

Amos (Part Nine)

Amos 5

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Let us go back to the book of Amos. We have been going through the fifth chapter, and it is, I think, a real powerhouse of information regarding the state of things in Israel and exactly where the problem lay for those people. You will recall that the key, as far as I am concerned, to the entire chapter lies in verse 5 of chapter 5.

Amos 5:5 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.

Now, what I was showing you is that each one of those cities was the home of a shrine, and they were places of some spiritual importance to those people. And as a result, there were pilgrimages made by the Israelites to those areas, and each one of those areas had a special religious, spiritual significance, and it was the reason why those people went there. Now, those three areas were closely associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and each one of them in particular with one of the men. Bethel, primarily with Jacob; Beersheba with all three of them; and Gilgal, not so much with those three men, but with the children of Israel coming out of Egypt.

We saw that with Bethel, it was the place where Jacob was encountered by God when he was fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau. And he just apparently came by chance upon Bethel. He lay down and went to sleep, and when he was there, he had the dream of the ladder, and that the angels of God were ascending up and down. And he woke up and was, I guess, somewhat concerned and said that God was in that place. And so he named the place Bethel, which means the "house of God."

Now, Jacob arrived there a man on the lam. He was fleeing from the wrath of his brother. His brother was a man who was certainly apparently someone to be feared. And Jacob arrived there with hopelessness in his heart, fearing

that at any moment his brother was going to appear around the next rock, and Jacob had had it. So he arrived there hopeless, but he left there a man with a future because God told him there that He would be with him. And Jacob then arose, and he made a covenant with God, that if God would bless him, then Jacob would tithe. That is how that particular scene ends.

The next time we find Bethel and Jacob associated, it is in Deuteronomy chapter 35. And here God once again encounters Jacob, and Jacob's name is changed to Israel. And normally, in the biblical record, that signifies a change in the man, you know, a change in heart. And so again, Jacob was confronted by God at Bethel, his name was changed, and he left, apparently, a converted man. And the crisis you might say, or one of *the* crises of his conversion—undoubtedly, another one happened at Peniel where Jacob wrestled with Christ and that certainly was a stepping stone to what happened there at Bethel. And I think between the two of them there, we see the spiritual conversion of Jacob.

The lesson, then, of Bethel is that when one comes in contact with God, God makes a difference in that person's life. That is, Bethel is related to transformation. And so people went to Bethel on their pilgrimage, their spiritual, religious pilgrimage in order to be changed.

Well, what we found from the book of Amos was that these people were going to Bethel, but it did not make any difference at all in their life. They did not come away transformed, there was no change in holiness, there was no change in morality in their lives. They came there, they had a good time, they enjoyed themselves. They enjoyed the fellowship and undoubtedly, you might say, the spirit that was there. They enjoyed the companionship, the eating and the drinking and having a good time, but they went back to their city and it was business as usual.

There was no transformation. They continued to conduct their lives with a great deal of self-centeredness and a lot of social injustice. We talked there about the gates of the city and how corrupt the courts were.

But at any rate, we find that these people were not at all being transformed by their encounter with God at Bethel. What these people were doing is that we saw a great deal of evidence of bribery taking place, gift-taking, gift giving, perverting of the social justice system.

These people were becoming very much aware of the tangible value of money, while all the while the intangible moral values were being given up. God of course, cannot cotton to that at all. It is not something that He will abide with in any way. And we are seeing here through Amos that God is warning that He is going to take steps; that their association with Bethel is not proving to be any boon in the way of good for them, and so He is going to begin to intervene in a way that they are going to know Him very, very surely.

Now there was an effect of all of this in the public that I think that you and I would be well aware of, and it shows this in verse 13. But let us go back to verse 12.

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

Remember, the poor were not necessarily people who were financially poor, but rather they are seen as people who are simply weak in the sense that they have no recourse to the courts in the same way that the wealthy did. They had no financial power to enable them to hire the great high-powered lawyers and be able to make a case for them. And so they were helpless before the rich.

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

What he is saying here is that the prudent found that the best course of action for them was to simply patiently wait for the judgment of God rather than to involve themselves in costly court cases in which their reputation was undoubtedly going to be ruined, whether they were right or wrong. Things were not going to go well for them, so that they would simply patiently wait

for the judgment of God rather than appeal to the judgment of men through the courts. So anybody who wanted to do righteousness was found to be, well, we would say, put down, shut up, silenced. Because there was so much pressure from the social order, people decided, I will just keep my mouth shut and go on.

Just to give you an example out of today, things are so bad in this regard that very large numbers of people are afraid to give testimony to the police because they fear that if they are required to go to court and testify that there is going to be some kind of retribution taken against them, either by the person who is on trial or by friends of the people who are on trial. The reason they fear the person that is on trial is because they fear that the criminal justice system is so lax that it is very likely that these people are going to get out in some way, either altogether or they are going to get a very short sentence. Then when they get out, their long memory of the injustice that was done against them by this person who testified against them, you see, is going to be met with violently somewhere out on the street and they are going to suffer damage to their property at the very least, or damage to themselves. Now, in order to counter that, what the police have had to do is set up telephone lines to the police departments that one can call in and give information without revealing who they are, so that things are kept absolutely secret. Otherwise, the police fear they are not going to get any kind of information or very little information out of the public that fears retribution.

That is what is taking place here. Therefore, the prudent keep silent. They would rather wait for God to intervene and do in the bad guys, than they would stick out their neck and risk having damage done to their family or to themselves because of their giving testimony in court.

So all in all, we find that the pilgrimage to Bethel was nothing more than a vacation, almost like a vacation to a resort only it was a vacation to a spiritual resort, maybe somewhat similar to Jim Baker's place there South Carolina, Heritage USA, where it is entirely possible that very sincere people went there, but it never changed them. They made the pilgrimage to that Christian mecca but it never really changed their lives. And I am sure that

when they were there, they had a good time. We are going to see more of that a little bit later in the chapter, how he emphasizes what a good time these people had when they made their pilgrimage.

Amos 5:6 Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it.

Fire is used in the Bible as the ultimate in divine rejection. The people go into the Lake of Fire. That is the ultimate in divine rejection and also the ultimate, you might say, in purification. Probably the best verse in this might be back in Malachi 4:3 where the unrighteous, the evil are going to be ashes under the feet of the righteous. See, that is the picture of divine rejection. What he is saying is that unless these people repent, then we are going to see that break out in the house of Joseph. So, that hits right home.

Now there is a New Testament corollary to this and I want you to turn with me back to Matthew the seventh chapter. Please understand what I said at the very beginning and it is something that we always have to remember. And that is that when we look at the Bible, we have to look at it with the understanding that it was ultimately written for the end-time church. We are the only church that has worldwide and general distribution of the Word of God.

I do not mean that the Bible was not worldwide before us. It certainly was, but never in the power and with, let us say, the density that it is today where God's church is worldwide and we are facing what Amos wrote about here in a worldwide situation. It is not something that is any longer just confined to one single nation, the nation of Israel. Certainly it is focused on Israel because Israel is God's chosen people, but it is not restrained or constrained just to Israel alone. It is something that is worldwide. It is something that God's people are facing on a worldwide basis.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name,

and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

There was no relationship with God in those people there in the book of Amos, that was shown through the obedience of the people. And so these people, God shows, are going to be confronted by Him.

Back to Amos again.

Amos 5:11 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.

So, despite the pilgrimage, the name of the game was still getting for the self.

In last week's Bible study and in this one here, there are five points that we covered. I will review them for you. There are five points that we covered here in this discussion about Bethel. It has something to do with true religion. Now, what we saw was not the true religion part, what we saw was the false religion part. What I am going to give you now is the opposite hand of this and this is what we need to do in our life. If we are going to really show whether or not there is a relationship with God, it is going to be in these areas.

1. That there is a real love for God's truth. That was the major problem. They did not really love God's truth.
2. A submission to God as our part of the relationship. Remember, when God made the covenant with the children of Israel back in Exodus 20 that He proposed to them, they accepted the terms, and their part of the relationship was that they would obey Him and He would be their God. He is showing here that they did not fulfill that. That is our part of the relationship with God today. It is exactly the same, submission to God in obedience.
3. If a person really has a relationship with God, he is going to be concerned about earning God's approval. Now, that is going to become a bigger issue as

we go through here. He is going to be concerned about earning God's approval.

4. Again, if a person has a good relationship with God, that person is going to have moral integrity. He is not going to be lying, cheating, stealing, bribing, laying traps for his next victim, whether it be in the marketplace or in court or wherever. It is going to be moral integrity, a seeking for truth, concern about God, and pleasing Him. He is not going to be concerned about getting for the self, he will be a real seeker after the things that are right in God's eyes.

5. There is going to be social responsibility. Now, this is something that does not impact on you and me as great as it did on these people. The reason being that Israel was a nation of this world and it was their responsibility to make sure that social affairs were up to snuff in God's eyes, while the church is not of this world and it is not our responsibility to change society. So that is less of a problem with us, but we still have to live within it.

I want to reemphasize one more thing here. These are not five rungs up the ladder to God. Remember Jacob's dream? Remember what I told you, that God shows in the Bible He is always the one who makes contact with men, not the other way around. They are not five rungs that are going to earn ourselves into the presence of God.

But rather, we have to look at them as five evidences that we have a relationship with the God of Bethel. They are evidences that God has met us at the foot of the ladder and He has made a difference in our life, that He is the one who instituted the contact. We can make a concluding statement then just putting this all together. True religion is not a way *to* God, but rather it is a way *from* God.

There is a big difference there because God always initiates the contact with man. If true religion is a way to God, then it puts the emphasis the other way, that man is earning his way into the presence of God. No, God comes to the foot of the ladder and He gives us a way of life that we are supposed to go out away from Him and live. It is away from God to man.

Then one final bit of advice from Amos. Back to verse 6. He says, "Seek the Lord and live." These people were seeking Bethel and coming away untransformed, which was to Amos evidence that they were not coming in contact with the true God. So what Amos is saying is, Hey, make the true God your pilgrimage.

And really, if you understand it, you do not have to go to Bethel. We are going to see that was a pagan shrine anyway. So what he is saying here is, "Look, set aside your time, set aside your life for Him. You don't have to go to a place. It's something that you do right where you are."

So you seek the Lord. God is omnipotent. God is omniscient. God is everywhere and you do not have to go to a place to seek Him. You can do it beginning right in your own bedroom, right in your own kitchen, right in your own living room. And then you go out from there after the contact with Him.

Incidentally, my eye just caught a note that I made here. The word live is in the Hebrew here imperative. That means that it has the force of a command. That is, it is something that one has to set himself to do. That is going to become important in the next part of the fifth chapter. It is something that one has to set himself to do.

Now, what he is saying is that if a person sets himself to do it and then he does it, then the fulfillment will follow. If you set yourself to seek the Lord, then you will live! That is very important here. Because when the fire breaks out, the chances are very great you are going to die.

If you are one of the people that is just going to Bethel and having fun, are you really seeking the Lord if you are going to Bethel and not coming back transformed? So, Amos' advice to these people is you set yourself to seek the Lord right where you are, and the fulfillment will follow. You will live when the fire comes. That is advice to you and me.

So the fulfillment, which is the living part, will inevitably follow if someone will set themselves to seek God. That is what he is saying. It will inevitably follow. Remember what I told you that seek means last week. It does not mean to search them out. It simply means to turn to it in repentance.

Amos 5, we are going to pick up in verse 14. I am going to read verses 14 through 20 and then go back and begin to expound it. Remember verse 13. Now this is following right on the heels of it in terms of thought.

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

Amos 5:14-20 Seek good and not evil, that you may live [there is that word again]; that the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Therefore the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, says this: "There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing. In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the Lord. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or [This word should be and. It really is the Hebrew word and. It connects the thought.] as though he went into a house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

We have come a little over halfway through the book of Amos, and to yourself, what is your thought about Amos the man? Now undoubtedly you are beginning to get somewhat of a picture of him and I believe that the picture that most of us would have is of a man who denounced Israel from beginning to end. I mean, the beginning of the book to the end of the book.

I think that we would also say if we are thinking about it, and honest, that Amos certainly gives us a picture of a man who seemingly did not fear

anybody. It seemed as though he felt free to say whatever had to be said, as stinging, as difficult to accept, and despite the kind of retribution that might come upon you.

Now remember what he just described. That the prudent people were afraid to speak up for fear of retribution and so they kept silent. That is how bad the times were. And yet here was a man who seemingly was unafraid to say whatever needed to be said. Now, if we are thinking along that line, we are probably beginning to get a picture of a man who was really tough as nails, hard bitten, you know, a man of the fields, a man of the desert, someone who could take anything that nature could throw at him and somehow he would find a way to survive. In fact, we might get a picture of him of incessantly roaring away like one of the lion metaphors that he seems to be so fond of using. (We just read one, he talked about the lion again.)

But I think that that would be an unfair and one-sided appraisal of him. Did chapter 5 not just begin with a lamentation, where he was on the verge of crying over the state of affairs in Israel and the way he saw the direction that the country was going in.

Now, there is another side of Amos and we are going to see that side here somewhat even in the midst of all this denunciation that we just saw between verses 14 and 20. Is there ever a time that a preacher, a prophet needs to somehow sow doubt in people's minds? Is it not always the responsibility of the preacher to somehow be a vessel or a means of infusing people with faith, with confidence, with positiveness? Well, that is what we normally think. But is there ever a time that it is proper; is there ever a circumstance when it is right that a preacher, that a prophet, should do something to fill people with doubt? And if so, what kind of a circumstance and how should he do it?

Well, the answer to that is, yes, there is a time when a preacher or prophet needs to sow doubt in a person's mind. And the circumstance is when the person is wrong and he does not realize it.

So, the next question is, how should the preacher do it? What should be his method? Should it be a direct confrontation in which he rails and rants and waves and shakes the finger and hammers away incessantly at some major

flaw in this person's character? I think that Amos shows us, no, that is not the way to do it. That the best way to do it is to do it rather gently, to ask questions, to sow doubt by making a person think that maybe the future is not as rosy and secure as he thinks it is if he continues going in the direction that he is going in, and give the person space to think it through.

Now, what we have just read is a change of direction, you might say, in Amos' approach to these people. And I asked what I did because of what follows verse 14. The problem that Amos was facing in these people is that they wrongly believed that they were in right and good standing with God.

Just try to update that thought in modern America. Are we not the greatest Christian nation that has ever graced God's great earth? Are we not the ones that have spread Bibles all over the world? Are we not the ones who give more money (at least in total dollar amount), than practically all the nations in the world do for charitable works?

Incidentally, Americans are not the biggest givers per capita. Do you know who the biggest givers per capita in the world are? They are Israelites, but they are not American. The Dutch people are the most generous givers in the world. But they are still Israelitish people, and it fits in with the common conception of being a separate and distinct and greater nation than others. I do not know, we might be the only nation in the world that has right on our money, in God we trust. And we have made up until the last 10 or 15 years, the Bible a regular part of civil ceremonies and whatever. It was deeply involved, deeply ingrained in the thinking of our people up until this last generation or so. And surely, *surely*, we are the nation with whom the Lord is.

Now let us start thinking about Beersheba. Remember the promise of Beersheba? God met Abraham there and He says, "I'll be with you." God met Isaac there and He says, "I'll be with you." God met Jacob there and said, "I'll be with you." Here is God promising the three great fathers, the patriarchs, "I will be with you in whatever you do." "Don't fear, go into Egypt, Jacob, I'll be with you there."

That is why the people were going to Beersheba, because that is the shrine that meant to them that God would be with us. It emphasized to them

something very important to you and me. Does God really walk with us as He did Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? Now, if God is with us, then can we look forward to a future that is a picture of serenity, of great hope, that we are just going to go sailing through right off into the Place of Safety and into the Kingdom of God.

If God is really with us, do we not have His promise? "I will protect you from the hour of trial." But is it possible that we are complacently assuming that He is walking with us? Maybe He is not. Amos is telling these people, they were assuming the same thing, No, God isn't walking with you.

But they assumed that He was, and they have been deceived. Now, if they had been deceived, is it not possible then that the future is going to be a time of very great testing—not serenity, not hope, but testing. Ah, the time of Jacob's Trouble. Trouble, boy, that is a test.

So what Amos is talking about is the Day of the Lord and so his approach to them is not argument, [audio cut out] the baseball bat. His approach to them is merely to show them what the Day of the Lord is really going to be like for them. They were expecting to just sail right through it. They knew about the Day of the Lord, they were going to go to the Place of Safety, were they not?

His ploy is he hopes he can paint a vivid enough picture that maybe he can make them think about the present, that they will reflect on their present status of their relationship with God because it is always the prophet's responsibility to remind the people that the future is inextricably bound with the present that we are now living in, that it cannot be separated. Malachi asked a question that kind of goes along with this. I will just read it to you.

Malachi 3:2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?"

Well, that is what Amos is doing here in these six or seven verses that we just read. Look at verse 18. He says, "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you?"

Now, no such doubts assailed these people at all. They were confident that things were going to be all right. Now, why could not Amos share their optimism? Was he not looking at the same things that they were? Well, surely he was. But when he looked at what they were looking at he got frightened! They looked at it and did not even see anything wrong with it. Just business as usual. Now, can a person walk with God and not really be aware of the greatness, of the majesty, and holiness of that God—you *have got to think about this*—and not be awed by the fact that one is walking with God?

These people were not. They carelessly assumed that everything was all right. And that careless assumption of peace with God told Amos that something was wrong with their perception of what God is like.

I want you to notice what Amos did here. Now, you and I would normally just skip right by this without really even thinking about it. But Amos drew about as much attention to God and His greatness as you could possibly do without hammering them over the head with it, without, in so many words, just spelling it out because he kept using the name of God over and over and over again. And each time he does it, he stresses His omnipotence, His majesty.

Verse 14, the Lord God of hosts, he says. What he is saying there is Yahweh, the omnipotent God. Verse 15, It may be that Yahweh, the omnipotent God. I mean, this is the God of armies, hosts and hosts and hosts of angels.

Now, what do these people think about that? It is interesting because when one looks back in the Bible, when a solitary Israelite was confronted by a solitary angel—not God, an angel—they became unnerved, unglued, unbent. They practically had diarrhea and everything else. They fell on their face and bowed in worship just to meet an angel. What would it be like to be confronted with God?

In verse 16, Therefore, Yahweh, the omnipotent God, again. Actually, if we would go through this seven or eight verse section here, he uses that title

three times. He uses the title Lord, meaning owner, master, ruler seven times. And he uses the word God three times. Thirteen times he uses the name of God between verses 14 through 20.

Now, there is a ploy there. He is indirectly really puncturing their pride, which resulted in a lukewarm complacency about their relationship with God. Well, here is the way it shows they just assume, you see, without a shadow of a doubt, that they were walking with Him, but they never stopped to think about whether *God wanted to walk with them*. We need to think about that.

Let us think about Adam. Adam was perfectly happy to stay in the Garden of Eden as long as he could hide from God. One sin and the man was terrified at God's presence. But you see, God did not even want him around. And so He kicked them out. Adam would have stayed there in his pride thinking that it was all right.

I am hoping that you will find from this at least some indications of God's holiness. You know, Mr. Armstrong used to shout at us every once in a while that God will not budge one inch with His law because that law pictures for you and me in so many precepts, the nature, the character, the mind, the way of our God. It spells out holiness for us so that we understand what it is. Holiness is moral.

These people in their pride thought that they were moral, but you see, they were not looking at the Great God, they were not comparing themselves with Him. And that is what Amos saw. That in their pride, their spiritual complacency, they were looking at one another and said they are pretty good. But their perspective of the holiness of that God was totally inadequate and they did not realize that that God did not want to walk with them at all and that He had sent His prophet Amos to make that abundantly clear to those people.

So, what is the Day of the Lord really going to be like? Well, Amos describes the Day of the Lord, not in terms of the kinds of disasters, although there is some mention of that or the nature of those disasters, but rather the way he chooses to make them think is to make them aware of their mental state as they go through the disasters. That is much more terrifying, much

more thought provoking because it is easy for us to say, well, bombs are going to fall on the United States of America.

But what if I could give you a really colorful and adequate picture of what it is going to be like *mentally*, the terror that is going to be in our mind, the hopelessness, the fear. That is what he does. And he shows a picture in which the flippant assumptions of walking with God, the confidence that these people formerly showed, the complacency of being God's chosen people. Instead, he shows complete and total despair.

Let us look at that.

Amos 5:16 Therefore, the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, says this:
"There shall be wailing in all streets, . . .

Not just a few of them, in *all* streets. Just beautiful illustrations that he is giving here: in the city squares, out on the country roads, out on the interstates, wherever one looks, where people are traveling,

Amos 5:16 . . . and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!'

Why do you think those people are on the highways? They are wandering from one place to another, looking for hope, looking for water, looking for food, looking for stability, looking for organization, looking for a city, a society that is functioning, everything is broken down.

Amos 5:16 They shall call the farmer to mourning, and the skillful lamenters to wailing.

He is talking here about two general classes of people: those who are accustomed to facing all the vagaries and insecurities of nature. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it does not. Sometimes you have locusts, sometimes it does not, sometimes the crop grows, sometimes it does not. And so that tends to make a person go over the rough spots. And so farmers are less likely to cry and to be mourning. Then there are the other extreme, the professional mourners who can cry at the drop of a hat, turn on the spigot, and the tears come up.

And so he is showing that every spectrum of society, everybody is wailing. He says that,

Amos 5:17-18 In all the vineyards [a picture of a beauty and productivity, a picture of industry, a picture of wealth, luxury] there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the Lord. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light.

And here comes a beautiful, arresting illustration. "It will be as though a man fled from a lion." Now get this picture: You are out for a stroll in the country, walking along, minding your own business, smelling the roses as you go along. You are enjoying life seemingly as you walk along and suddenly there is a lion in your path.

What are you going to do? You turn and run. That is what anybody with their wits about them would try to do. Turn and run. As long as, you know, the lion is far enough away, you spot him soon enough. You know, you start running, running down the road and somehow or another, you manage to escape, the lion loses you.

And just about the time you think you are safe, oh, there is a bear! He is running in the other direction, but away from the lion and you are running, running out in the field and there is a building out there, some kind of an outbuilding and the door is open and you dash in the door, slam the door in the bear's face, and you know, you are safe. A moment of peace.

Now you are all winded, your knees are watery. Your legs probably have knots in them. They have not run so fast for so long. And so you lean against the wall to get some support and a snake jumps out and bites you and you die.

Do you see the picture there that he is giving of what the Day of the Lord is going to be like? He is painting a picture of no escape. He is painting a picture of a people who are going along in their complacency thinking that everything is all right. Like they are on a stroll in the country on a Sunday afternoon and suddenly, unexpectedly, a lion is in their path!

He is showing that the Day of the Lord is going to come upon them unexpectedly. They are not expecting it at all and they are going to start running for their lives and just about the time they think that they have some safety and they get a little breather, the bear comes and chases them further and just about the time that they think that they really have some peace, there is walls between them and the bear, the snake bites them and they die.

He is painting a picture of utter hopelessness, unexpected, startling danger, an escape that turns out to be no escape at all. And finally, when it seems peace at last, the mortal wound is inflicted.

God is not finished yet.

Amos 5:20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

We find wailing, an inescapable judgment followed by darkness.

Now, their logic, the logic of their complacency was telling them that everything was all right. After all, God was on their side. He was going to be on the side of His people. Is that not what the Good Book says?

And when that day came, it was going to be a day of retribution against their enemies. It was going to be their crown of glory. Everything that ever plagued them was going to be overcome and everything was going to be gladness and light. No, Amos says, no. Amos said, you have been feeding yourself with false hopes because when God comes, He says He is going to be your enemy.

Notice what he says in verse 17, "In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you." Now connect that with Beersheba. Was God their companion walking alongside them? No, He purposefully inspired Amos to say, I'm going to walk right through you. He was not their companion, He was not with them. See, there is no promise of Beersheba here that He would be with them. He was going to go right through them.

Now, back to verse 14,

Amos 5:14-15 Seek good and not evil, that you may live [That has a familiar ring to it does it not? It sounds just like verse 6, "Seek the Lord and [you] live."]; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Verse 14 contains the instruction of how to counteract what follows. He gives the instruction first and then he follows it with what is going to occur if they do not follow through with the instruction. He gave the people something to do. And again, the instruction is be moral, holy; seek good that you may live.

Notice that there is a positiveness and negativeness to being holy. The positive action is to seek good. The negative part is to shun evil, seek not evil, shun it.

Now holiness involves both actions and emotions. Seek/shun. Hate: hate evil; love good. This is important because if holiness did not involve both aspects then holiness could be something that we could just simply put on, like a face. In other words, we could hypocritically live one kind of life during the week and then on the Sabbath put on our holy look and go to services. But true holiness involves both aspects. It involves both the action and it involves the emotion as well.

Notice further. Amos puts the action before the emotion and I think that this is important to understand. We are to live by every word of God. We are even to look at the order that He puts things in. You seek good and not evil. What he means again is to turn to the good, you make the good a target in your daily life.

Now, what he is saying is this: that if in practical operations throughout the day, throughout the week, if we wait for God to infuse us with the right kind of feeling before we take action to do good, then he is saying that we are going to be waiting an awful long time or maybe we are going to be waiting

in vain because it will never come. What Amos is showing is that we have to take action and the corresponding right feeling will come along with it. You put the seeking before the loving.

Emotions are fickle and false guides and those things can be educated into us and our feeling may not match what needs to be done in the circumstance that we are in. So he is saying that if we act right, God will give us the corresponding right feeling.

The next thing: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live." Now, this is important too. He is showing that holiness is a *means* to life, not just a way of life or a rule to live by. Notice "that you may live." Holiness will produce life is what he is saying.

Now let us look at an effect of this or, let us say, a conclusion that I think that we can reach. It is something that we have to be thinking of constantly. And that is that the grace that God has given to you and me in that He has chosen us out of this world—He called us, He chose us, He led us to repent, He has given us His Spirit, He has forgiven our sins, He has given us gifts—if we just funnel that thought back into the times and then update it to us, from their situation we can learn that Amos is telling them that you cannot take the grace of God for granted. That is what these people were doing. They were complacently assuming that God desired their companionship.

The instruction is clear: that the person who sets himself to seek the Lord and to seek His holiness is going to receive from God the infusion of grace by His Spirit that will enable Him to do it. You are going to live. You see, the key for you and me is that we cannot afford to take the grace of God for granted. In other words, we cannot let down. We have got to set our will to seek God daily. Not on a pilgrimage once a year but it has to be something where we are turning to God every day.

You know, we would rather reverse the situation that he is talking about here. I mean, by nature, humanly, we would rather wait for God to fill us with a desire to do His will. And then we would say, well, if He just fills me, then I will pursue righteousness with all my heart. We cannot do that.

Look back in the book of Acts here in chapter 5, a very famous verse,

Acts 5:32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.

The implication is very clear. The Spirit is given to those who obey Him. You obey first, then the Spirit is given. Now just think of that in terms of your conversion. The Spirit of God was not given to you until after you began to obey Him. God led you and me by His Spirit, too.

But if we had not turned to God and began to obey Him, if we had not obeyed Him in regard to the Sabbath, if we had not obeyed Him in regard to tithing, if we had not obeyed Him in the things that He was revealing to us, if we had not obeyed Him in regard to baptism, we would not have gotten His Spirit.

Now think of it in another area that ought to be also just as clear. What use is faith if we do not have to step out, as it were, into the unknown before He answers? It is really not unknown because we should trust God in what He says. But nonetheless, the faith is used first and then God gives the answer or the blessing or whatever. That is how growth takes place.

So if you are waiting for God to fill you with a feeling of love, of desire to serve Him, of a desire to do good things, of a desire to sacrifice, you are going to wait and wait and wait and wait.

God will educate us and that is what His part of this responsibility is. He tells us what is right to do. He then expects us to do it. And as we do it, He fulfills what He said He would do as we do it. He gives us the strength.

One final note before we leave this section and that is in Amos 5:15, he again mentions Joseph and I wanted to just go through this briefly because if there was anybody that God was with, it was Joseph. And it is interesting that God mentioned him in the midst of this chapter. Back in Genesis 39.

Genesis 39:1-2 Now Joseph had been taken down in Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian,

bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

So he was sold into slavery and God was with him and God blessed him even in his slavery so that Joseph was living a fairly comfortable life, separated his from his family, but God was still with him.

Let us drop down to verse 21 because in between verse 2 and verse 21 Potiphar's wife comes on the scene and she has designs on Joseph. Joseph fled the inducement there. And it says that he was there in prison,

Genesis 39:21 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy.

So even though things went from bad as a slave to worse being a slave in prison, God was still with him there in his imprisonment.

Genesis 39:23 The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's hand, because the Lord was with him.

God was with Joseph, despite the problems that Joseph had. Well you know most of the story. Anyway, in chapter 41, verse 38 we find that Joseph has made an astonishing leap, all the way from prison to the throne in one day.

Genesis 41:38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

You see, God was with Joseph the whole time. Now, the implication, I think, back in the book of Amos is very clear that Amos specifically brought Joseph's name into it because of the Beersheba connection. The Lord really was with Joseph their father, but was He with the modern descendants of the man with whom the Lord really did walk?

Down to verse 21 and we will read through verse 27.

Amos 5:21-27 "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fatted peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts [Yahweh, the omnipotent].

Interesting that he ends that discourse with that.

What has Amos been teaching and to whom? This is important in regard to Gilgal because Gilgal is the subject of this next section. In chapter 3 and verse 2, he says,

Amos 3:2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Amos has been talking to the redeemed, those who knew God, the ones who had been redeemed from Egypt, certainly the descendants of those who were specifically redeemed. But nonetheless, the ones that He had chosen. And He was seemingly holding over their heads unrelieved sorrow and inescapable death. And so there seemed to be nothing more than hopelessness. That is what he was preaching.

Now, when Amos looked at these people, he was looking at the people who professed salvation. They were the redeemed, but they exhibited a total lack of the evidence which would make their profession credible. So they had groundless confidence as far as Amos was concerned.

This section focuses on Gilgal and Gilgal should have taught to those people security and inheritance of the land.

Just to quickly review it. Bethel: what proof have these people given that their contact with God had produced change transformation in their life. Beersheba: if a person is really walking with God, what will he show in his life? And now Gilgal: what is the modern spiritual equivalent to what Gilgal was teaching these people or should have taught them? How can one be sure that he has eternal life? Because Gilgal, to them, meant inheritance of the land. Now spiritually to you and me, to New Testament Christians, that is eternal life, eternal inheritance of the earth. How can it be proved beyond all questions? That is the question for this section.

In verses 21 through 23 it shows there to you and me that these people had a wealth of religion. I mean, they were religious, they were going to church, no doubt about it. He mentions festivals, sacrifices, and music. Now they took their feasts seriously. I do not think there is any doubt about that at all, that they took it seriously. And I am sure that in a modern equivalent that those feast days were "red letter" days on the calendar. They were things that they looked forward to and so they were a must to attend because anybody who was anybody was going to be there.

That is where all the action was and so if anybody wanted to be in on everything that was going on, so to speak, at least socially, religiously, that was the place that you wanted to be. And so he is showing here a picture of these people who participated very freely and liberally in the religion that they had.

But from God's perspective, all He heard was a bunch of noise. The music was not beautiful to Him. The sacrifices were not a sweet-smelling savor to Him. These people were dutiful to their religion. It was costly to them, I am sure. And by every appearance they were wholehearted about what they were doing, but it did not impress God one iota.

So do you think at the camp meetings of the evangelicals that they impress God? All the music, all the singing, all the sacrifice of time and cost that it takes to get there, the time spent in the services that they had. Where did this all fail? Why did not it impress Him?

Verse 24 begins to give us a picture.

Amos 5:24 But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Now there is a pun in there but you and I cannot see it because we do not read Hebrew. You see that word, your King James may have roll. I do not know whether it does or not. What does the King James have for that first phrase? "Let justice roll down like water," "run down" in the New King James. The margin says roll. My margin does not say anything as far as I can see.

But at any rate, that is the pun. That word roll or as my Bible says, run down, comes from the same root as the word Gilgal.

Let us go back to the book of Joshua in chapter 5. That is where we came across Gilgal before. This is where they circumcised all the males.

Joshua 5:9 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you [in the circumcision]." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal [rolled away] to this day.

Back to Amos. "Let justice roll down like water." A play on the word Gilgal. What is he saying? In practical fact, what is he saying?

We saw from verses 21 through 23 that God was not impressed with their religion and all of their activity within it. What Amos is saying (and God), through verse 24 is that their religion was going nowhere. It had no practical outlet to it. They went to Gilgal to be religious, but they left it all behind when they went back to their normal course of life, whenever they returned home. The pilgrims rolled into Gilgal—we can make another pun there—but justice and righteousness did not roll back into society with them whenever they went back.

Now, by way of contrast, you can look in Genesis 8:21 and whenever Noah offered a sacrifice after the Flood, God was pleased with the fragrance of that sacrifice. What Noah did was pleasing to God. These people were making sacrifices and it was not pleasing to God. They were offering the

same sacrifices, but there was a difference between Noah and them. Noah is listed in Ezekiel 14:14 as one of the most righteous men who ever lived.

Noah's sacrifices to God were of a righteous man practicing righteousness. These people were offering sacrifices but they were not righteous, they were not moral, they were not just in their dealings with one another. It is quite a contrast between them and Noah.

Well, I think I am going to have to stop there because it is nine o'clock. We are right in the middle of something, but it would be better, I think, to stop and explain it fully next week because what we need to do is define something: what is justice and what is righteousness? Because that is what these people were not doing. And within the context of the book, it is very clear what Amos intended that these people get from this instruction. Why God was upset and not accepting their sacrifice.