

Prepare To Meet Your God! (Part Eight): Seek Me And Live!

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The name *Amos* means “burden” or “burden-bearer,” and the message he proclaims to Israel is surely one of doom and destruction. In that gloomy, heavy warning, there is little room for hope, for good news, for happy days. Yet at the end of his prophecy, Amos sets down his oppressive burden and describes the wonderful future Israel can have if the people turn back to God.

We find in the last chapter that the nation’s destruction will not be total: “Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,’ says the LORD” (Amos 9:8). Although not bound by His past commitment, since Israel had broken the covenant, He will not completely wipe out the nation. He will show mercy to a few (Micah 7:18); He will spare a “remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:15).

Other prophets expound further on the idea of a remnant being saved to carry on God’s way of life to new generations. “Remnant” suggests a scrap of cloth cut out from a larger piece of cloth. The basic concept is smallness. A remnant is a tiny representative of the original whole, in this case, of the entire nation of Israel.

Ezekiel pictures a remnant as a pinch of hair hidden in the fold of his garment (Ezekiel 5:1-4). Isaiah shows the remnant of Israel scattered to “the four corners of the earth” and having to be gathered one by one (Isaiah 11:11-12; see Jeremiah 23:3; 31:7-11; Micah 2:12). They are just a few grains of sand compared to all “the sand of the sea” (Isaiah 10:22), perhaps a tenth of the original population of the nation (Isaiah 6:13).

When Assyria conquered and enslaved Israel in 721-718 BC, many of the survivors were resettled “in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (II Kings 17:5-6), that is, in northern

Mesopotamia. Few, if any, of these transplanted Israelites ever returned to the Promised Land. Instead, they migrated primarily north and west into Europe and from there, around the globe, places where they still reside (Isaiah 43:5-6; 49:12; Jeremiah 3:12, 18; 31:8; Zechariah 2:6; 8:7). Thus, the prophesied return of the remnant is still future.

The regathered remnant of a future destruction will return to the land of Israel a beaten, broken, humbled people, having suffered horribly at the hands of captors and oppressors all over the world (Jeremiah 31:8-9; Micah 4:6). Through their sufferings, they will have come to understand the reasons for their slavery and captivity: They had forsaken God and His way of life. They will now be ready and willing to listen and obey the instructions of their God (Isaiah 10:22; Zephaniah 3:13) and reap the wonderful benefits of following Him (Isaiah 37:31; Zechariah 8:4-8, 11-15).

Jeremiah shows what a wonderfully joyous time this will be.

“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.’ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, streaming to the goodness of the LORD—for wheat and new wine and oil, for the young of the flock and the herd; their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, and they shall sorrow no more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together; for I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow. I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness,” says the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:10-14)

“Sifted in a Sieve”

God truly desires this bountiful, happy life for His people. Yet the terrible punishment that He inflicts on the people of Israel—war, famine, pestilence, captivity, slavery, exile—is in itself a necessary and painful test of their professed faithfulness. “For surely I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest

grain shall fall to the ground” (Amos 9:9). This parallels Romans 11:26, where Paul writes, “All Israel will be saved.” God wants to give salvation to all Israelites, and these calamities are His last-ditch effort to get their attention and turn them back to Him.

“The smallest grain” would be better translated as “a pebble.” God puts His people through a sifting process, and the sieve is designed to catch the stones and other things that are *not* grain. In the metaphor, what passes through the sieve—the grain—will be saved. The pebbles caught in the mesh of the sieve are those God will destroy.

“All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, ‘The calamity shall not overtake us nor confront us’” (Amos 9:10). Their words echo those of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 who will be spewed from God’s mouth. Those caught in the sieve see no cause for alarm, no reason God should judge them. They are apparently unaware of what constitutes sin, of the penalty that falls on the sinner, or of the need for a remedy. They are complacent, careless sinners living in a fantasy world of self-deception.

Turning to God in Faith and Deed

How can this calamity be averted? The solution is so simple and obvious that God seems to spend very little time on it within the book of Amos. In reality, every word of the book screams what Israel needed to do then—and needs to do today.

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate” (Amos 5:14-15). A person does not need to seek God if He has already revealed Himself to him. Thus, *seek* means “to turn” to Him in repentance, not necessarily “to look for.” It is a way of saying, “Set aside your time and life for God.”

Seek in the Hebrew is imperative; it is a command. Seeking good, or seeking God (verse 4), is an act that we must set ourselves to do, as it is not a natural inclination (Romans 8:7). But it is worth the effort, for its product is life—

not just physical existence, but life as God lives it (John 17:3). If we resolve to seek good and continue in it, the result—truly living!—will follow. Seeking the Lord produces godly life.

In living by every Word of God, we should notice the order in which He lists these commands: “Seek good and not evil. . . . Hate evil, love good” (Amos 5:14-15). The action of turning to good *precedes* the emotions of hating evil and loving good. Holiness involves action *and* emotion: seeking *and* shunning, loving good *and* hating evil. He wants us to turn to the good and make it a target in our daily lives. If we wait for God to infuse us with the right kind of feeling before we try to do good, then we will wait a long time because it will never come. We must take action first by faith, and the corresponding right feeling will follow.

If holiness does not involve both action and emotion, it becomes something that we can put on and take off. We could hypocritically live one kind of life during the week, and on the Sabbath put on our holy look and go to services. Action and emotion combine to make a whole way of life.

Holiness is not just a way of life or a rule to live by. It also *produces* the very best *quality* of life—the way God lives eternally. God’s people must constantly think about holiness, appreciating that He has chosen us out of this world and given us grace to be holy.

A major theme of the book of Amos is that we cannot take the grace of God for granted (see [Part Two](#), “The Responsibility of the Covenant People”). The Israelites complacently assumed that God wanted their companionship, but we must set our wills to seek Him daily, not just once a year during a pilgrimage or a feast. By nature, we would rather do the opposite and wait for God to fill us with a desire to do His will. But only one who sets himself to seek the Lord and His holiness will receive from Him the infusion of grace by His Spirit. Bolstered with the Spirit of God (Ephesians 3:16), he can seek God in spirit and truth (John 4:24) and truly live.

Peter says in 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 Scripture clearly declares that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him! One obeys first, and then the Spirit is given. God leads us to repentance

through His Spirit, but if we do not begin to obey Him, He will not put His Spirit in us.

Also, what use is faith if we do not have to step out into the unknown before He answers? If we really trust God, then, in a sense, it is not the unknown. But we must act in faith first, trusting God that it is the right thing to do, then He gives the answer or the blessing. That is how growth takes place. He educates us by telling us what the right thing to do is. He expects us to do it, and as we do it, He fulfills what He promised. As we do it, He gives us the strength to finish it.

Thus, grace and obedience work together; they cannot be separated. God calls and redeems us by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), but He requires us to obey through faith (II Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11)—living by His every Word (Matthew 4:4)—to maintain our privileged position (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31). By living righteously and seeking God, He gives us more of His Spirit to help us grow in grace and overcome sin through the knowledge of God (II Peter 3:18).

Our Sovereign, Omnipotent God

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you” (Amos 5:14). Amos introduces to his audience “Yahweh, the Omnipotent God,” the God of hosts or angelic armies. In the Bible, when a man was confronted by a spirit being, he often became unnerved and unglued (Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:7-8). Amos wants his audience to think about what it would be like to be confronted by God Himself.

To do this, he uses a ploy to puncture their pride, the real cause of their lukewarm attitude in their relationship with God. Between verses 14 and 20, he repeats God’s name *eleven times* to emphasize to them the One they had failed to know.

Amos draws as much attention to God as he can without hammering his audience over the head. In the background is the rhetorical question, “Can a person walk with God and not really be aware of His holiness, greatness, and majesty?” These people carelessly assumed they were at peace with God, but how could they really know if they were when they had no idea what He is

like? Amos' ultimate purpose is to show them that the one they were worshipping is not the true God at all. If they knew the true God, it would be obvious to them! And they would repent.

Another example of repetition is Amos' use of "Lord GOD" twenty-one times throughout his book. One commentator translates "Lord GOD" as "Sovereign Yahweh." When "Sovereign," suggesting owner and master, is combined with "Yahweh," indicating the Covenant God, it means that He has every right to expect the obedience of the covenant people, and that He, in turn, will keep His promises to them, whether blessings or curses (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

Amos wants us to have faith in God and understand that He has the right to do as He pleases. Our salvation is important to Him. He is a merciful Ruler who will bring His covenant with us to pass, even if it takes painful, corrective discipline.

In Romans 11:11-36, a section titled "Israel's Rejection Not Final" in the *New King James Version*, the apostle Paul explains how the Gentiles have been grafted into the natural olive tree, a symbol of Israel. In verses 25-29, he shows that the Sovereign Yahweh is at work—He has not forgotten His people. Though He punishes them for their rebellion, His plan for them in the end is to give them salvation.

We need to apply this understanding personally. Sometimes God's purpose covers thousands of years.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:8-9)

With us, His purpose covers the entirety of our converted lives. God's will is to save us after He creates His mind and character in us. If He must cause pain and suffering through trials of our faith to produce His character in us, He will. But He prefers that we seek what is good and right, so He has no need to test us so severely.

The World Under God's Reign

Finally, after so many threats of punishment and destruction, God reminds His people that wonderful blessings and abundant lives lie just on the other side of these dark days. After their repentance, He will lead them back to the Land of Promise and help them rebuild their ruined cities and shattered lives. This return never occurred after their expulsion from the land of Israel by the Assyrians in 718 BC, so this wonderful Millennium of restoration and prosperity lies ahead (compare Jeremiah 30-31 and Micah 4:1-7 with Revelation 19:1-20:6). In this future era, the Israelites will quickly regain their preeminence in the world, and never again will they be devastated and driven away. They will live in true peace and security forever under God.

“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle [house] of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,” says the LORD who does this thing. (Amos 9:11-12)

In II Samuel 7:1-17, God makes a covenant with David, establishing his house, kingdom, and throne forever. He adds in Jeremiah 33:17, “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.” This latter promise comes at the end of a prophecy about “a Branch of righteousness” coming from David’s line (verse 15). A similar prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-5 leaves no doubt that the “Branch” is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Many scriptures show that when Christ returns, He will rule forever as King of kings upon the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 19:16). He will make the resurrected David king over Israel, and each of the twelve apostles will rule a tribe under him (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30).

This reference to David would bring to an Israelite’s mind her “Golden Age,” the time before Israel split from Judah and David’s dynasty, when her wealth, peace, and power were at their height. God proclaims that the people need not look to the past in longing for Israel’s Golden Age, for it is still future and will be even more golden!

Edom (Amos 9:12) represents to Israel what Babylon does to the church, that is, all that is hostile to God. It represents the world, all of mankind. The Edomites, it seems, never forgave Jacob for stealing Esau's birthright (Genesis 27), so throughout their history they consistently opposed Israel. When Edom, Israel's archenemy, and the rest of the world are humbled under God's hand at Christ's return, then all mankind can be converted.

In Acts 15:16-17, James quotes Amos 9:11-12 as the church's authority to work for the conversion of the Gentiles, and this is indeed its sense. Amos uses "possess" in the sense of "conquer." The dynasty of David, and Israel in a larger sense, will conquer the rest of the world, not through arms, but through the Word of God (Isaiah 49:6), producing for those captive nations an equality with Israel. Israel can possess the remnant of Edom and all the Gentiles because, when the King from the House of David comes, He will accomplish the major conversion of the Gentiles (Isaiah 11:10). They, too, will be His people.

This conversion of the world is the grand purpose God is working out. He is orchestrating events so that one day in the future, all mankind—all who have ever lived—will be offered the opportunity to become members of His Family! He wants all His children to have the glorious, fulfilling, wonderful life that He lives. There can be no higher purpose!

Peace and Bounty

That time is just ahead!

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:13-15)

Jesus Christ will return in power and great glory to take up the reins of government over His people. In contrast to the calamitous natural disasters that prevail under man's dominion (Amos 4:6-10; 8:8), nature will respond positively to the rule and reign of God! The curse of sin will be lifted, and man will begin to produce an Eden-like paradise over the whole earth. The Israelites will return from the nations of their captivity and rebuild the Promised Land in beauty and splendor.

This future time will be the end of insecurity. Peace results when people obey God's government (Isaiah 9:6-7). Never again will a man be robbed, killed, oppressed, or lose his inheritance, not only in Israel, but in all nations as Christ's rule expands. We can look forward to such a wonderful world!

In their proud affluence and self-reliant power, the ancient Israelites sought security in their homes and possessions, in their sincere but false religious zeal, and in their mistaken conception of their standing with God. But God says that true security comes from Him. All blessings flow from Him (James 1:17), and He is eager to give them. He simply has His priorities set differently than man's: "But seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33, emphasis ours).

Take Amos' Message Personally

Are you—personally—prepared to meet your God (Amos 4:12)? If you were called before His judgment seat today, would He pronounce a positive or negative judgment on your life? Would He say, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matthew 7:23)? Or would He say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21)?

That is the crux of Amos' strong and urgent message! How well are you prepared for God's judgment *right now*?

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do

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not obey the gospel of God? Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (I Peter 4:17-18)

Amos has answered these questions. In the verses of his prophecy, we see the end for those who do not believe, and we also get a quick glimpse of the awesome blessings for those who do. How long do we have to show God whether we believe or not? Only God knows—but any one of us may die at any moment. Our period of judgment will then be over. Ezekiel writes,

“Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord GOD. “Therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:31-32)

Now that we have heard the message, we have time to apply it. Though similar conditions to Amos’ day are evident in our own nations, the punishments for sin have not yet fallen on them. The warnings, however, are intensifying and quickening. Take the opportunity to act while it is still available!

“Seek the LORD and live”!