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C0919 – May 13, 2009 – Amos 5:1-15 – Seek God & Live

Tonight we want to get back into Amos; we've covered chapters 1-4. Let's review a bit this little known shepherd, Amos, from the shepherd's town of Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah. He was not a professional prophet but he was called out for this special task by the Lord God and therefore is constrained to deliver this very lengthy and difficult message of doom to the northern kingdom of Israel.

In general, the book can be divided into three parts. Chapters 1-2, eight oracles of doom, chapters 3-5, three covenant lawsuits and chapters 7-9, five visions. It is a very powerful prophecy most of which covers the themes of judgment and doom. From this we gather that Amos was not a very popular prophet. The people he was ministering to were in rebellion against the word of God and therefore, when he approaches them in chapter 1 he has to come with the indirect approach, a strategy of entrapment that may seem quite lengthy, but sometimes the shortest way home is the longest way around.

And so begins chapter 1, v 3-2:5 by pronouncing judgment on seven of her surrounding neighbors to draw Israel in so he can get a hearing. Those who are prosperous and steeped in sin are often the least likely to give ear to the word of God. They don't want to hear that. So to get a hearing he pronounces doom on these surrounding nations. That would thoroughly interest them and it would be quite delightful to hear that your enemies are going to be defeated. But Amos didn't stop with the seven surrounding nations. In chapter 2, verse 6 he turned the table on them too and gave them the longest message of doom yet. Chapter 3 enters into the first of three covenant lawsuits and in chapters 3:1-8 Amos defends his right to prophecy since he was not of the school of the prophets. A lion has roared, who can but prophecy. The rest of the chapter outlines the fact that God is their enemy.

Chapter 4 - how they should prepare to meet the Lord their God. So the nation of Israel is coming under divine discipline and with that said we want to briefly review some of the principles of divine discipline.

First, let's be clear that *there is a difference between God's disciplinary wrath and God's judgmental wrath*. When God is dealing with the surrounding nations in chapter 1:3-2:3 you are reading of the judgmental wrath of God. Those pagan nations did not have a Father-Son relationship with God. And therefore the pronouncements there are categorized as judgmental wrath. But chapter 2:4 to the end of the book are categorized as disciplinary wrath because they did have a Father-Son relationship with God and therefore the pronouncements are disciplinary wrath. So there are two kinds of wrath and you have to be careful with the word 'wrath' because in the NT it's applied to both believers and unbelievers and so the distinction in a passage is not whether it uses the word 'wrath' or not, but who in the context it's being applied to and once you determine that then you can say whether it's disciplinary or judgmental wrath. Disciplinary wrath is for those inside the family, judgmental wrath is for those outside the family.

Second, the objects of discipline. Expanding the distinction we've made, God only disciplines inside His family. That goes for OT Israel and finds it's parallel in the NT Church. So the judgments that come on America are not disciplinary, we're not under divine discipline, we're under divine judgment. Let's be very clear that when Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome fell it was not because of God's discipline. God disciplines only those whom He loves with a special covenantal love. In addition to holding for Israel and the Church what we're also learning is wisdom principles for parental discipline of children. What we're trying to learn from watching how God disciplined Israel and how He disciplines us in the Church can be transferred in principle to how parents discipline their children. And so it is that as God only disciplined inside His family so the parent should discipline only inside his family. Your children hold a privileged position in your house and are therefore responsible to you. Ultimately to God but God gave you to them as their parents and you are called to discipline. God the Father is the archetype you're to follow.

Third, the reason of discipline. God disciplines because He loves. And you ought to discipline because you love your child. I could care less what Johnny

does because Johnny's not my responsibility. But Joshua is my responsibility. He's my son and if I love him I will discipline him. If you do not discipline your child and you want to subject your child to all kinds of secular psychology all you're doing is damaging your child. You're violating the word of God and you're not loving him, your hating him. Before we get to the means, because I have a piece to say about the biblical means of discipline, let's talk about the purpose of discipline, the fourth thing.

The purpose of God's disciplining us is so we will line up under His authority and grow spiritually. This program is outlined in Heb 12. And the end of the whole thing is that we are oriented to authority and we know how to say to God's commands, Yes sir. There is no arguing with God's commands. God is the sole authority and we submit to Him, the result of learning loyalty to Him is the fruit of righteousness. In the home the purpose of parental discipline is the same, to orient your child to authority. Your child comes into this world equipped with a sin nature and you will never have to teach any child how to do what is wrong. Children already know how to do wrong. And very quickly they will begin to master certain sin patterns and it's your responsibility as a parent to say no to those sin patterns, to cut him off so he does not develop highly advanced skills of the sin nature. Now you're not going to get rid of the sin nature but you will teach him authority (if done correctly) and will prepare him for the gospel. That's the ultimate purpose of parental discipline, to prepare your child for the gospel. The gospel comes with authority. You can come to Me My way and that's the only way. People don't like that because it comes with authority and it's not your authority, it's God's authority. So we discipline to orient our children to authority in the universe.

Fifth, the manner of God's discipline. What the Bible calls the rod. Now, the rod is not a paddle, the rod in the Bible is a very specific instrument in the Bible. To discipline with a paddle or your hand would not be the biblical method. There's something about the rod that makes it superior to any other instrument. The rod refers to a long slender branch-type instrument. Sort of like a dowel rod. So it's thin and it's long, it's not a baseball bat. Clubs and paddles can injure children if the parent gets out of control or the kid puts his arm in the way or twists, the rod will eliminate that. The rod won't injure, it may leave a red mark, it may leave a whelp but it won't bruise, it won't injure. And the place you put the rod is the buttocks, not the head, not the face, not the legs, the buttocks. The Bible is absolutely consistent in saying

use the rod and the father who does not use the rod hates his son and so forth. Don't try to go through the clothing, children wear different thickness of clothing and you want to be consistent. Pull the pants down and put the rod across the buttocks. It will sting because your nerve receptors, the pain receptors called nociceptors, are on the surface of the buttocks, they're not deep down. A child who you spank over and over with a paddle will get used to the pain and you'll have to up the intensity and then you can really injure a child, so you don't do it that way. You follow the biblical method, the rod. The last thing I'll say about the rod is the most important thing. What is it that Jesus Christ rules with in the Millennial Kingdom? A rod of iron. Why the rod? Because it's a symbol of authority. And a child knows that. He is built to recognize it because God built him to recognize it as a symbol of authority. The hand doesn't carry that symbology, the hand carries the meaning of hitting, beating, hurting and fighting. That's not what you're doing when you discipline, it's not a fight. It's saying I'm the authority, now will you submit? And finally, a rod is humbling, that's another thing because the things so small and thin that frankly it's humiliating to feel the sting out of such a little thing. And of course, these may get bigger as the child grows but once they reach the age of 10-12 there should be little reason to use the rod if you've been consistent.

The sixth point we want to make about discipline is the progressive nature and we already touched on it a bit with the rod, but elaborating, God's discipline increases in stages. We saw that in chapter 4 of Amos, I disciplined but you did not return to Me, so let me turn up the discipline. Oh, that's not enough, here's some more and He cranks it up some more. The same thing is true for the parent. If the son does not respond to the discipline at stage one then He increases the discipline to stage two and if he continues to rebel then He increases it to stage three. There's an increase in the severity of the discipline. And the parent in the home should follow the same progress.

Alright, with that review, those are truths we've drawn out over the course of the last several weeks. They are disciplinary truths. Today we get into chapter 5. **Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel: Hear this word**, the introductory formula for a covenant lawsuit, the same words are used to introduce chapter 3:1 and chapter 4:1, three covenant lawsuits in the Book of Amos, chapters 3, 4 and 5. So he begins with the covenant lawsuit formula, **Hear this word which I take up for you,**

literally, against you, in the form of a **dirge**. The **I** here is the Lord speaking directly to the nation Israel. Now, this word is taken against Israel as a **dirge**. The **dirge** was the lament given at a funeral. What we're looking at here is the funeral procession of the northern kingdom. They're still alive in the land and yet they're attending their funeral. How would you like to attend your funeral before you died? How would you like to look in your casket? How would you like to hear the words spoken by the minister? How would you like to see who showed up for your funeral? Or hear the words spoken by the people there? What did they say about you? Well, that is in fact what the nation Israel had the privilege of seeing. That's the idea here of the **dirge**, vv 1-3 are the dirge and scholars have recognized a peculiar meter in the Hebrew language,ⁱ just as when you attend a funeral procession, if you listen carefully you will hear that the melody of the music is doleful, downcast and saddening, not neutral. The same instrument(s) can be used to produce different moods, thoughts and emotions. Or if you watch the gait of those in a formal procession, it's a peculiar doleful gait. And in the Hebrew text there's this peculiar doleful, dirge-like meter. If you want to see another dirge that uses the same meter you can study 2 Sam 1 where David's laments over Saul and Jonathan or you can study most of the Book of Lamentations. So Israel's funeral before she dies.

Vv 2-3, her death. **She has fallen, she will not rise again— The virgin Israel. She lies neglected on her land; There is none to raise her up. 3 For thus says the Lord God, "The city which goes forth a thousand strong Will have a hundred left, And the one which goes forth a hundred strong Will have ten left to the house of Israel."** What is said here is certain, **She has fallen, she will not rise again**, yet what does verse 4 say? **Seek Me that you may live**, and in v 6 what is said? **Seek the Lord that you may live**. But I thought Israel was fallen, I thought Israel would not rise again? How is it that if she seeks the Lord at this point that she may live? That's a good question. That generates theological tension for us. Israel will die but Israel can live if they seek Him. We'll try to resolve that tension tonight. But for now, **She has fallen, she will not rise again—The virgin Israel**. Now look at how she is described there, as a **virgin**, as a woman who died young before she reached her potential, before she reached her purpose in life. What was God's purpose for Israel? That she would learn loyalty to Him. Yet she failed to reach that potential. Far from learning loyalty to God she had sharpened her rebellion against the word of God and

shaken her fist at God. She never reached God's purpose, her potential. What did we say was the Aim of Sanctification? We have five aspects of the Doctrine of Sanctification, what are they? The Phases, the Aim, the Means, the Dimensions and the Enemies. What was the Aim? Was it to defeat their enemies? No, What is the goal God wants us to reach? Loyalty to Him. Loyalty to His word. To love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus said, who is the one that loves Me but he who keeps My commandments. Obedience to God. Learning loyalty to God through His word. Had they learned loyalty to God? No, Israel died a **virgin**. She failed to meet God's purpose and her potential.

And Amos continues now with the military defeat, **She lies neglected on her land**, she's forsaken on her land. She's all alone; when the enemy enters the land Israel will have no one to protect her. That's the sense of this statement and it's a horrible thing to consider that the Lord God has abandoned them on their land to suffer this military defeat. In fact, God's the enemy leading the attack as we learned in chapter 3. So He is their enemy, not their protector. But that's a part of the discipline, when we obey the Lord He protects us, when we disobey the Lord He disciplines us. And when this happens there is **no one to raise her up**, that is, no one to establish her in strength since their strength is found in no one but YHWH and He's the opposition.

Verse 3, **For thus says the Lord God, "The city which goes forth a thousand strong Will have a hundred left, And the one which goes forth a hundred strong Will have ten left to the house of Israel."** This is the body count; this is what flashes on the TV screen as the list of casualties. 90%. This is going to war and finding out that you're nation has suffered 90% casualties. Imagine if America were to face a military defeat on the scale of 90%. 9 out of the 10 people you know would be dead, that's the situation when the discipline comes on the nation of Israel. 90% of the people you know are laying dead on their land, in their homes, at their workplace, the soil is saturated in the blood of your countrymen, your husbands, your children, your extended family. It's sickening, death and disease spread, the stench alone is pretty gross. All because they didn't learn loyalty to God, they rebelled against the word of God. They failed to reach God's Aim for their lives as a nation. Learn loyalty to Me and I will bless you, I will establish you, I will protect you and will be with you and build the greatest kingdom on

earth with all the cultural fruits of music, art, science, economy and so forth. Fail to do so and I will curse you, I will abandon you and there will be none to protect you and your society will rot. This of course is the fifth and final degree of cursing. In Lev 26 and Deut 28 you can trace the five degrees of cursing, each one increasing in intensity until finally God's grace runs out and He says, that's it and He exiles them, that's what this is, she will be cut off from her land for covenant disobedience while still a young **virgin**.

Verses 4-7 give Israel's proper response to this funeral dirge. What should she do? **For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, "Seek Me that you may live. 5 "But do not resort to Bethel** and literally that word **resort** is "seek" again, same word as verse 4, **Seek Me** but "do not seek Me at Bethel." **And do not come to Gilgal, Nor cross over to Beersheba;** These are the three shrines. The first two are in the northern kingdom, **Beersheba** is in the southern, which is why it says, do not **cross over to Beersheba** because they had to cross the border to get to Beersheba. So let's look at these cities because for some reason they want to seek God in these cities but the Lord says, forget it.

If we back up a few centuries to the Golden Era of Solomon, when Solomon got done ruining the kingdom, in 931BC it was turned over to his son Rehoboam who was a spiritual ignoramus and drove the kingdom to the brink of civil war. God said don't draw your brother's blood, so the kingdom was divided. Rehoboam took the two southern tribes and Jeroboam I, who had been in exile in Egypt, returned and took the ten northern tribes. Now Jeroboam was a very shrewd politician, he wasn't too with it spiritually, but he was brilliant in terms of pagan political philosophy and he knew enough of history to carry out some pretty interesting tactics. He didn't want his people going down south to Jerusalem to worship three times a year so he set up a false religious system in the cities of Dan and **Bethel**. Over time more high places were built, such as at **Gilgal**. But the system he set up was an amalgam of ideas, some pagan, some YHWH'istic. What do we call that when we mix elements of two or more systems of thought? Syncretism, the admixture of two or more systems of thought. And so Jeroboam had altars just like God commanded, he had priests just like God commanded, he had feast days just like God commanded, but they were all slightly nuanced. The altars were not in Jerusalem but Dan and Bethel, the priests weren't Levites, the feast days weren't in the seventh month. So it all sounds pretty good, it's

almost right, but it's not right. Remember what Dick said, discernment isn't knowing right from wrong, it's knowing right from almost right. They were almost right, but almost right in the eyes of God is wrong. They were an apostate kingdom; they had departed from the Lord their God. And now it's been almost two centuries and they have departed further and further from the Lord their God. And so he says **Seek Me...But do not seek at Bethel And do not come to Gilgal, Nor cross over to Beersheba.** Three significant places in the life of the nation Israel. **Bethel** we've said before was where the patriarch Jacob saw the vision of the ladder going up to heaven and the angels ascending and descending and surely he said, this is the house of God, surely this is the gateway to heaven, surely God is in this place and so when Jeroboam came along he established this as the central religious shrine. And in Amos' day they thought, maybe if we go to **Bethel**, maybe we will have a great experience with God like Jacob. But the Lord God says through Amos, do not seek Me in **Bethel**, you will not find Me there. Second, **Gilgal**, is where the Israelites camped after they crossed the Jordan River at the Conquest and Settlement of the land. It's just a few miles from Jericho, but this was their base of operation. This is where Joshua circumcised that whole generation of the wilderness wanderings. Once they entered the land they were circumcised and God called that place **Gilgal** because it was there God removed the reproach of Egypt from them. And they may have thought in the northern kingdom, you know, God once removed our reproach at **Gilgal**, now if we go to the place called **Gilgal** maybe God will remove our reproach again. Again, that's not necessarily a right association. And third, **do not cross over to Beersheba.** **Beersheba** was a religious pilgrimage to visit the hometown of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is where Abraham called on the name of the Everlasting God and the Lord appeared to him, and he also appeared to Isaac here and to Jacob. So they must have thought, if we go to **Beersheba** we can call on the name of the Everlasting God like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and HE will answer us. Wrong again. What's the point of these three apostate northern ideas? There's an association in pagan thought that the gods hang around certain shrines so they're just doing their pagan thing. This is pagan thinking. Even Solomon knew that even though Jerusalem was central and the Shechinah Glory dwelled there, that even the highest heaven could not contain God. But they thought a shrine could contain God. They associated God with the shrine. And the point of application is that just because a place has a historical association with God does not mean that He's still there. I think of Churches that had tremendous

Bible teaching for decades. Scofield Memorial Church, across the street from Dallas Theological Seminary, was pastored by a number of the finest theologians, men of God and yet, today if you go there you will not find God. Just because you go to a church or a seminary or you go to a Bible conference it is not the same thing as going to God because going back to God is a matter of the heart not of geography. They were full of religious activity. Look at the places they went and worshipped; Dan, **Bethel, Gilgal**, they were always going to worship service. It was a routine. Yet they did not seek God. What do you mean? I mean going to worship is not the same thing as seeking God. This is a message we all need to hear. You can come to Fredericksburg Bible Church all your life but if you come here out of religious routine then you have come for the wrong reason and you are no different than the apostate northern kingdom. Seeking God is very different than going to church.

And the Lord says **Seek Me**, not at **Gilgal, Gilgal will certainly go into captivity**, some translate that “Gilgal is as gone as a gosling,” and so is every object of devotion other than the Lord God. **And Bethel, Bethel will come to trouble**. So you don’t want to go there, those revered places are going to be militarily destroyed and where you go is not the issue. The issue is where your heart is. It is a very different thing to go to a prayer meeting than it is to seek God. It is a very different thing to go to a Bible study than it is to seek God. It is a very different thing to go on a mission trip than it is to seek God. Those things in and of themselves do not equate with seeking God. They are things done often out of sheer habit or show, it’s routine, or it’s my social life or it’s my weekly lip service to God. God doesn’t care about that, that’s not seeking Him. He looks to the heart. He’s the *cardiognostes*, the heart-knower.

So, if all that is not seeking God, what does it mean to **seek** God? It means two things in the OT. In some passages it means to go to the Temple to sacrifice. People would go to the Temple in Jerusalem to seek wisdom, to seek the mind of God and there could be a hint of that meaning here because he doesn’t say do not seek Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the authorized location of worshipping God, it did have the visible presence of God, Shechinah Glory, so that may be the idea. But more likely the predominating idea is the second use of seeking God which is entering into fellowship with God; it’s used this way in Isaiah and Hosea, in other words they as a nation were out of fellowship because of covenant disobedience and they needed to return to

covenant obedience, covenant loyalty. See, they had their position; their position was due to the Abrahamic Covenant, God had promised certain things to the nation unconditionally; a land, a seed and a worldwide blessing. Now that's the bigger picture of your life as an Israelite. Those things depend upon God, they tell us who God is and what God is going to do in history, they are His gracious gifts that do not depend on you or your actions. They depend upon God and His character. We have their experience, which fluctuated in terms of the Mosaic Covenant, and there's blessing and cursing, there's blessing for obedience to the Law and cursing for disobedience. That's your day to day life as an Israelite. The Mosaic Covenant sketched God's will for your every day life in the nation Israel. Had they learned to follow God's will in every day life? No, they've been in rebellion against God's will for years. They've invented a whole new worship system that was almost right, but not right. Almost right is wrong, almost right is dead wrong. There's nothing in the word of God about it being okay just to be a little off. Does the Holy Spirit lead you into partial truth? That's not what the word of God says; it says I lead you into all truth. These people are apostate, they had departed from the word of God and so is any organization or denomination that capitulates or accommodates to the culture. Oh, it's okay to have this pagan music in our worship where we get everyone gyrating their hips, it's okay to worship God half naked and have no respect for biblical modesty, we're still worshipping YHWH. Really? I find it impossible to believe that those things do not project a worldview completely out of step with the Christian worldview. Just like the golden calf thing? They worshipped God + golden calf. Don't you understand that you inevitably project the nature of the golden calf onto the Creator; you're creating God in the image of a calf. It's corruptive of His nature, it's apostasy and it's rebellion against the word of God.

Verse 6, **“Seek the Lord that you may live,** get back in fellowship, and learn loyalty to God through His word. What word? The word in His Law of Moses...what's the parallel for you NT believer? Get back in fellowship and learn loyalty to the law of Christ. That's the aim of sanctification in your individual Christian life, not all this other boloney. The other boloney may come here and there, a great experience, a happy day, but that's not the goal of it all. Loyalty to God is the issue. Loyalty to God will always work out in what John called the abundant life. How does he phrase it, “The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, I have come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly. Life, that's having eternal life, we get that by

believing in Jesus Christ, but abundant life, that's something more, that's an enjoyment of the eternal life you possess as a believer. They had the land but the land rebelled as long as they were out of fellowship. What happened when they obeyed the Lord? The land was full of life; it was the abundant life, prosperity and blessing. Same thing is true in the Christian life on a spiritual plane, obviously not your garden. But spiritual contentment through the struggle. If they did not seek the Lord what is the declaration? **He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, what's that all about?** That's about divine discipline, that's what it's about. God is going to break forth upon them like fire. Sounds real friendly doesn't it. God means business. And the **house of Joseph** by the way, that stands for the whole northern kingdom. And further, **it will consume with none to quench it for Bethel.** No fire extinguisher is going to save your favorite shrine Bethel, it's lost. This is like the apostates greatest Seminary or Church being totally burned to the ground. You don't go there to find God, God's not there. You're deceived, sin deceives and you've been deceived about all your religious practice, all the habitual nonsense. That doesn't make you right with God, that's just going through religious motion. How is all the religious motion in the world going to cover the sin of verse 7? **For those who turn justice into wormwood And cast righteousness down to the earth."** This is the court proceedings where justice and righteousness are to reign but injustice and unrighteousness reign. They've got their slick lawyers who just love to oppress in the name of the almighty dollar, they **turn justice into wormwood.** Wormwood was a bitter plant and the whole point of justice is that when justice reigns in the courts there's sweetness; the person who deserved justice received it and the criminal is punished. Not in the case of northern Israel. They'd rip you off so fast you didn't know what happened. **And cast righteousness down to the earth.** Which means they would just trample you, they're not interested in your well-being, they're not interested in ruling according to the Law of Moses. They're interested in their own pocketbook, that's what they are interested in. V 10 because we want to finish this thought, vv 8-9 are thought by the liberal critics to be a later addition but I don't think so at all, so we'll come back to that Hymn in a moment.

Verse 10, here's how they trampled the poor in the courts, **They hate him who reproves in the gate,** the **gate** of the city was where the judge sat, they had a nice little porch, hopefully shaded, and the judge sat there and

cases would be brought before him and apparently in the northern kingdom if you were a Mosaic conservative, a strict constitutional lawyer, they hated you. Why? Because they hated the word of God, that's why. Do you think we have people in the Church today who hate the word of God? Absolutely, if you interpret the Bible in a conservative, strict way you're the enemy, not only of society at large but the vast majority of the Church. The church is in deep apostasy. In fact Paul was in the apostasy in his day and he said it's going to go from bad to worse. By the time John writes the Book of Revelation, 96AD, five of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 are apostate. If it was that bad thirty years later how bad do you think it is 1930 years later? We're deep in the apostasy today just like the northern kingdom. And people are in rebellion against the word of God. I don't want to hear it God! Paul said it 1900 years ago, "But the time will come when they will no longer endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled will accumulate teachers in accordance with their own desires." And not only did they abhor the person who stood up for the truth in their day, **they abhor him who speaks with integrity.** This is the witness and he gets up in the court and he tells it like it is. Quite honorable you'd say, Not them, they abhorred the guy. Get him out of here. We can't have that, that's convicting. Verse 11, **Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them,** see this is more of the oppression techniques they used, oh, how much money do you make per month, \$1,000, alright, I'll charge you \$650 for the apartment, exorbitant rent, squeezing every penny they could out of the poor. And after that, what kind of food do you have, what's your food bank look like, I'll dip into that too. All for their own selfish gain. Look at it, **Though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.** All the excess you gained by abusing the poor, you're not going to get to enjoy it. You've spent years building that house, sorry; you've spent hours developing the perfect grape, sorry, all going to come to destruction.

Verse 12, **For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous and accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.**

13 Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time. That can be taken a couple of ways. One way scholars say is

this is a rebuke, he's rebuking the **prudent person** for keeping **silent** because it's an evil time and that's when they need to be heard the most. And there's no question in my mind that we're living in the time when we need the same thing in the church, prudent people, people who are wise in a Biblical sense and have understanding to stand up and let their voices be heard. It has to start in the pulpits; it has to start with the pastors crying out. But normally they're too afraid, too afraid of the social repercussions, too afraid they might hurt someone's feelings, too afraid they might get thrown in the slammer. That's the time to speak out. Another view of this is that this should be translated, "The prudent shall cease at that time, for it will be an evil time." In other words there what they're saying is there are no prudent people left, they've completely disappeared from the scene. And either way both of those eventually happen, there are less and less prudent people and eventually there are none.

Verse 14, **Seek good and not evil, that you may live;** you'll notice that's a little different than vv 4 and 6 where they were to **Seek** God, but essentially they're the same thing because to **seek good** is to seek God because only God is **good**. He's the standard. And if they do they **may live**. **And thus may the Lord God of hosts, that's armies, the God of armies be with you, Just as you have said!** Now that's an interesting statement, **Just as you have said!** They were saying in the northern kingdom, oh, look at the prosperity we have, our borders have expanded, we're getting wealthy, we have all these religious shrines, God must be with us, God is on our side. Uh uh, sorry. I'm convinced there are a lot of people who think that when they walk in a church God must be here. I feel like I'm in God's presence, look at the media system they've got here, remarkable, the Lord is blessing, the Lord is with us. The Lord's not interested in all that. The Lord is interested in you seeking Him, remaining in fellowship with Him and learning loyalty to Him through His word. That's all that matters. You want to come face to face with the Lord God, get in the word! It's not the place that counts, you can meet God in the city dump and some churches do. If they're truly seeking the Lord then that's where the Lord is, not in the high dollar classy outfits.

Hate evil, v 15, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Change has to take place or else the Lord God is going to discipline with His might hand. If they do change and orient to Him, then He may be gracious

and extend the grace a bit longer. See, God always does this, He always extends the grace and extends the grace far beyond the time of judgment. So no one can ever say God didn't give me a chance. God gives you every chance in the world, c'mon, get over yourself. God is a God of grace and it often appears to go on and on and on and you think, is God ever going to do something about this. Yes He will, eventually the grace wears thin and God says, alright, I've given you every chance in the book now it's time to judge and He does.

Finally let's return to the judge Himself in vv 8-9. This is a nature hymn, there's another one in v 9, and we want to ask why this is injected in the text at this point. Obviously He's the judge, **He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The Lord is His name. 9 It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress.** Alright, at the beginning of v 8, what event of Scripture is recalled, **He who made the Pleiades and Orion**, those are stellar constellations. What event? Creation. What day did He create the stars on? Day 4. Why did He create them? To indicate the change in season. He put them there for us to tell time by. He made them, He governs them. Then he says, **And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night.** The change of day to night and night to day. He governs deep space, He governs near space. Third, what else does he govern? **Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth.** Rain, some indicate this is the Flood, but rain on the earth, the precipitation cycle. How could we categorize this governing? He governs our atmosphere. Notice how we're working from the heavens to the earth, he starts with a wide lens and closes in. Verse 9, **It is He who flashes forth with destruction upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress.** And now we're down to man, God governs man. What's the argument as he moves from deep space to earth? It's a common argument in Scripture, the argument from the greater to the lesser. If God governs the greater things like the Pleiades and Orion, does He not govern the smaller things like man? If He can keep control over the whole cosmos can He keep control of man? Can He orchestrate destruction upon mankind? Indeed He does, what does chapter 3 v 6 say? If a calamity occurs in a city has the Lord not done it? Their calamity is coming.

Seek the Lord! That's the great imperative of this passage. But how you ask can one seek the Lord when Paul says in Romans 3 there is none who seeks the Lord? That's a good question. Now, if you say that there is nothing I can do until the Lord works in my heart then that is a distortion of what the Bible teaches. But when the Bible says none seeks the Lord that's true and when the Bible says seek the Lord that you may live, that also is true. So there is a sense in which we can seek the Lord. What the Bible seems to be saying is that we cannot seek the Lord in our own strength, that we have no innate desire to seek the Lord, but that in God's strength we can seek Him. Maybe we can conclude that if the Lord gives you the desire to seek Him then you will seek Him and if you do not desire to seek Him you won't. Everyone does exactly as they want to do. There are no excuses. So, a man can come to God but not in his own strength. The struggles that people have in their soul are evidence that the Holy Spirit is on one side pulling, working and your flesh on the other side pulling and working against in a tug of war. Seek the Lord that you may live. Walk in fellowship with the Lord and learn loyalty to Him through the word. Historically we know there were some from the northern kingdom who had been coming all along to Jerusalem to worship. There was a remnant. Perhaps it was those who sought Him and were not caught up in the 90% casualty cost of v 3. Seek the Lord that you may live.

¹ The dirge meter is a long-short pattern. It could be three beats followed by two beats or six beats followed by five, but this pattern carries the rhythm of mourning.

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