitudes that we have in our mind regarding the Feast of Tabernacles that we are actually frustrating God's purpose for the Feast?

Why do we keep the Feast? Why do we go there? Is it merely a vacation, a place to go and spend money and have a lot of fun? Or is there something of greater, deeper purpose and meaning? Are we really going there to seek God? Are we going there to learn to fear God, like it says in Deuteronomy 14:22-23?

Why? That is the question that Amos is asking here. Why go there? There is something radically wrong, he tells these people. Is God confined to a place?

What does Gilgal stand for? It stands for possession of the land, inheritance, stability, and security. And so what does verse 3 say? "The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left," and so forth. There is everything pictured there except stability and security.

What we see is this: possession of the land, not possession and inheritance. Amos reaches a conclusion. He says, going to Gilgal is not helping one bit because God is showing me that you are going to be forsaken. Going to Beersheba is not helping one bit because God is showing me you have no companionship with Him. And the same with Bethel, no use going there. There is no life there. He said, I see death in the vision that I have of God.

Now, I think that we can safely assume that in each one of those shrines that the priests who were there preached on the dominant theme of that particular place, even as our ministers preach on the dominant theme of the Feast of Tabernacles when we go there. And I am sure that the average Israelite when he went to those places, he thought of himself as a legitimate partaker of the promises of God. But history shows that they were quite mistaken because in 721 to 718 the proof of the pudding showed very clearly.

If you stop to think about what he is talking about here relative to Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, Bethel-hope; Gilgal-possession, being in the Kingdom of God, and Beersheba-fellowship. Now, these are things that we can have in Christ. Is that not why we seek Christ? Is that not what we want as well?

But obviously hearing and knowing are not enough. I mean, knowing intellectually, hearing about it is not enough. Now, can we be certain that we possess them? Can we be certain that we can possess them in Christ? Because these people did not possess what they thought that they did. Well, yes, we can. Because as we fill in the chapter here, we are going to see that their performance did not match what they knew. I mean, their performance in their life.

Now, God tells us that He will never withdraw from His promises—and that is true. Even though He punished the Israelites by taking them into captivity, His promise continues. That is very evident. And that He has not forgotten about Israel. Even though Israel does not even know who they are, God is going to carry through what He promised in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that writing of history is a lesson to you and me that God does not go back on what He promises. He says, "I will *never* leave you nor forsake you." And so if anybody is going to withdraw from God, it is going to be the human part of the equation. It is not going to be God Himself.

We are going to see as we go on here that the problem has always been the same. It is self-centeredness. You are going to see that evidenced very, very clearly here in just a little bit. An explanation I guess that I have used in John 16:8 many, many times. You know, that He says the Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of sin.

We have to come to the place where we realize that the root of sin lies in men's self-centeredness and their desire to live independent of God. That is what is shown there when Adam and Eve made the choice. They could have been dependent on God through the Tree of Life. They chose independence from God and the choosing of their own way. That is where the root of sin is in all of us.

Now, I think that we need to go back to something that was in Genesis 28 before we go on to Amos 5, verse 6.

Genesis 28:12 Then he dreamed [Jacob did], 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.

There is something that I never noticed before that I noticed today about the ladder. I have always read into that that *men* were ascending and descending. It does not say that. It says that angels were ascending and descending. And the way it always appeared to me is that the ladder represented man having access to or being able to ascend, as it were, to God.

But I have a different outlook on it now because men having access to God is really in effect something that takes place after something else. And this something else fits in with so many other things, so many other illustrations that are given in the Bible regarding God and man's relationship. And that is this: it is *always* God that initiates the relationship, not the other way around. In other words, what I am saying here is that the ladder supplied a means for God, as it were, to descend to man rather than man to ascend to God. It was angels who were going up and down, heavenly creatures, which shows to me that the communication, as it were, began with God and not with the man. In other words, it was the ladder that brought God to Bethel so that God is here. See, He was not there until He descended.

Now, that is only the first part of it. The second part of it is this: when God arrives on the scene, you see, when He descends to communicate with man, He makes a difference in events or a person's life, because that is what happened to Jacob. Things immediately changed in Jacob's life. Now what immediately changed in Jacob's life was his attitude toward things.

Circumstances did not change yet; they *would* change. But Jacob left a man fleeing for his life. When he got to Bethel, the future changed dramatically because God descended to make contact with him and made a difference. A transformation began to take place in Jacob's life.

Now the transformation *began* there. It was *not completed* there. It took many years for it to occur. But it was at Bethel that the transformation began because God reaffirmed in person the promises that He had made to Abraham and Isaac to Jacob.

Then again, you see in chapter 35, Jacob himself changed. So circumstances began to change first, and then Jacob himself changed.

This just fits in with the theme of what Bethel meant to Israel and what it meant to Amos and gives understanding to a great deal of Amos 5. And that is that Bethel represents reorientation. It was the place where the old life became new and the old man became a new man. I want you to get this because this ties in to New Testament teaching. Remember, what God went through in the Old Testament was something that was literally occurring to a human being. In many cases, it physically occurred. With us, it might be a spiritual change that of course breaks out or evidences or manifests itself in other physical changes. But here we look in the Old Testament, and we see the history of a reorientation of a man's life. Now, that is what was taking place in Jacob's life, and it began in Bethel.

Now back to Amos 5. We are going to jump over verses 6 and 7, and we are going to go to verses 8 and 9. Now, every source that I looked into, every reasonably good source, let me put it that way, said that verses 8 and 9 are a verse or a portion of an old hymn, you know, like you sing in a church, a hymn.

Amos 5:8-9 He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into the morning and He makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and He pours them out on the face of the earth; the Lord is His name. He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress.

You can see change: Pleiades to Orion, the shadow of death to morning, dark to day or day to dark, waters on the face of the earth, ruin to the strong, fury to the fortress. We see here a hymn to a transforming God. See, a God who changes things.

Where this hymn came from, nobody knows. But it is speculated; they wonder if maybe it was not a hymn that was sung at the shrine in Bethel because here is the shrine that represents transformation. Is it a possibility? Yes. It is only a speculation, a possibility.

What they are saying is this: that when you meet God, it is going to make a difference in your life. Now, if you are thinking, this sounds very similar to modern evangelical Protestant theology. People talk about the difference that meeting Christ made in their life, how it transformed them, see, how they were changed from one thing to another.

Now, the illustrations that are given, Pleiades and Orion, represent the change of seasons, you see, which constellation will be at a certain part of the sky. So He is not really changing Pleiades or Orion. God made them, and He made them to shift around the heavens because the earth is rotating on its axis and revolving around the sun. And so the star groups are seen in different parts of the skies at different parts of the year.

He turns the shadow of death. It simply means night in this case, into morning. He turns darkness into light. He calls for the waters of the sea. Now, in this case, it means the breaking open of a seawall. It has been breached in a storm or it breaks in or something, and the water comes in, and it floods the land. So there is a very dramatic change here. So what do we see? We begin to see things taking place.

Verse 9 is talking about the change of the strong and the fortress fall before the destroyer. So we see four different kinds of transformations that they are lauding here and attributing to God. It is God who turns the seasons. So He is responsible for weather patterns. He is responsible for winter and summer and spring and fall.

He makes daily changes, daily transformations, darkness to light. In addition to that, He makes occasional changes even in the surface of the earth, as when a shoreline is washed away, a seawall is breached, and what formerly was land becomes sea once again. And then finally, He makes historical changes as well. So they are showing that God is in control and managing things. The historical changes, when the strong become weak.

Now back to verse 7,

Amos 5:7 You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!"

Amos 5:10-12 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; you afflict the just and take bribes; you divert the poor from justice at the gate.

Amos is excoriating these people who come to Bethel in order to be changed, but they leave the place totally unaltered.

And now let us begin to feed that into the Feast of Tabernacles. If we are using a place that we make a pilgrimage to, does the Feast of Tabernacles change us? Does it alter our life? Do we go there to seek God, or do we go there like these people were going to this shrine, and it did not change their lives? You see what we are dealing with here is the people who are religious, but they are also willful, and they refused to be transformed from their lawlessness. Now what good is a religion that leaves your life untransformed, untouched, unchanged?

They go, and they sing, and they enjoy the fellowship, but nothing changes. Justice is perverted, verses 7 and 12, and righteousness is overthrown. Let us look at that, at least just briefly, from a New Testament perspective. Go back with me to II Corinthians 5, verse 17. Let us look at one verse in this regard.

This particular paragraph happens to be about reconciliation to God. Would not one expect transformation where reconciliation with God took place?

II Corinthians 5:15-17 He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves [self-centeredness], but for Him [for God] who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

What is conversion? Conversion is change. Conversion is transformation. It is from the old man to the new man.

Now, ostensibly, these people in Amos's day were going to Bethel to be converted, to change. They were going there to meet God. They were going there to be reconciled to God. They were supposedly going there to give their lives to God. They went there and they sang the hymns, and they enjoyed the fellowship, but nothing changed in their relationship to God as was manifest in their lives, because they went back, and the unrighteousness continued. The perversion of justice continued. We will get to the perversion of justice in a bit because I think you will find it is very interesting. It might not be what you think it is.

So if that occurs, we are saying with our life, not with our mouth but with our life, that a relationship with God really does not make a difference. But God shows us that when He comes on the scene in a person's life, things change.

Now what kind of changes will take place? Well, it would seem to me that the very first change that ought to be evident is that the changed person will love God's law because that is what he has been breaking. That is what necessitates the reconciliation. And so that to me would be the first manifestation that the person really had encountered God at the shrine and that he was becoming a changed person.

But we can see in verses 7 and 12 that they resented justice in the courts, you see, in the gates, that they did not want either honest judges or honest witnesses, as verse 10 shows. "They hate the one who rebukes at the gate."

That is, the honest judge. "They abhor the one who speaks uprightly," that is, the witness who tells the truth.

But the major issue here is not social justice. That is what the world tends to think. It is an issue, but that is merely the fruit or the effect. You see, what God was after was that these people would allow their lives to be governed by truth. If they would, everything else would change. But that is what they would not permit.

You see, they would go to Bethel, and they would have a good time. I am sure that they enjoyed some sort of a religious experience while they were there, but they came away unchanged because they were unwilling to let the truth of God rule, dominate in their lives. So that was the real problem. That was the heart and core of it. If they had gotten to the heart and core, then social justice inside the nation would have changed. There would have been righteousness on the streets and justice in the courts.

And so what Amos is saying to these people back here that God is not just a God to be admired. These people really had no relationship with Him even though they thought they did. That is the frightening part of it.

Amos 5:11-12 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.

Just remember, we are going to come to five things that he is addressing here.

The first one is that they really did not have a relationship with God. The second one that he is jumping on here is their relationship with other people. Now again, the word poor, it means one who is without resources. It does not necessarily mean destitute. It just simply in modern terminology means the little man. It means somebody who has nothing with which to fight back. They could not resist the rich because they had all the power on their side. They could get the high-powered lawyers, and they could bribe the judges. They had everything going in their way. And so the poor, the little man, the little farmer who had a couple of acres of ground and a couple of cattle and a few sheep, those kind of people could be treated with impunity.

Now, this tax or this tribute, tribute is actually a better word than the word tax because it implies something that is imposed on someone in two ways. It can be both legal, and it can be very, very unfair. It is kind of like a two-edged sword. It is not easily seen here. But what we are talking about, what Amos is talking about here was an early form of what we call today a protection racket where a fee, a tax, a little bit of tribute you pay to the ward boss, you are protected. But what made it worse was that the ward bosses had made it legal. I mean, that is how bad things had gotten; that they could legally impose tribute on the sharecroppers. We will see more about that just a little bit, more about that later where it had actually gotten to the place where the wealthy had taken over the land through this tax that the farmer was unable to pay anymore. And so the farmer then ended up paying, working on what used to be his own land, but now belonged to somebody else that was taken away from him by means of this tribute and through unfair judgments in the courts. You can see that beginning to happen in the United States. It has advanced pretty far where the small farmer is about gone. And yet he lives out there, in many cases, farming land that once he owned and now he no longer owns. It is owned by some big corporation, you know, Standard Oil owns his land or some big company in Japan or Arabia has bought it up.

What he is showing here is that those who had the power were looking upon the little people as someone to be milked. That was the principle of their life: to get as much out of these people as they possibly could. And yet as Amos is showing that these are the very people who are making the pilgrimage to Bethel. They would go there, but there was no transformation in their life. In Luke 22:27 Jesus shows that service is to be the criterion of those who are in authority.

And the third area that he attacks is that they came and went to and from Bethel. But when they left, they left bearing the same grudges and resentments and bitterness that they had when they arrived, and outwardly they sinned. And that was very evident to Amos. But inwardly, their rebellion was against God. You see, there was rebellion in their heart. David talks about this in Psalm 55 about the man whose words were smooth as oil but inside his heart was seething with rebellion.

Now how can there be assurance of forgiveness and a good relationship with God thereby if there is rebellion, resentment, bitterness boiling away in a person's heart? Well, Amos is saying that that is impossible. You cannot have God's approval whenever man is being mistreated. That is, you are the one doing the mistreating.

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions [You see, they are not being hidden from God. He can read the mind. He looks on the heart.] and your mighty sins [an indication of rebellion. It is not just a matter of somebody stealing a little bit of money, but there is rebellion seething in the heart.]: afflicting the just and take bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

You know what were these people doing? Well, what they were doing was this. Maybe I better explain their judicial system because it is kind of interesting. It is different from ours.

You know, you always see mentioned in the Bible about people sitting in the gate because that is where the place of judgment was. Well, the way they normally built their cities, of course, there was a living area, and it was surrounded by a wall, a living and business area is surrounded by a wall. And depending of course on the size of the city, we will just take here a small town. There would be one major gate in; there might be a couple of gates, but there would be one major one. And at that gate, they would build right into the wall as a part of the wall what we would call today a courthouse. Instead of having it in the center of the village as it might be in modern, fairly modern America, it would be right at the gate where people would go in and out all the time. And so access to the courts was always very handy because practically on any given day, the whole population of the city was going in and out.

Now that was important to the process of justice because they did not employ lawyers in the same way that we do. In most cases, a man went before the elders of the city, and he defended himself. He was his own lawyer, and he stood up and gave testimony regarding the case that he had for himself or against another person.

Here is where their system really differed. Up to now it sounds reasonably similar. And that is that the cases were heard publicly, and that anybody was free to testify at any given time. You did not have to be subpoenaed. You just came. If you were interested, you happened to be sitting there, and you were free to testify at any given time. All you had to do was stand up and speak your piece. Now, also, the judgment was made generally by what we would call the judge or the elder. But again, the people were free to give their opinion as to the guilt or innocence. You see, it was done openly out in the public.

Now, that had a great deal of impact on the kind of things that he is talking about here. What was happening was this. We will see this a little bit more later that because righteousness was declining, justice was disappearing. Justice is the child of righteousness. There has to be righteousness before there can be justice. Now, as righteousness declined, justice also declined with it. Why? Because people began to side with others not because of truthfulness or faithfulness, not because of innocence or integrity or of character, but because of what the person they were testifying for had and what they were prepared to give for the testimony. See, because the court system was so open, bribery became very easy.

So what were they doing? And you see, the judges were included in this as well, the elders of the city. They were weighing the value of the bribe, but they were not weighing the moral value of the individual or his testimony.

Amos is saying, "Look, you people are going to Bethel but you're not being transformed there. You're not being changed in any major area of life. And look what's happening to the social justice system here as a result." You see, these people were giving up intangible moral value. You see, moral worth cannot easily be measured because it is something that may not produce something tangible for a long period of time, but produce it will. And so they were giving up on intangible things, things that could not be necessarily measured. They were giving up on truth. They were giving up on honest testimony. They were giving up on integrity and morality in favor of the very tangible monetary value of the person or his bribe.

Now you contrast with that a person who has really been in contact with God. God has descended and touched this person's life, and He has made a difference. That person is going to be acutely interested in morals, integrity, honesty, truth, character. These people were not being changed. And so what Amos is showing here is that the whole social order—he is just using the justice system as an example as evidence—but the whole social order was being threatened because very few, we might even go so far as to say nobody, wanted to do righteousness.

Look at verse 13,

Amos 5:13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time.

And anybody who wanted to do righteousness was fearful of opening up their mouth to protest because it is very likely that they would be the ones who would end up in jail. I think that you can agree that we are moving in that direction.

Back to verse 6. Here is the overall instruction. "Seek the Lord and live." Now, when the Bible says seek Me or seek the Lord, it is in reality saying "seek My way of life." Because these people were going to Bethel to seek God but they were not seeking His way of life. They were not seeking transformation of their lives.

They were only seeking an experience, emotional, mentally stimulating, something that they could be admired for in the nice society of the day. But they were not seeking a change of life. And what it amounted to was that the priests in that location were offering these people nothing more than a cheap grace. Yeah, come to Jesus and have your sins forgiven without really pointing out to the people what God was going to require of them as a result of that reconciliation.

And so when it says seek, what it really means is *turn to*. It does not mean look for; it means turn to. Turn to God and live. Live has two connotations: it has to do with quality and quantity, quality of life.

So what were these people doing? They were playing religious games with God. That is all that it amounted to. They were going to camp meetings, had a rip-roaring time, come away feeling good but unchanged.

And so God says in verse 6 again, "lest He break out like a fire." Fire is used in the Bible as the ultimate of divine rejection. Malachi 4, the unjust are going to be burned by the fire, and they are going to be ashes under the feet of the righteous. Fire is a symbol of purification. Lest the fire break out in Joseph. See, Joseph will be purified and devour it.