



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **A Survey of the Book of Amos, Part 2**

Amos 5:4-9, "For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel:

- “Seek me and live;  
5 but do not seek Bethel,  
and do not enter into Gilgal  
or cross over to Beersheba;  
for Gilgal shall surely go into exile,  
and Bethel shall come to nothing.”
- 6 Seek the LORD and live,  
lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,  
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel,
- 7 O you who turn justice to wormwood  
and cast down righteousness to the earth!

- 8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion,  
and turns deep darkness into the morning  
and darkens the 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 who makes destruction flash forth against the strong,  
so that destruction comes upon the fortress.” (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,  
2001)

## A Note of Warning

Take it from me: it is difficult to be in a battle and not realize you are in a battle. There have been times in my life when I have been “persecuted for righteousness sake” (Matthew 5:10). Yet at the time I didn’t know it. As such I did not, in the words of Christ, “rejoice” nor was I “glad” (Matthew 5:12). Rather I resented it, became angry, and even grew embittered.

It was only after the trial, looking back, that I realized what was happening. I truly believe that this is an apt description of us as a church body. We do not see the battle raging around us. We live in a time of great compromise. This is the age of which Christ said, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Paul warned us:

2 Timothy 3:1-5a, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power...”

Is this not the age in which we live? Truly we are living at a time in which the battle against the truth is raging as strong as it ever has. That is why I am so thankful for the Book of Amos. As we’ve seen and will see, the state of the people of God when this prophecy was penned was much as it is today in the church. Thus one does not need to guess God’s will for us as a body. We need only to heed the exhortation and calling that God gives us here!

## Living in Perilous Times: God’s Word of Consolation to the Genuine Servant of Christ

Amos gives us the calling that God gave to His people living in perilous times.

Amos 4:1-5: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring now, that we may drink!’ The Lord God has sworn by His holiness, ‘Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks. You will go out *through* breaches *in the walls*, each one straight before her, and you will be cast to Harmon,’ declares the Lord. ‘Enter Bethel and transgress; in Gilgal multiply transgression! Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a thank offering also from that

which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make them known. For so you love *to do*, you sons of Israel,' declares the Lord God."

As reflected in this text, the people of God in Israel had enjoyed thirty years of economic growth and prosperity. The surrounding nations which in the past had been a thorn to Israel were in decline. As a result trade and commerce flourished such that Israel became an oasis of hope, comfort, prosperity, and blessing to the people of God.

For most however, this would not have been a surprise. For under the regency of Jeroboam II the northern kingdom turned back to their religious roots. From the beginning, the northern kingdom was founded on compromise in their worship in order to keep people from rejoining the southern kingdom of Judah. Recall that Jeroboam I established two worship centers in Israel: Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:29). He also allowed any who so desired to serve the Lord as a priest (1 Kings 12:31). The result was a religious system which essentially worshipped God according to the imaginations of man.

Needless to say, God was not pleased!

But then Jeroboam II came to the throne in 793 BC. He called Israel back to the religion of Yahweh. And it was then that the nation enjoyed economic, social, and political success. So they concluded that God clearly was blessing His people because of their religious devotion.

Now we know this was false. The prosperity of Israel and their decision to turn back to the religion of Yahweh were not connected. In fact, one of the main messages of Amos is this:

Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11: "... ' you have not returned to Me,' declares the Lord."

Israel had returned to the religion of Yahweh, but they had not turned back to God!

Yet again Israel didn't see this. Instead they pointed to the prosperity of the age as proof of God's satisfaction. This had the impact of legitimizing their many sins. They had:

- Transformed the worship of God into a religious show by which the priests endeavored to entertain the masses lest they stop attending the services and stop giving their money.
- Trampled underfoot "covenant compassion" - hesed- and so the care for the weak, hurting, bereft, and poor.
- Persecuted the genuine servant of Christ who spoke out against the abuses (Amos 5:10).

As a result, God removed from the land the true preaching of the Word (Amos 8:11-12). No longer would God allow "the pearl of great price" to be cast before the swine that His people had become.

Now I want you to know that there are many who could see that I am also describing the church in America; it is much the same as the people of God in Amos' day. R. K. Harrison describes the setting of Amos; it sounds a lot like what is going on today in the church:

Trade and commerce flourished, and there was a pronounced drift of labor from the land to the city. A generation from whom the ever-present threat of military attack had been removed began to concentrate upon more material things, and this quickly resulted in a demand for luxury items that had previously been the prerogative of only the highest levels of Israelite society. Such preoccupation with materialistic goals went hand in hand with moral and religious depravity, and struck hard at the traditional concepts of social justice inherent in the Torah. Bribery of officialdom was frequently employed by unscrupulous individuals who wished to amass lands and wealth in a comparatively short time. This trend was carried to its extreme in the corruption of the judiciary, with the result that one who was illegally deprived of his property or other holdings could seldom if ever expect to receive justice in the courts of the land.

Self-interest of this kind soon created a powerful aristocracy of wealth, and this was accompanied by the virtual disappearance of the middle class in Israelite society. Since there was then no social level that could maintain the tensions necessary for a healthy communal climate, the gap between rich and poor became ominously wide. Within a few short years the poor had been reduced to the level of servitude, and when conditions made it necessary they were sold into bondage by their masters, often for trivial considerations (Am. 2:6).

In the area of religion, the depravity of worship in the northern kingdom reached its fullest point of development. Self interest in social affairs made for self-indulgence in matters of religion. The northern sanctuaries were crowded with worshippers who, in the main, were rejoicing in the prosperity of the times... Prophets and priests associated with the sanctuaries profited from the lavish gifts of the worshippers, and naturally condoned these exercises in the name of religion, appearing completely oblivious to the conditions of rapid decay which lay immediately underneath the surface of social life. (Harrison, 2004, pp. 885-886)

It was a dark time indeed. Yet there were many who had not bowed the knee to Baal (cf. Amos 5:10, 13). So what were they to do? What was the exhortation that God gave to them? That brings us to the call by God.

## The Call

Amos 5:4, "For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, 'Seek Me that you may live.'"

This is the command that God gave His people at this time. Now if you read the context (vv. 1-3) you will note that the exhortation was proclaimed against a dour message of certain judgment! As in our day (cf. Revelation 2-3, 17) so it was in the days of Amos, the future that awaited the people of God was not bright. However, they must seek the Lord rather than simply living and enduring God's judgment when it came?

Amos 5:6a, "Seek the Lord that you may live..."

The clear and obvious calling was for God's people to seek Him. While this denotes many things; as

we'll see, at minimum it involved genuine conversion whereby the sinner turned from his sin unto God for forgiveness.

Isaiah 55:6-7, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

There is no question that this was involved in the calling which we read about in Amos! Yet, there is far more to "seeking the Lord" than conversion. The word for "seek" in this passage is שׁוֹרֵץ (*dāraš*). It is an important word in the Old Testament as it is used over 160 times as a call to the genuine child of God. Now if you study this word, you will note at least five different elements to this "seeking:"

### Genuine Care

It speaks of a genuine care offered on behalf of someone which results in their benefit and welfare. When David was fleeing from Saul, he wrote the following while hiding in a cave from Saul we read:

Psalm 142:4, "Look to the right and see; for there is no one who regards me; there is no escape for me; no one cares for my soul."

Years later, God exhorted His people through Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 29:7, "And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."

Both of these passages reflect an important nuance when it comes to the word for "seek" - it is a longing after and so a pursuit for the welfare/benefit of the thing sought. As the calling of the child of God in reference to the Lord, it is reflected in the following sentiments; John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Paul wrote, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7). In fact, the opposite is reflected in Paul's words in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:21, "For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." - this is what the nation at the time of Amos was doing. This is what is precluded in the command to "seek the Lord."

Thus for God to call His people, most notably the genuine child of God who had not bowed the knee to Baal, to "seek the Lord," He was exhorting them to continue to be Christ-centered and so Christ-focused in their living. And the servants of God in Amos' day needed to hear this. When times get hard and the servant gets weary, the temptation is always present to look out for one's own interest. Thus, God exhorted His people here:

- Don't lapse into selfishness now where your needs are placed before the Lord's.
- Continue to offer yourself as a living sacrifice and so a sacrifice of praise unto the Lord.

All suffering, inconvenience, trial, bitterness, and weakness as a special calling from the Lord in which you have the opportunity to say, "Soli Deo gloria!" to God alone belongs the glory! This is what is behind the calling to "seek the Lord." Yet there is more.

### Delight in the Person and Work of Christ

Secondly, seeking God means that one must delight in the person and work of God.

Isaiah 58:2, "Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me *for* just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God."

The concept of "boasting" or "exulting" in Scripture involves living vicariously through another. When a parent derives satisfaction from the success of their child they consider it a personal triumph when their son or daughter scores the winning goal. In fact they boast before others on account of what their child has done. They are "exalting in their child."

The Scripture calls us to "exult in God" (Romans 5:11). This means the same thing as the command to "seek the Lord."

- It is deriving satisfaction from His character!
- It is considering a triumph of the Lord's and taking it personal!
- It is boasting before others on account of what God has done!
- It is delighting in His character and work!

Think of what life would have been like in Amos' day for a genuine servant of God. The powerful were walking around flaunting their wealth as if it were their righteousness. They were claiming that their success was a sign of God's pleasure. There were false teachers tickling the ears of overflowing crowds. It would have been tempting to seek after riches, success, wealth, power, prestige, and the like. Thus God came to His people and said, "No! No! Don't seek after these things. Seek the Lord and know what true living is all about!"

As a word associated with a kingdom and so a king, to seek the Lord is to seek after His knowledge, advice, and insight into a particular problem.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 58:2, "Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me *for* just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God."

Speaking of Rebekah when she was pregnant with her twins:

Genesis 25:22, "But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it is so, why

then am I *this way*?' So she went to inquire of the Lord."

When God called His people to seek after Him, He was exhorting them to forsake the folly of human wisdom. Man says, "It is working... God is blessing it!" God says, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

We live in perilous times, as did God's people in Amos' day. The measure of

- How we worship.
- How we live.
- How we parent.
- How we play.

Is determined by perceived success! God would have us live according to His word, His counsel, His wisdom, regardless of the results! And that is the calling to a people tempted to forsake their faithfulness, "Seek me and live!" It involves the elements of adoration and so reverence such that when used in reference to God it is translated as "worship." Speaking of Solomon:

1 Chronicles 22:19a, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise, therefore, and build the sanctuary of the Lord God..."

Speaking of Hezekiah:

2 Chronicles 31:21, "And every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all his heart and [flourished]."

Another important element when it comes to "seeking the Lord" is the rendering of proper and acceptable worship to Him. This is important! Today, as in Amos' day, worship has become a vehicle to self-fulfillment. We gather to be:

- Entertained.
- Inspired.
- Taught.
- Moved.
- Blessed.

This is a perversion of the calling of God to His people regarding the service of worship. Scriptural worship revolves around "ascribing the worth of God!" As such, it is NOT concerned about

- How the worshipper feels.
- Whether he likes the service or not.
- Was he moved.

All this was the focus of Baalism!

Thus we can conclude that when God called His people to “seek the Lord” He was exhorting them to reject the worship practices of Baal, come to the house of the Lord, and ascribe to Him His worth! It is akin to appreciating another person for who they are or what they’ve done. On Mother’s Day hopefully none of you give a gift/card to your mom because of the way it makes you feel; rather, you consider what would bless her, buy it (maybe even at a sacrifice to yourself), and then give it to her unto her honor and joy! This is the idea here. God called His people to, “Forsake the worship of Baal. Seek the Lord alone!”

## No Stone Unturned

Seeking the Lord speaks of a diligent pursuit which leaves no stone unturned.

Jeremiah 29:13, “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

Deuteronomy 10:16a, “But Moses searched carefully [diligently, with great effort] for the goat of the sin offering...”<sup>2</sup>

A very common problem we have as sinners is half-hearted devotion. It is what makes

- The genuine worship of God boring.
- Biblical parenting ineffective.
- Service in the kingdom of God dull.

When one finds a man who gives his heart to something, you will behold passion, devotion, loyalty, diligence, and care. That is how God would have us “seek the Lord.”

There is such a need for this calling! In a time of great comprise as was Amos’ day, many a faithful servant of the Lord was not swayed. God’s concerns remained their concerns. They sought to order their lives according to His word. God’s person and work were their glory. They had not bowed the knee to Baal. Yet after suffering so much grief for standing for the truth, they began to shrink back from society (Amos 5:13). Soon they became complacent such. They were content being common.

God came in this prophecy and gave an exhortation to His people which was akin to Paul’s command to Timothy, “...kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Timothy 1:6) It was similar to Paul’s command to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!...” (Philippians 4:4) It is the same command given to the Thessalonians, “...do not grow weary of doing good.” (2 Thessalonians 3:13b)

Family of God we conclude from this that it is not enough for us to do what is right and so maintain our vigilance, we want to do it with all our heart! Such is the calling of God to His people living in perilous times!



## The Threefold Caution

Now that we might not compromise our faithfulness, God gives us a threefold warning. The first point is that the religion of appeasement is bankrupt.

Amos 5:5, “But do not resort to Bethel, and do not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity, and Bethel will come to trouble”

In Amos’ day, each of these cities had become a hub for the religion of Yahweh. It was here that God’s people did NOT turn to God, BUT to their “ol’ time religion!” What was the concern? Just as Israel assumed that their religious devotion was what provided for the era of blessing in which they lived, so it would have been easy for the people of God to turn once again to these places in the face of the trial and difficulty prophesied in Amos.

Amos is quick to say, “Don’t do it!” And so must we continue to sound the warning to this generation. The tendency when it comes to trial and difficulty is to fix up one’s life in the hope that God will see the effort, and relent. You say, “I love Christ! I’d never do that!” Don’t be so quick to respond as Peter when the Lord said he would deny Him. The heart is an idol factory. If given the choice to serve Christ or the religion of Christ, most of us would choose the later. That is our inclination.

Let the warning of Amos sober you unto vigilance in your walk with Christ. In the words of Solomon:

Proverbs 4:23, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it *flow* the springs of life.”

## Judgment Begins with the Household of God

Amos 5:6b-7, “Seek the Lord that you may live, lest He break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, and it consume with none to quench *it* for Bethel, *for* those who turn justice into wormwood and cast righteousness down to the earth”

Without apology, God has stated quite clearly in Scripture that judgment begins with us!

1 Peter 4:17, “For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

Now this ought not to alarm us. As the church clearly sets in the place of utmost blessing on account of our possessing the stewardship of God’s word AND as it is comprised of both sheep and goats, the obvious reference for this judgment are the goats! Because this is true, then what will be the experience of the genuine child of God? He is going to:

- Grow alongside the tares until the Day of Judgment, Matthew 13:29-30.
- Be at times the object of ridicule and attack (again cf. Amos 5:10, 13).

- Be persecuted (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12) and when God deigns to judge...
- Suffer on account of the judgment God has planned for the goats. The genuine child of God is not going to be raptured out of the world!

In the words of Peter, “Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you... as though some strange thing were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4:12) Judgment is coming to the church in America, and we are going to be affected. Don’t be shocked or surprised. Rather let us maintain our diligence unto the end!

### God’s Sovereign will cannot be Thwarted

Amos 5:8-9, “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. It is He who flashes forth *with* destruction upon the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.”

It turns out that Amos 5:1-17 is a chiasm. The focus and message is found at the end of Amos 5:8.

Amos 5:8, “The Lord is His name!”

In his desire to show the certainty of the judgment that awaited the visible people of God, Amos structured this verse in such a way as to emphasize the sovereign unthwartable will of God. Now on the one hand, this may sound like bad news. “You mean there is nothing we can do to stop that which God has planned? No religious appeasement?” Indeed, there isn’t. God’s will is going to come to pass. However there is a flip side to it. The sovereign God whose will is unthwartable is also good.

This means that as bad as it may seem at times, the genuine child of God stands on a firm foundation. He trusts in God’s unending love! Now I’ve said this before, few are there in our churches who doubt the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. But how important it is that you and I add to our list of “doctrines-we-will-never-doubt,” the doctrine of the goodness of God! Relying upon God’s goodness we are able to say no matter how bad it might be:

Psalm 119:75-76, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me. O may Thy lovingkindness comfort me, according to Thy word to Thy servant.”

There is no bitter providence that can change the conviction that God is good! Yet Lord, please comfort me with the gospel of grace! Knowing the goodness of God, one must conclude that the uncertainty in this life is explained in Christ’s word to Peter:

John 13:7, “What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.”

This is the word which God gives His people living in perilous times!

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, such inquiry was to be made via a prophet (Exodus 7:1; 18:15ff; 1 Samuel 9:9; Jeremiah 21:2), or through a priest using “lots” (Deuteronomy 17:9).

<sup>2</sup> cf. also Leviticus 10:16; 2 Samuel 11:3.

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*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.* (2001). Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society.

Harrison, R. K. (2004). *Introduction to the Old Testament.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

## VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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## About the Preacher

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