

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C0922 – June 3, 2009 – Amos 7:1-9 – God's Plans & Man's Prayers

Last week we covered Amos 6 where we could easily see by the end of it that the responsibility for Israel's disaster fell on Israel's leaders, it fell on Israel herself, it fell on Assyria and God. God caused the calamity, Israel's leaders failed to lead the nation according to the law, the nation failed to obey the law and Assyria was the instrument of God that brought the disaster. So chapter 6 shows the interworkings of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Now, having said that, and we've said it before, we'll say it again, to say God is sovereign over the affairs of men does not mean that man is a robot. Robotic views of man are pagan views. In our modern world man is a material body composed of biochemistry. Man is a machine and he is determined by his biochemical makeup, which is what evolution is saying. And if evolution is true then you're into a robotic, deterministic view of man and there can be no responsibility in that kind of a universe with no sovereign God. So, for man to be responsible there must be a God who is there, who created man a personal being composed of both a material body and an immaterial spirit which is the biblical position. Man is a hybrid being composed of material and immaterial, both made in the image of God and therefore responsible to Him. So for man to be responsible at all, God must be His sovereign creator of all. If God is not sovereign over man then man is no longer under the umbrella of God and could not be responsible to Him at all. So, we're maintaining human responsibility when we affirm the sovereignty of God over all. It's His sovereignty which sets up human responsibility just as it's His sovereignty which sets up angelic responsibility. Being subjects of His creation we are subject to Him. No one can escape this. The nation Israel could certainly not escape it, the leaders could not escape it, Assyria who executed the judgment could not escape it and so by the end of chapter 6 every city from the northern border at Hamath to the southern border at the brook of Arabah would be decimated. A 90% population decimation. What

God had marked out for destruction and was not killed by the Assyrian army would be killed by the plague of disease which followed. All that is part of chapter 6.

Another emphasis in chapter 6 is the responsibility of the national leadership. And it highlights the importance of good leadership. Good leadership can lead to blessing but bad leadership can lead to cursing. This leadership in the north was extremely wealthy in material things but bankrupt in spiritual things. They didn't care about anyone but themselves. They had oppressed the people by siphoning the life out of them bit by bit. Now they had become rich and complacent. They were eating the choicest cuts of meat, drinking bowls of wine from the finest vineyards, pampering themselves with the finest cosmetics, slouching on their divans, inventing new musical instruments and songs...and meanwhile the people were suffering spiritually. They should have been grieving over them as Joseph's brothers should have been grieving over him when they stripped him of his fine tunic and threw him in the pit, but rather chose to celebrate by having a meal. The leaders had done virtually the same thing; they had stripped the people of all their belongings and now they sat in their ivory inlaid palaces and banqueted. It was a sickening display of arrogance and pride that the Lord God said would result in their going into exile at the very head of the exiles. It made the Lord God sick at His stomach to look at this leadership who were to lead with care and concern but were now complacent, unconcerned and without a care for His people. Who took and took and took and gave nothing. Well, it would not be long until the Lord God would send His army and if ten men were in one house they would all be dead and when the only remaining relative came to remove the corpses for burning he would call out to one in the back room of the house, is anyone with you and they would say no and then he would say do not even mention the name YHWH for fear that YHWH would be summoned and would find them and come and take their life too. The leaders had acted so out of kilter with how they should have acted that it was a moral absurdity in the Lord's eyes and therefore the Lord was sending a powerful army against them.

Now we come to chapter 7. Chapter 7 begins with the first of five visions the Lord showed Amos which reminds us of the basic outline of Amos. So let's review. Chapters 1-2 contain eight oracles of doom. Chapters 3-5 contain

three covenant lawsuits and chapters 7-9 five visions. So that's the structure, eight, three and five.

Let's start off today with a few words about a couple of doctrines that are helpful to think about in disciplinary contexts. We're approaching these as disciplinary truths in the kingdom. Discipline presupposes a family relationship. And the nation Israel has that by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant. Amos 3:2, "You only have I known among all the families of the earth." But notice the latter half of the verse. "Therefore I will discipline you for all your iniquities." Put another way, "There are many families of people on the earth Israel, but only you are My family. Therefore I will discipline you. I don't discipline other families. I discipline My family." So God's discipline is reserved for those in God's family. Now, just because the nation as a whole is God's family did not mean that each Israeli in the family had personally believed God and been eternally saved. Many of them thought that by simply being circumcised they entered into God's family and were eternally saved. But salvation is not by circumcision but by faith. And so many of them, the vast majority of them by this time, had not believed as Abraham and were not eternally saved though they were in God's chosen family. In the OT you have God's family composed of believers and unbelievers. Now, what was the condition for stepping into the three promises of the Abrahamic Covenant; the land, the seed and the worldwide blessing? Was it not to believe like Abraham? Even Abraham himself had to believe before God entered into a covenant with him. Gen 15 is very clear that the sequence was that God appeared to Abraham → God called to Abraham → Abraham believed God → Abraham was justified by God → God covenanted with Abraham. So God didn't covenant with an unbelieving Abraham, but a believing Abraham. And therefore only those descendants of Abraham that believed would step into the Covenant promises of the land, seed and worldwide blessing. Those who did not would not enjoy the final fulfillment of those promises; they would not enjoy the Land as an eternal dwelling, they would not enjoy a personal relationship with the Seed Messiah and they would not be a part of the worldwide blessing in the future kingdom. Those three promises are reserved for Jewish believers.

Now, that said, the second covenant God entered into with the nation applies to the whole family of God whether they were believers or not. That's the Mosaic Covenant. It applied equally to believing and unbelieving Jew. They

were all under that structure and they were all given blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. This is the family blessing and the family discipline. So when we read these pages of Scripture that speak of the discipline they are being disciplined because they are in God's family by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant, but they may be believers or unbelievers, and the discipline is due to disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Now, will Israel's promises finally be fulfilled? Yes, to the believing remnant of Israel. Chapter 9, verses 11-15 attest to that.

So when we go into chapter 7, as with most of the earlier chapters, the northern kingdom branch of God's family is in view and discipline is the subject. If they were not a part of God's family they would not be coming under His discipline. So let's read vv 1-9, three visions here seen by Amos.

¹Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop *was* after the king's mowing. ²And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord GOD, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, For he is small?" ³The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD.

⁴Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend *with them* by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land. ⁵Then I said, "Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?" ⁶The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.

⁷Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. ⁸The LORD said to me, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold I am about to put a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel. I will spare them no longer. ⁹"The high places of Isaac will be desolated And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

The first two are very similar; the last one is quite different, so let's start with vv 1-3, the vision of the locusts. **Thus the Lord GOD showed me**, and literally that says **the Lord God** caused me to see, that's a *hiphil* meaning

God caused this, he put this vision in the mind of Amos. The same thing is said at the beginning of the vision of the fire in 7:4 and the plumb line in 7:7 and the basket of summer fruit in 8:1. This is a way the Lord God revealed things to His prophets. He would give them a vision in their mind while they were awake. Abraham, Daniel and others were also visited by God in visions. The difference between dreams and visions is whether you're awake or asleep. So Amos is caused to see this vision and the Lord God showed him how **He was forming a locust-swarm when the spring crop began to sprout. And behold, the spring crop was after the king's mowing.** Now that may sound like a strange verse, but you can see the big issue here is the timing. Something is dreadful about the timing being **after the king's mowing**, so let me explain what it is. The nation Israel had two spring **mowings** or "shearings" of the **crop**. The first came in the early spring and the crop was for the king and his household. It was the very best of the annual crop. And the king's requirements were very large so all the first mowing was given to the king. That meant that the second mowing, in late spring, was for the people and their herds. So in our verse the king has already had his mowing and his house and his servants and his herds have already been fed. Now the second crop has begun to sprout and it's at this time that the locust-swarm is forming and so what's going to happen to the people's food for themselves and their herds? It's going to be eaten by the locusts. So this spells agricultural and economic disaster for the northern kingdom. So the significance here is in the timing of when the Lord God is **forming** this **locust-swarm**. The timing is what will cause total disaster in Israel. Some have pointed out the present participle here, **forming** means that at that very moment the Lord was forming this locust swarm which would put this vision about April and at the worst time they would go and destroy the entire **spring crop**. So this spells absolute disaster. It would bring terrible famine on the land, people would begin to starve, disease would spread and death would ensue. And who has caused it? The Lord. It is He who is **forming** it, a word by the way that is used of God's creation of all things. He's sovereign over all, He controls the universe and He marshals whatever resources He desires and uses them as instruments of discipline. All because of what? Because the nation and her leaders were in continual disobedience to the word of God in the Mosaic Covenant.

Verse 2, now Amos has seen the total disaster and it says, **And it came about, when it [the locusts] had finished eating the vegetation of the**

land, that I said, “**Lord GOD, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, For he is small?**” Alright, now we’re into Amos’ prayer. It’s a short prayer but a prayer nonetheless. What the Lord has shown him has prompted him to pray on behalf of the nation Israel here under the rubric of **Jacob**. We’ll explain that. But the prayer first of all is a prayer of intercession to the **Lord God to please pardon** or “forgive” **Jacob**. This is one of those great intercessory prayers in the Scripture which look forward to the need of an intercessor. The first time we see this is with Moses while he’s up on Mt Sinai and while he’s up there receiving the Covenant from God Himself the people are down below violating the Covenant, having a big party, building a golden calf and worshipping YHWH through the golden calf. And in that situation the Lord said Moses, get out of My way, they’ve kindled My anger, now let me alone that “My anger may burn against them that I may destroy them.” And that’s a very interesting passage as we’ve seen because that prompts Moses to intercede on behalf of the nation and the Lord changes His mind. It’s a very similar passage to what we have here in Amos. Amos sees a vision of Israel’s destruction and he intercedes on behalf of the nation and the Lord changes His mind. So, there’s something peculiarly similar about both of these passages. For one, both are showing us what a faithful intercessor looks like, someone who will go between and pray on behalf of others. And in that sense both Moses and Amos give us a foretaste of the intercessory work of Jesus Christ. And what they show us is that if Israel is ever going to be restored to fellowship she is going to have to have an Intercessor who will have to pray on her behalf that the Lord forgive her for all her disobedience to the Mosaic Law. So Amos, like Moses is a picture of that great intercessor.

Now, the second thing we pick up from this short prayer is that Amos refers to the nation as **Jacob**. He asks the Lord, **How can Jacob stand, for He is small?** How can Jacob survive Lord? How can He recover from total devastation, for He is small? Now, this shows us another instance of just how in touch Amos was with the OT Scripture. He had a tremendous knowledge of the word of God. Last week we saw how he connected back what the leaders were doing to the people with what the brothers had done to Joseph and this week he connects the life of the nation Israel back to an event in the life of Jacob. We know Jacob was the twin brother of Esau and Jacob was the younger, that’s where he comes out with this remark that **Jacob...he is small**, which means Jacob didn’t have the superior position as a son in that family, he was the second born, not the firstborn. Esau had the rights of the

firstborn, he was the larger, Jacob the smaller, but if you recall who ended up getting Isaac's blessing? It wasn't Esau, Esau was out hunting. Jacob dressed up and put the smell of game on him and went in and got the blessing. What's the point? The point is that Jacob was the lesser and for Jacob to get the blessing what had to happen? His mother had to help him. She was the one who worked up the grand plan that got Jacob the blessing. Jacob couldn't do that by himself. And so Amos remembers that and he says, now Lord, Israel is like Jacob and just as Jacob needed help from his mother so Israel needs your help now. Look down Lord and show compassion on Israel. Nothing can save Israel but you sovereign Lord, so **please pardon**, you're the only one who can help, so please forgive, please restore Israel to fellowship.

And how does the Lord respond to this great intercessory prayer? Verse 3, **The LORD changed His mind about this. "It shall not be," said the LORD.** Amos got a positive response to his prayer, just like Moses got a positive response to his prayer. This strange note about the Lord changing His mind about what He proposed to do. Now we'll have to come back to this before we're finished, but we'll wait til v 6 because there the Lord does it again. The Lord changed His mind. And that's what we call a Bible difficulty because there are other passages that say the Lord is not like a man that He should change His mind. And so tension is created. Somehow human prayer is important because this prayer was answered and the Lord says, I'm not going to do it, I've started the swarm of locusts but I'm not going to finish what I've started here. So Amos' intercessory prayer has seemingly stemmed the tide of divine discipline.

Alright, let's look the second vision, the first one of locusts, the second one of fire, both pictures of total destruction. Why do you think you have two visions portraying the same thing? You find this a number of times in the word of God. How many visions did Joseph see of the global famine in Genesis? Two. How many visions were used to bring about the Peter-Cornelius encounter in the Book of Acts? Two. Double visions are standard operating procedure of the Holy Spirit to set off biblical visions from satanically inspired visions. So let's go through vv 4-6, **Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend *with them* by fire**, Alright, this one is not by locusts but by fire, a consuming fire. And again, this is already in motion, the participle **calling** is saying, alright, it's already in progress, the

Lord is already calling this consuming fire to come and in the vision it **consumes the great deep and begins to consume the farm land.** Two things, first the **great deep**, Now, in their thinking this was the subterranean water that rose up to irrigate the land. So the fire is so consuming it licks up all the subterranean waters and the result of that is it begins **to consume the farm land**, all the land really. But again, agricultural and economic disaster. The fire licking up water is reminiscent of Elijah's battle with the Baal worshippers at Mt Carmel when the Lord rained down fire upon the altar drenched with water and surrounded by a trench of water and the fire from heaven licked up the water, just consumed the whole thing. That's the picture here of what happens to all the subterranean waters. And then Amos again responds, verse 5, **Then I said, "Lord GOD, please stop!** He sees the Lord in the middle of this thing and rather than asking Him to forgive, he asks Him to **stop!** So this is more of the intercession on behalf of Jacob. Jacob needs help. **How can Jacob stand**, he asks, **for he is small?"** Same as verse 2. And again, verse 6, **The LORD changed His mind about this. "This too shall not be," said the Lord GOD.** We have two cases where intercessory prayer averted God's discipline. And we want to say some things about prayer and the sovereignty of God. On the surface one of the things it reminds us of is the verse that says the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Now in that passage of James 5:16-18 it's the prayer of a mature believer who is in the process of maturing. Mature but maturing. The example is Elijah. Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it didn't rain for three years and six months. Then he prayed that it would rain and it poured. And so when it says the prayer of a righteous man it's not saying just any old believer can offer a prayer and it will restore. That's the context of James, that if you have a believer who needs help because they're down and out spiritually and they can't pray to the Lord and expect an answer because they're so out of it they can't trust the Lord. They couldn't offer a prayer in faith so that's why they call some mature men in the church to pray for them. And through their prayers the spiritually depressed believer is restored. Now, isn't that the role Amos is cast in here? He's come all the way from the southern kingdom and now he's praying on their behalf. They're so spiritually depressed I doubt very seriously there are any believers mature enough in the northern kingdom to pray for their nation so Amos has to hike all the way up from Tekoa to pray for them. That's the point of James 5. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much. That is the mature man of God who is in continuing to mature.

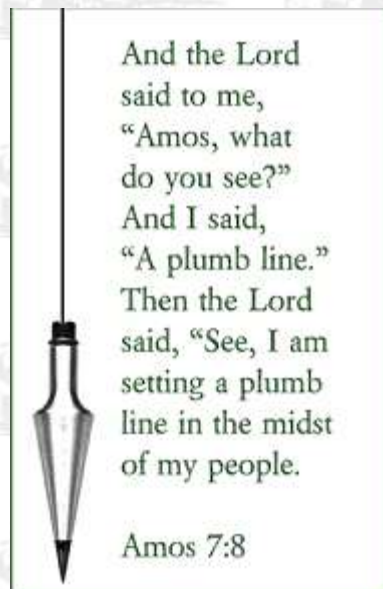
The second thing we have to face are some of the theological difficulties that arise from vv 2 and 3 and vv 5 and 6. This generates difficulties in how we understand God's nature and human prayer so we want to address those. The first difficulty we have to address is "How does human prayer reconcile with the sovereignty of God?" "If God has pre-ordained history then what place does prayer have?" "Does prayer have any legitimate role or is what God has ordained to happen going to happen whether we pray or not?" These are the kinds of questions people of God have looked into since prayer began, so I highly doubt we're going to resolve all the difficulties you might have tonight. The more I study the Bible the more answers I get to these kinds of questions, but it still leaves questions. In the end I have to say that He is the Creator and I am the creature. He has exhaustive knowledge of all things and I, in my knowledge, get exhausted. So, for us some things cannot be known but God knows all things. He has no problem reconciling a pre-ordained history with human prayer. Besides, He's the one that ordained prayer. So, there's not a problem in His mind though we may feel tension as finite human beings. Now, here's what I suggest you do in difficulties like this; start out where the word of God starts out. God is the Creator. He made you, He made me, He made the whole universe. So, I have to start out there or else I'll never get a satisfactory approach to the difficulty. Another thing I know is that God has a plan. He's not haphazard. Things don't happen by chance. All things have a place in His plan. So does prayer have a place in His plan? Yes, He planned it. Now, I think we've already resolved most of the difficulties. We can say that God has a plan and human prayer is part of the plan. In other words, God has a plan for history and history is going to go to point x but to get to point x God planned that several human factors would play a role and prayer is just one. God also brought about human authors who would be the human side of writing the Scriptures, he uses human witnessing, he uses human teaching, human mercy, human giving. God planned all those things as means to reach point x in history. They are all part of God's plan. So is it important to pray? Of course it is. Is it important to witness? Of course it is. What if we were to sit on our couches and say, well, God's got His elect and they're elect so they're going to be saved and so I'll just sit on my couch and eat my cheeto's. That would be a wrong conclusion to draw because God has also planned to use humans to pray for others, to witness to others so that those are means God uses to create the elect in history. So, I don't see a problem with human prayer and God's plan.¹

The second difficulty that comes out of these verses is a little harder and that has to do with God changing His mind. That seems, in the mind of many to conflict with God's attribute of immutability, the idea that God never changes. Some have even decided, process theologians, that God is not immutable but changes. That is a misunderstanding but there are a number of questions raised by verses that say God *nacham* His mind. We've confronted this a number of times. This word, *nacham* means "to repent, to be sorry or to relent." Frankly, that's a translation I like here, God relented in the sense God did not bring about the judgment He threatened to bring about. There are a number of these in the Scriptures and if you think about them you see that when the Lord says something like what He says in these visions to Amos there are conditions embedded in them. Take the one we've just studied - the visions of locust and fire and ask yourself this question. Why did God reveal these visions to Amos? Why didn't he just do it and leave Amos out of the equation? Is there a purpose in God showing Amos this? Isn't it because God was prompting him to pray? Of course He was. When God reveals His word He expects a response. And Amos responded. Just like Moses responded in Exod 32. God didn't have to say, Now Moses, leave me alone that my anger may burn against them. Isn't there a hint that if you don't leave Me alone My anger may not burn against them. See what God is up to? He's working with man to respond in prayer. And if prayer is what we've said it is, God's decree means to bring about some part of His plan, then all is perfectly reconciled. I hope you see that. We could use the example we've already studied in Jonah chapters 3-4. God told Jonah, yet forty days and Ninevah will be destroyed. Why did God tell Jonah that? To get a response. And finally, grudgingly Jonah goes and preaches the word to the Ninevites and they repent. Then Jonah goes up on the hill overlooking the city and he waits and he waits till the forty days had transpired. Did the Lord judge on the forty-first day? Why not? He said, yet forty days and I will destroy Ninevah. Because the prophecy had conditions built into it. If they had not repented would He have destroyed Ninevah? Yes. But since they did repent God did not. There were conditions embedded in the prophecy that depended on human activity. Did the plan of God change? No. It didn't change one bit, it came to pass. God simply made a proposal and when certain human conditions were met He relented from His proposal. Did God's character change? Of course not, God's character is immutable. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. But there is a genuine personal

interaction between God and man. Prayer is a real and vibrant ministry that we are commanded to engage in.

When we come to the third vision in vv 7-9 the dialogue between God and Amos is a little different. The Lord relented in the first two visions but in the third He does not which shows you that there are certain things that no matter if you pray against them for the rest of your life they're not going to be answered. For example, you can pray against the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but that's not going to be answered. Jesus Christ is coming back. So when a prayer is contrary to what God has unconditionally planned to do no amount of prayer is going to quote unquote "change His mind," in the sense we have stated. So let's see the vision of the plumb line.

Thus He showed me, and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand. Now, we don't know if **the Lord** here is the pre-incarnate Christ. I assume that Amos did see the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ here standing like a carpenter next to a **vertical wall** holding a **plumb line in His hand**. In Amos' day the walls they built were made of stone without mortar. I know you find that hard to believe in Israel, but those of you who've toured Israel, by about the third day you've forgotten the itinerary but one thing you know for sure, you're going to see some more rocks, so having a lot of rocks they built everything out of rock. So when you think of mangers and stables in the Bible don't think of wooden structures, think of stone structures. And when they would build their stone walls they wouldn't use mortar, they would just stack them and so over time they would settle or they might be altered substantially by geological changes and so when they set the stones they used what was called a **plumb line** to make sure everything was in line. These aren't used much by carpenters today but it looks something like this and wherever you hold this string the heavy pointed end points to the center of the earth, so it gives you a perpendicular to the surface so you can level things. It was a measuring device.



And here the pre-incarnate Christ is holding this measuring device and in v 8, **The LORD said to me, “What do you see, Amos?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said, “Behold I am about to put a plumb line In the midst of My people Israel.** In other words what is the Lord going to measure? His people Israel. He’s going to measure them according to the Law of Moses and apparently they’re not going to measure up. He says, when I measure them **I will spare them no longer.** Literally that says “I will no longer pass over them.” He had passed over them once in Egypt, but no longer will HE pass over them. Now he’s coming into their homes to discipline them. So the first two judgments are averted but the third will not be. He explains in v 9, **“The high places of Isaac will be desolated And the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste. Then I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”** Three names; **Isaac, Israel and Jeroboam,** it starts broad with **Isaac,** it narrows to the house of **Israel** and finally pinpoints the **house of Jeroboam.** It shows that the whole kingdom will be decimated. The **high places** were the **sanctuaries** where they carried out their syncretistic worship. And **Then I,** the Lord God Himself would **rise up against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.** The sword is the nation of Assyria that is in the hand of the sovereign Lord. Can anyone stay His hand? What He has determined to accomplish He will most certainly accomplish.

Alright, so we have seen the double vision of the locusts and the fire and the relationship of prayer to divine sovereignty and how that relates to statements to the effect that God changes His mind and finally the vision of the plumb line when the pre-incarnate Christ measures the nation Israel

according to the Mosaic Law and turns up short. So Amos in making these proclamations in the northern kingdom is about to face a fierce combatant in the following verses. The words he has poured out over the land have become intolerable and so next week we'll see how the man of God and the word of God are hated and attacked and what the Lord thinks about that.

¹ This is why, for example, we have some of the plan of God revealed in the word of God, for example the future millennial kingdom. Does God tell us that there is a future kingdom to come? Yes, He does. Well then, should it be a subject of prayer? Should we pray for His kingdom to come? Of course, we're instructed to pray for that in the Sermon on the Mount. So when the kingdom does come will it be the result of human prayer? Yes. Will it be the result of God's plan? Yes. Both statements are true. Or we are told to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Is Jerusalem going to be a place of peace? Yes, it is? How will it be established? Because of God's plan or man's prayer. The answer is both. If God has decreed the end then He has also decreed the means to reach that end. Sometimes we pray for the Lord to return and remove us at the pre-trib rapture or to destroy evil. These are all things the Lord is going to do that may be conditioned on human prayer.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2009