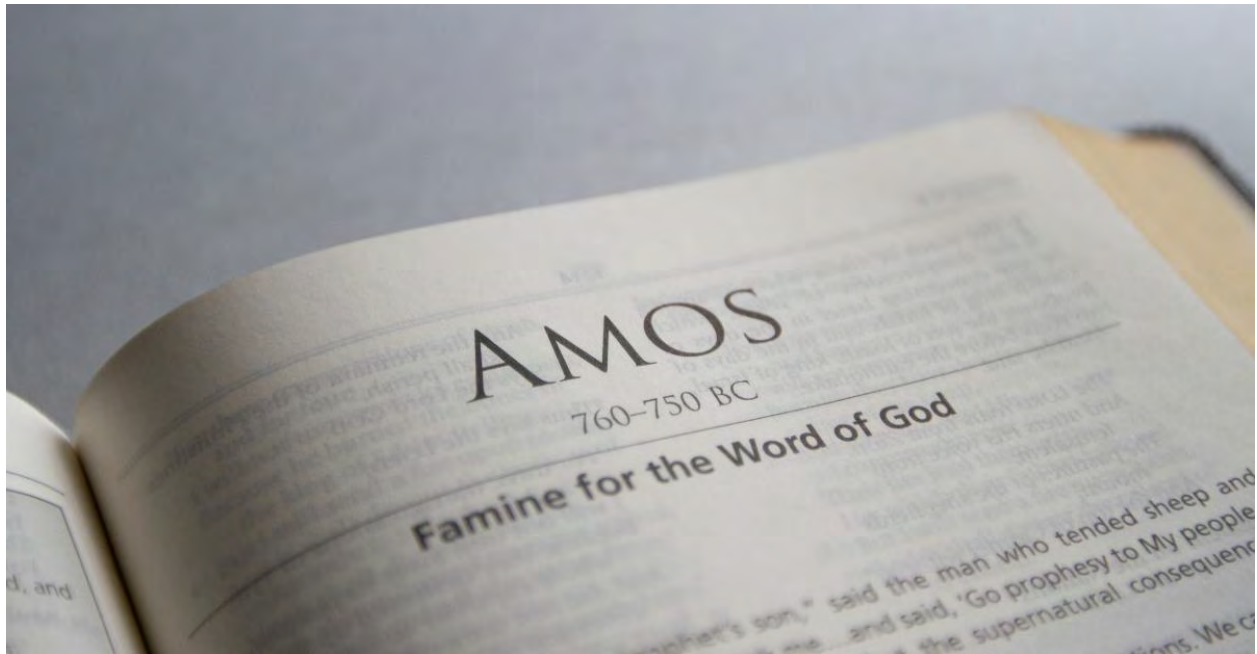


AMOS 8

FAMINE



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Amos 8: Famine
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Amos 8: Introduction

God loved and cared for all those who identified as “Israel.” But they were not all truly His. Just so, God loves and cares for every human being, all whom He has made in His image that they might know, love, and serve Him and rejoice in Him. But many of these reject God, choosing to be gods and a law unto themselves. Yet God’s love for them endures (cf. Ps. 52.1; Matt. 5.45).

But a day is coming when, the Book of Life being opened, their names will not appear, for they will have chosen not to appear. And once all the names in that Book are read out and those whose names appear there have entered the joy of the Lord, the Book will be closed, and those who are left will go into eternal darkness, cursing Him Whom they scorned all their lives.

Our calling, like that of Amos, is to remind the lost of God’s lovingkindness and to call them to repentance and faith in God’s Promised One, Jesus.

We hope you find this study of the book of Amos to provide abundant stimulation for your walk with and work for the Lord.

For His glory and praise!

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1 The End Has Come

Pray Psalm 37.1-3.

Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.
Trust in the LORD, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

Sing Psalm 37.1-3.

(Neumark: [*If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*](#))

Let not the wicked make you worry; envy not those who break God's Word.
Like dying grass will they be sorry, and fade like every dying herb.
Trust in the Lord and do His will; dwell in His grace, be faithful still.

Read and meditate on Amos 8.1-3.

Preparation

1. What did God show Amos?
2. How did God interpret this to Amos?

Meditation

Following two dire threats of which the Lord relented comes this vision of a basket of summer fruit. All is harvested; all will be consumed. And that will be the end of that.

Israel's final harvest was upon them. God would put His sickle in and reap Israel for the threshing. He had passed by them for many years, but His longsuffering was at an end. Now He would pass through them, leaving death and destruction in His wake. The Assyrians would be God's weapon of choice; yet in bringing destruction to Israel, the Assyrians were only setting themselves up for the same from "the glance of the Lord" (Byron).

What a contrast in this vision! A basket full of summer fruit should be an occasion of rejoicing and celebration. Instead, bodies are being buried in silence. Wailing pervades the houses of worship. And a mood of darkness and gloom pervades the land (as we shall see).

Yet to the very end—as, like Amaziah, their families were being destroyed before their eyes and they themselves were being queued up for the long march into captivity—no signs of repentance were in evidence. No calling on the Lord for mercy. No weeping for their sins. Israel remained hard-hearted to the very end. Even when prophets like Amos warned of judgment and pled with them to repent, they silenced them.

And so it will be as well when Jesus returns to judge the world. Those who scorn His Word, reject His offer of forgiveness, and refuse to follow in His Kingdom, and who continue thus to the end of their days, will be the same even beyond the end of history. Even as they are marched off to eternal separation from God, they will curse and blame Him for their plight, sorry for their misery but shaking their fists at the Lord.

Thus, let us pray for mercy now, repenting of our sins and calling our world to repent before the final harvest and the end of all things arrives.

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Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD” (Prov. 19.3).

“A man may ruin his chances by his own foolishness and then blame it on the LORD” (Prov. 19.3 TLB).

Isn't this what the foolish do?

They: disobey God, punishment ensues, then blame God.

That is the history of man in a nutshell.

Our longsuffering God: continues to warn.

We: ignore Him, are then punished, then we blame Him.

Isn't this the very thing Amaziah and his lot were doing?

However, “Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool” (Prov. 17.10).

“Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you” (Prov. 9.8).

How grateful we are, or should be, for the Amos' in our lives. Those who throughout the years have been used by the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and to point us in the right direction onto the Jesus Path.

Strawberries are beautiful—red, shiny, luscious smelling, juicy, sweet—for a short time. They are from the rose family and can be served in a variety of ways. But oh my, let them get a little over-ripe and a tad rotten and they become furry, squishy, and inedible.

For the second time, God asks Amos, “What do you see?” (Amos 8.2; 7.8)

This time Amos answered, “A basket of summer fruit.” (vs. 2)

Just about to go bad.

John warned those who were coming to him for baptism, “Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3.8-10). God was still warning His people through yet another prophet. Longsuffering.

After Paul, the apostle-prophet, listed the litany of rotten fruit things that will keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God, he lists the attributes that should characterize us as good fruit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5.21-23). All the characteristics of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ. Whom we are to be like (1 Cor. 11.1).

To us “God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Col. 1.27-29).

The end will come. Just as surely as strawberries are lovely, then they are not.

And we can either be found on that Day disobediently fretting against the LORD, or wisely and obediently following Him—a basket of good fruit or rotten. For God “will not pass by them anymore” (Amos 8.2).

Reflection

1. In what ways have you noticed the fruit of the Spirit coming out in your life?
2. What could you do to cultivate more of the fruit of the Spirit?
3. How can believers encourage one another to bear holy spiritual fruit?

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*Amos saw a basket of summer fruit gathered, and ready to be eaten; which signified, that the people were ripe for destruction, that the year of God's patience was drawing towards a conclusion...Sinners put off repentance from day to day, because they think the Lord thus delays his judgments. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 8.1-3**

Pray Psalm 37.4-9, 34-40.

Rejoice in the salvation God has given you in Jesus. Commit yourself to follow Him and to be a light to everyone in your Personal Mission Field. Rest in the Lord for the strength you will need.

Sing Psalm 37.4-9, 34-40.

(Neumark: *If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee*)

Delight yourself in God's salvation; He'll give you all your heart's desire.
Commit to Him your every station, and His good purpose will transpire.
Your righteousness a blazing light He will bring forth against the night.

Rest in the LORD and wait on Jesus; fret not at those who practice sin.
Forsake all wrath till anger ceases; let anxious fears not enter in.
The wicked perish from the LORD, but they are blessed who heed His Word!

Wait on the LORD, His way observing, and He will lift you up on high.
Those prone to wicked ways preserving, your eyes shall see cast down to die.
The blameless man shall stand upright, for God preserves him by His might!

Salvation comes from Christ our Savior; He is our strength in time of need.
On us does He bestow His favor, who all His holy judgments heed.
He is our help in troubled times; our refuge He, in Him we hide.

2 Hankering for Corruption

Pray Psalm 52.1-4.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God endures continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness.

Selah

You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

Sing Psalm 52.1-4.

(Warrington: [Give to Our God Immortal Praise](#))

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words both harsh and strong with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

Read Amos 8.1-6; meditate on verses 4-6.

Preparation

1. What was happening to the poor and needy?
2. What were the wealthy merchants doing?

Meditation

Paul wrote that those who turn from God enter a downward spiral of sin, where corruption increases as God gives them up to their sinful desires (Rom. 1.18-32). This is what had happened to the people of Israel, especially those who had wealth and power.

The poor were for these people just a means to an end, the fattening of their bellies. They worked them to death and taxed them into poverty as they “swallowed up” the needy and poor to satisfy their own desires (v. 4).

The Sabbath for the wealthy and powerful had become a burden because they could not engage in money-making. And when they did, they shorted their customers—small measures, high prices, and rigged scales (v. 5). And again, it was the poor they bilked by overcharging and underdelivering on the basics of life. The poor to them were little more than a bit more silver or a new pair of sandals. So what if the wheat they overcharged them for was blighted and moldy (v. 6)? Hey, they were just the poor, you know?

Self-interest breeds habitual sin. Habitual sin hardens the heart. A hard heart scorns all love but love of self. Love of self leads to more habitual sin, more corruption, and more self-love.

Sort of like what we see rampant in our own society. Ours is a “culture of narcissism” (Christopher Lasch), in which everyone's theme song is George Harrison's, “I, Me, Mine”. But like Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2, such a life is vanity and feeding on the wind. And, as in the case of Israel, it can hasten an entire nation to its end.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is true, as Jesus said, “you have the poor with you always” (Matt. 26.11); but He was saying this in contrast to the fact that He was going to be crucified, rise from the dead, and return to His rightful home in heaven. He was not denigrating the poor nor taking a “ho-hum” attitude as if they were just a pervasive problem or nuisance. God said, “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land’” (Deut. 15.11).

“He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people” (Ps. 113.7, 8).

God also had a lot to say about how to conduct business with honesty and fairness:

“You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I AM the LORD your God...” (Lev. 19.35, 36).

“Honest weights and scales are the LORD’s; all the weights in the bag are His work” (Prov. 16.11).

“Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 20.10).

“Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, and dishonest scales are not good” (Prov. 20.23).

He also clearly spelled out His word on the treatment of the poor:

“Do not rob the poor because he is poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate;

for the LORD will plead their cause, and plunder the soul of those who plunder them” (Prov. 22.22, 23).

Thus the people should not have been shocked when Amos told them of God’s mighty displeasure regarding their treatment of the poor and needy (Amos 8.5, 6).

There is a more mindful, kind, and better way to treat the poor and needy:

“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,
but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy” (Prov. 14.31).

“There is one who scatters, yet increases more;

and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty.

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself” (Prov. 11.24, 25).

“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice...”

It is a joy for the just to do justice...” (Prov. 21.3, 15).

Is it any wonder that God was violently opposed to the behavior of His people?

They were breaking His commandments with impunity and were not sorry. Not one little bit.

What He wanted was for them to “let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5.24); but instead, they were damming up all justice and righteousness so that not even a trickle was forthcoming. And it led to their demise.

We dare not do the same, for it will hasten the end. And there are still so many who need the LORD (Matt. 9.37, 38).

Reflection

1. How can you, as an individual believer, help the poor and needy?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to pray for the poor and needy?
3. What can you do to keep self-seeking and dishonesty from sneaking into your life?

The rich and powerful of the land were the most guilty of oppression, as well as the foremost in idolatry. They were weary of the

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restraints of the Sabbaths and the new moons, and wished them over, because no common work might be done therein. This is the character of many who are called Christians. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Amos 8.4-10

Pray Psalm 52.5-9.

Pray that God will keep you from corruption, that you will be firmly rooted in His Word, and that you will seek His Kingdom and righteousness throughout the day.

Sing Psalm 52.5-9.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire."

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

3 He Never Forgets

Pray Psalm 106.4, 5, 48.

Remember me, O LORD, with the favor *You have toward* Your people.
Oh, visit me with Your salvation,
That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones,
That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation,
That I may glory with Your inheritance...
Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 106.4, 5, 48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

LORD, when You Your people favor, help me, O, remember me,
that I may Your blessings savor and in joy and glory be!

Refrain

Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!
Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

Read Amos 8.1-8; meditate on verses 7, 8.

Preparation

1. What does God always remember?
2. What are the effects of this?

Meditation

Here is the Lord’s promise to all who repent:

“I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins.” (Is. 43.25)

But until repentance is realized, He continues to remember *all* our works, and all our works, being sinful, will tell against us in the day when God comes to judge the world (Matt. 16.27).

The sins of Israel were very great, indeed—idolatry, injustice, oppression, fornication, violence, lying, and more. From none of these did the people repent. Instead, they clung to the fact that they were the offspring of Jacob and would of course always have the favor of God, no matter what they did. Their pride in being Jacob’s offspring freed them, in their minds, to live as they pleased. No need to follow God’s Law or to be bound by any of His Word. No need to seek Him in prayer, since He was always watching over them anyway. No need to live as a people set apart for holiness, since they had their Jacob-ticket to escape God’s wrath.

Wrong. All such wrong belief is deadly, because the Lord remembers all the sinful works we do, even those we consider to be small or harmless or private. God sees. God remembers. And God is preparing a place of eternal judgment—worse than constant earthquakes and monster floods (v. 8)—for all who prefer their works to God’s, and who will not repent of their sins.

Don’t let that consequence be yours. As the Lord remembers your works, let Him see in them a reflection of Jesus—sinless, undefiled, and abounding in goodness. And repentant as needed.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Surely I will never forget any of their works” (Amos 8.7).

After the rain, and the floods, and the death, and the mayhem “God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark” (Gen. 8.1). God didn’t forget Noah’s work and obedience.

When God’s children were groaning and bemoaning their horrible situation of bondage in Egypt, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them” (Ex. 2.23-25).

After all the work Nehemiah had put into rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem and trying to revive the lives of God’s people within, he prayed, “Remember me, O my God, for good!” (Neh. 13.30).

When Hannah was crushed in spirit before God in prayer, she cried out, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head” (1 Sam. 1.10, 11).

Through the psalmist, we can pray with him, “Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope” (Ps. 119.49).

In the suffering of His people, He remembers His covenant (Ps. 106.45).

There is much to be thankful for when God remembers our works.

They are works that have been created for us before we were ever born. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.10).

Knowing that God remembers us, and will not forget our works, spurs us on to greater obedience and love. We are filled with respectful fear of what God can do for good and for evil. We are His. Come what may. Let us pray with Habakkuk: “O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab. 3.2).

As Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, said: “And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation” (Lk. 1.50).

He will remember us.

How He remembers us depends on what He cannot forget about us.

Reflection

1. What works do you expect Jesus to do in and through you today?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to keep from falling into sinful ways?
3. When we repent, God does not remember our sins. What should we learn from this about how to relate to one another?

He says, I shall never forget all your works, that is, none of your works shall be passed by unpunished. For though conscience sometimes disturbs hypocrites yet they think that many things may be concealed; and if the hundredth part, or at farbest the tenth, must be accounted for, they think this to be quite enough: "Why! God may perhaps observe this or that, but many faults

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will escape him." John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Amos 8.7*

Pray Psalm 106.44-48.

Thank the Lord that He remembers none of your sins because of Jesus. Seek His favor for the work that lies ahead of you today..

Sing Psalm 106.44-48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

Look upon us, LORD, with favor, see us in our sore distress!

Hear our cries, with love surround us; turn again to heal and bless!

Refrain

Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!

Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

Save us, LORD, from every nation; gather us from all our ways.

And we to Your Name will offer glorious thanks and endless praise!

Refrain

4 A Time of Mourning

Pray Psalm 7.9-11.

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end,
But establish the just;
For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.
My defense *is* of God,
Who saves the upright in heart.
God *is* a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.

Sing Psalm 7.9-11.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still, My Soul*](#))

Bring to an end the evil of the wicked,
but let Your righteous ones established be.
You are my shield, my soul will not be stricken;
test heart and mind, my true Defender be.
You are a righteous Judge in every way,
angry at wicked people every day.

Read and meditate on Amos 8.1-10; meditate on verses 9, 10.

Preparation

1. What will happen “in that day”?
2. What is all that meant to suggest?

Meditation

How many ways can God describe the gloom, loss, and despair coming upon the people of Israel? The day that God’s judgment falls, the day when the people are carried away into captivity, will be like a sudden darkening of the earth. All light will vanish as the sun goes out in mid-day. Thick darkness—a symbol of fear and hopelessness—will shroud the heart of every Israelite.

Instead of bawdy feasts in the temples of their pagan gods, the people will mourn and sing songs of lament. They will be dressed in sackcloth, but not because they are repentant, only because misery has become their end. Heads will be shorn—a sign of humiliation and enslavement—and everyone will mourn as if they had lost an only son. They will have lost their freedom, their country, and their identity. Indeed, that day’s end will be full of bitterness.

All these images are designed to help the people of Israel feel the wrath that is coming upon them. The prophet’s burden was always twofold: First, to vindicate the Name of the Lord by telling the people in advance what He was going to do. Just as He promised from as far back as Deuteronomy 14.15ff, God would bring judgment against His ungrateful, disobedient, rebellious people. When it happened to Israel, then He, not they, would be vindicated.

Second, there was always the hope that the people would repent. Seeing what lay ahead and eager to avoid it, perhaps more would repent and find their way to Judah, there to save a remnant of Israel for the future hope of deliverance to be realized in Christ.

This is our message to our own generation. Jesus has borne God’s wrath for our sin. Repent and believe the

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Good News, lest the wrath of God, that is even now being poured out on the wrong-believing world (Rom. 1.18-32), should come suddenly, terrifyingly, and finally.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

God, in His mercy, continues to warn.
We have been warned.

Unfaithfulness in marriage is often used as a dire example of not only cruelty to one another, but for God's people's unfaithfulness to Him through love that's grown cold and disobedience. Solomon wrote this as a warning to his children; we should hear it as a warning to us: "Therefore hear me now, my children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel one; lest aliens be filled with your wealth, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner; and you mourn at last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and say: 'How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised correction! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me! I was on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the assembly and congregation'" (Prov. 5.7-13).

Truly, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief" (Prov. 14.12, 13).

There is a matter of the heart that God wants us to be aware of; for we can look altogether godly and well-behaved when in fact, our spirits are corrupt to the core. God knows. God sees. He can make that "lightness" dark in the blink of an eye—sundown at noon, the earth dark in broad daylight, celebrations become mourning, nice clothes into sackcloth, lush locks into baldness, mourning for a child, bitterness—total and complete (Amos 8.9, 10).

The people in the church at Ephesus thought they were doing really well, thank you very much. At least outwardly. But God knew better. This is what He saw: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."

Okey-dokey. All is well. But no, wait.

"Nevertheless." Ah. Now the truth that hurts and convicts.

"I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Rev. 2.2-5). Sundown at noon.

And here is where they fell down on the job—where the outward and the inward diverged.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22.37-40).

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4.23).

Love for God, first and foremost, can most assuredly turn "a time to mourn" into a "time to dance" (Eccl. 3.4). We have been warned.

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Reflection

1. How would people who know you know that you had not lost your “first love”?
2. What can you do to help your fellow believers keep from straying off the path of love for Jesus?
3. Can we love our neighbors as we should if we lose sight of our love for God? Explain.

This speaks the case of such unjust, unmerciful men, to be miserable indeed, miserable for ever. There shall be terror and desolation every where. It shall come upon them when they little think of it. Thus uncertain are all our creature-comforts and enjoyments, even life itself; in the midst of life we are in death. What will be the wailing in the bitter day which follows sinful and sensual pleasures! Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 8.9, 10*

Pray Psalm 7.1-8.

Pray that God will spare His people from wrath through repentance and revival, and that, once we are revived, we will be renewed in our message to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to our world.

Sing Psalm 7.1-8.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still, My Soul*](#))

O LORD, my God, I trust in You: O save me!
Deliver me from all who seek my life.
If in my hands, You find iniquity,
or any evil, any wicked strife,
then let my foe pursue and overtake me,
and without honor I shall surely be.

Arise, O LORD, rise up in wrath to save me!
Let rage and judgment fall upon my foes!
From all who know You let abundant praise be;
rise up on high; the wicked curse with woes.
O Judge of all, judge now my righteousness
and my integrity, approve and bless.

5 A Famine of Hearing

Pray Psalm 19.12-14.

Who can understand *his* errors?
Cleanse me from secret *faults*.
Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Sing Psalm 19.12-14.

(St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))
Who, LORD, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!
Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.
O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight
be pleasing to You, gracious LORD, acceptable and right.

Read and meditate on Amos 8.1-11; meditate on verse 11.

Preparation

1. What did God promise to send?
2. What kind of famine?

Meditation

Jesus said, “For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matt. 13.12). He might as well have been commenting on today’s passage.

God had sent His prophets to Israel from the reign of Jeroboam I to that of Jeroboam II. Neither they nor the people of Israel—save for the remnant who returned to Judah—heard or cherished or obeyed the Word of the Lord. Indeed, they silenced the prophets God sent, preferring instead the idols and ways of pagan religion.

Therefore, God would “close the book” on His people. They didn’t appreciate or want the gift of divine revelation? Fine. They could have just what they wanted. No precious and very great promises. No enriching history of their faithful forebears. No divine light on their paths. No future or hope. The people of Israel would hear the Word of the Lord no more, for He would deprive them of it, according to their demonstrated wishes.

When God looks at us, does He see us hungry for His Word (Jer. 15.16)? When He comes to visit with us every morning (Job 7.17, 18), does He find us ready with His Word and situated in prayer? Are we in the category of those who receive the Word of God, more and more each day, and to whom God thus grants more of His grace and truth?

Or are we setting ourselves up for the Lord to close the Book on us as well?

Amos 8: Famine

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The Rabshakeh (Chief of Staff) from the king of Assyria was sent to convey some very bad news to the children of God during Hezekiah's reign. He spoke his words of doom in a very loud voice, in the hearing of all the people. So, Hezekiah's spokespersons said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall" (Is. 36.11). Cause, what, they can't handle the truth?

Seminaries of today, and the last several generations, seem to have taken this particular verse to heart in training men for the pastorate. "Speak in a language your congregants will not understand because the folks just can't handle the truth. And you might lose some tithers if you irritate them with the understandable Word of God. Because, students, as you may know, the Word of God requires a change of heart and life, and that might be hard for your people to grasp. Plus, it can seem just a tad off-putting if they are choosing to live any way they want—like ignoring the Ten Commandments. Keep your preaching opaque and mild. By all means, Do not make it clear. Class dismissed." And off they go, to starve their congregations with impunity.

Thus, we experience a "famine of the Words of the LORD" (Amos 8.11).

"For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd" (Zech. 10.2).

In truth the people of God want the truth. The people want to live righteously in their Personal Mission Field. The people want to live for something and Someone that is worth dying for! Trust us with the truth!

Jesus, "when He saw the multitudes, was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9.36).

It is true that we are in a famine of the Word. We are weary and scattered. However, we also have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. And with His help and guidance, we can feed ourselves. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5.6).

The plan is the Church. And the shepherds are the leaders. But if there are no leaders, we cannot plead ignorance and helplessness. We must move forward on the Jesus Path—regardless.

"The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied" (Ps. 37.18, 19).

There are treasures in the Old and New Testament that we are free to search out, pray through, and grow by (Matt. 13.52; Ps. 119.162). Treasures in which to find nourishment to sustain and enliven us; to encourage and embolden us; and to feed us so well that we have abundant leftovers to share with those in our Personal Mission Field (Lk. 9.14, 17).

The Rabshakeh continues to threaten, and our pastors continually tone it down; we could starve in the famine of not hearing the words of the LORD, but we won't—because we know where to find nourishment. "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jer. 15.16).

Let's pray that our seminaries find a new favorite verse; and that our pastor's hearts are revived to preach the whole counsel of God. We could always use an extra meal to grow on.

Reflection

1. How do you avoid falling victim to a famine of hearing God's Word?

Amos 8: Famine

2. What can you do to encourage your fellow believers to spend more time in the Scriptures?
3. If we don't feed on the Word, if we choose to do other things in the time we might be searching the Scripture, how might we expect the Lord to respond?

Here was a token of God's highest displeasure. At any time, and most in a time of trouble, a famine of the word of God is the heaviest judgment... Let us value our advantages, seek to profit by them, and fear sinning them away. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Amos 8.11

Pray Psalm 19.7-11.

Thank the Lord for the gift of His Word. Praise Him for the many insights, lessons, and instructions you have gained from Him. Commit yourself to following His Word in all you do.

Sing Psalm 19.7-11.

(St. Christopher: [*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*](#))

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
the simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

6 Effects of the Famine

Pray Psalm 42.6-8.

O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon,
From the Hill Mizar.
Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows have gone over me.
The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime,
And in the night His song *shall be* with me—
A prayer to the God of my life.

Sing Psalm 42.6-8.

(Nettleton: [Come Thou Fount](#))

Oh my God, my soul is weary, therefore I remember You.
Let Your grace and goodness near be, and Your promise, firm and true.
LORD, when trials and fears surround me, Your commands will be my song!
When distresses sore confound me, Your great love will keep me strong.

Read Amos 8.1-14; meditate on verses 12-14.

Preparation

1. What happens to people in a famine of the Word?
2. Where do they end up?

Meditation

Jesus came to earth as a Man with a mission. He knew why He had come, what He must do, how He must comport Himself, what He must teach, and that, at the end, though He would seem to fall into death yet He would rise again. Jesus had a clear vision and purpose and He would allow nothing to deter Him—not the devil (Matt. 4.1-11) and not even His closest disciple (Matt. 16.14-23).

As the Word of God, every moment of Jesus' life was filled with purpose, meaning, and the glory of God. And where the Word is not present in a life or a society, quite the opposite picture emerges. People wander about with no greater purpose than to satisfy their next impulse. They're looking for something stable, reliable, and true, but because they will not resort to the Word, every choice they make is feeble and fleeting (v. 12).

They thirst for truth and cannot find it because they believe themselves to be the source of truth (v. 13), and they worship the vain idols they have adopted as their goal in life. But their idols don't deliver (v. 14). They roam the land, from Dan to Beersheba, in search of something like the hope of eternal life ("As your god lives...As the way of Beersheba lives..."), but every moment indulged is gone and their thirst remains.

Where a famine of the Word has settled in, people are lost. They may look strong and successful, and it may appear that all is well in their lives. But, like Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2, trusting in things and circumstances ends up leaving you thirsty for the real thing. But the real thing is not available because it has been set aside, neglected, forsaken, rejected, and scorned. Souls become a desert and a culture becomes a swamp where a famine of hearing has set in.

Don't let it happen to you.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Admittedly, Solomon had a few bad years. He went from being the wisest person on earth and living within that framework, to being a usual dolt who fell for women. Loser.

But when he was surging with God's wisdom, he was teaching his children how to live life to the fullest; and warning them of what happens when a person turns away from God's teaching. As we read what he wrote in Proverbs 1.23-33, we can hear the voice of God in Solomon's thoughts. Here are some truths and consequences he put before his own offspring:

"Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you;

I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused,

I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,

because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke,

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes.

When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind,

when distress and anguish come upon you.

Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;

they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.

Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke.

Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.

For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil."

As God's children we must heed this warning. Amos, Solomon, and a plethora of others have been warning us, "Seek the LORD and live" (Amos 5.6). Jesus warned us, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed" (Matt. 13.14, 15). And He was repeating what the prophet Isaiah had warned of hundreds of years before (Is. 6.9, 10). On and on it goes. How long do we really think God will wait to judge?

The thing we must hear and see is this: God clearly stated that at some point people will look for His Word and will not *find* it; that the hardest will *faint*; and those who serve idols of self and sufficiency will *fall*—never to rise again. A failing grade for all the faux students of the LORD God.

God is saying to us, again, through Solomon: "Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths" (Prov. 4.10 11).

Furthermore, "I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine" (Is. 43.1).

That truth fills our heart with joy. We are full. And we have the goods to give to those who are hungry.

As Isaac Watts (1674-1748) so beautifully wrote in his hymn, *How Sweet and Anful is the Place*:

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,

And enter while there's room,

When thousands make a wretched choice,

And rather starve than come?"

We have heard the warning.

We are called to lovingly warn.

Amos 8: Famine

And to invite others to the banquet (Rev. 19.9).
Where there is no famine of God's Word.

Reflection

1. How would you advise a new Christian to keep from falling into a famine of the Word?
2. Have you ever been helped by a well-timed rebuke? Explain.
3. Why do Christians need other Christians to keep from falling into a famine of hearing God's Word?

*It seems unnatural, that those who are vigorous, and can run to get supply for their wants, should faint: but the Prophet, as I have said, wished to show that there would be no escape, but that God would distress the strongest, when he sent such a famine, and with it the want also of drink. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Amos 8.11-14**

Pray Psalm 42.1-5.

Call on the Lord to refresh your soul as you feed on His Word. Give Him praise and thanks for the Word He speaks to you today.

Sing Psalm 42.1-5.

(Nettleton: [*Come Thou Fount*](#))

As the deer pants for fresh water let my soul, LORD, pant for You!
Let my soul thirst as it ought to for the Savior, ever true!
Tears by day have been my portion, tears by night have been my food,
while my foes add to my sorrow, saying, "Where now is your God?"

Now I pour my soul out in me as these thoughts come to my mind.
And I long to once again be where true worship I might find.
Oh my soul, be not despairing! Hope in God, and praise His Name!
For the LORD, your burden bearing, will restore your peace again.

7 A Closed Book

Pray Psalm 138.7, 8.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me;
You will stretch out Your hand
Against the wrath of my enemies,
And Your right hand will save me.
The LORD will perfect *that which* concerns me;
Your mercy, O LORD, *endures* forever;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

Sing Psalm 138.7, 8.

(Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))

Your Right Hand will save and keep me; all I need You will supply.
For Your love is everlasting reaching from beyond the sky.
You will not forsake or leave me; You will save me when I cry.

Read Amos 8.1-14; meditate on verses 1, 2, 14.

Preparation

1. How did God show that He had “closed the book” on the northern Kingdom?
2. What would be the result of this?

Meditation

The apostle Paul explained that not all those who were of the ten tribes of Israel were truly “Israel”, that is, truly the people of God (Rom. 9.6,7). He further clarified, “That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.” Being a fleshly descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was never the criterion for knowing the favor of God. Believing God’s promises, trusting in Him, and obeying His Law are the identifying marks of those who truly belong to the Lord. In Amos’ day, only those who heeded the Lord’s prophets and trusted in Him would find safety from His wrath by fleeing to Judah, the southern kingdom.

For the rest, God closed the book on them, withdrawing all His favor and protection and consigning them to utter destruction. They had known His love over and over, yet they spurned Him in wrong belief to seek idols. Oh, they kept up some semblance of worshiping God (vv. 5, 6; cf. 5.21-26), but there was no substance to it. All their works were self-aggrandizing and oppressive, and God would not forget a single one of them (v. 7). He would remove His Word and promises from them (v. 11) and leave them to their vain choices—ruined, mourning, and led away into captivity (vv. 3, 8-10).

God loved and cared for all those who identified as “Israel.” But they were not all truly His. Just so, God loves and cares for every human being, all whom He has made in His image that they might know, love, and serve Him and rejoice in Him. But many of these reject God, choosing to be gods and a law unto themselves. Yet God’s love for them endures (cf. Ps. 52.1; Matt. 5.45).

But a day is coming when, the Book of Life being opened, their names will not appear, for they will have chosen not to appear. And once all the names in that Book are read out and those whose names appear there have entered the joy of the Lord, the Book will be closed, and those who are left will go into eternal darkness, cursing Him Whom they scorned all their lives.

Our calling, like that of Amos, is to remind the lost of God's lovingkindness and to call them to repentance and faith in God's Promised One, Jesus.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

God is asking us, just as surely as He asked Amos, "What do you see?" (Amos 7.8, 8.2).

And there is not much difference in what we see and in what Amos saw all those years ago.

God came to Ezekiel after the destruction of Israel to warn him of the pending end of Judah. "An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end has come upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will repay you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity; but I will repay your ways, and your abominations will be in your midst; then you shall know that I AM the LORD!" (Ezek. 7.4) "Then you shall know that I AM the LORD Who strikes" (Ezek. 7.9).

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

(The Westminster Shorter Catechism)

That is the point of everything. Every breath we draw, every thought we think, every action we take is to glorify God and to acknowledge Him as The LORD of everything and everyone. Isn't that what God is saying to Ezekiel and to Amos? "I AM the LORD, seek Me and live. And do it My way."

Q: What is the other option?

A: We can fall and never rise again.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12.1-3).

Open God's book, read it, meditate in it, for it is your life.

"The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them.

His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever.

He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations...

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;

a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.

His praise endures forever" (Ps. 111.2-6; 10).

What do you see?

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3.2, 3).

Because this is true, "our calling, like that of Amos, is to remind the lost of God's lovingkindness and to call them to repentance and faith in God's Promised One, Jesus"; so the Book will not be closed to them.

Amos 8: Famine

Reflection

1. When you look on the people in your Personal Mission Field, what do you see?
2. What opportunities for sharing the Good News of Jesus do you have in your Personal Mission Field?
3. In what ways is your ministry like that of Amos? In what ways is it different?

*God indeed, as it is well known, had so treated that people, that He ever spared them even in their greatest calamities. It was with a suspended hand that God ever struck that people, until after many trials they at length seemed so refractory, as not to be benefited by such remedies. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Amos 8.1, 2**

Pray Psalm 138.1-6.

Praise the Lord for His great patience and lovingkindness and for all the ways He has answered your prayers in the past. Call on Him to show you His glory and to glorify His Name in all you do today.

Sing Psalm 138.1-6.

(Regent Square: [*Angels from the Realms of Glory*](#))

I will give You thanks and praise You, God of gods, with all my heart.
I will bow before Your temple, grateful praise to You impart.
For Your Name and for Your glory, You have magnified Your Word!

On the day I called You answered, made me bold within my soul;
when I walk in troubled places, You revive and make me whole.
For Your hand will gently shield me, and my fearsome foes control.

All the kings of earth will praise You when Your words of truth they hear;
of Your ways, of Your great glory gladly they will shout and cheer.
For the proud shall not approach You, yet You hold the lowly dear.

Amos 8: Famine

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What did God think about the worship Israel offered Him? Why?
2. What is a “famine of hearing” the Word of God? What are the effects of this?
3. God would not forget the wicked works of Israel. Does He remember ours? Explain.
4. Did God deny His Word or change His mind concerning “Israel”? Explain.
5. What’s the most important lesson you have learned from this section of the book of Amos?

For Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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