
A Season of Promised Destruction

Amos 8:1-14

Pastor Stevan Vaughan

Introduction

Above all other books combined, the Bible has been hated, vilified, ridiculed, criticized, restricted, banned, and destroyed, but it has been to no avail. As one rightly said, “We might as well put our shoulder to the burning wheel of the sun, and try to stop it on its flaming course, as attempt to stop the circulation of the Bible” (Sidney Collett, All about the Bible, p. 63).

In A.D. 303-313, the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshipping Jesus Christ and to destroy their Scriptures. Every official in the empire was ordered to raze the churches to the ground and burn every Bible found in their districts (Stanley Greenslade, Cambridge History of the Bible). Twenty-five years later Diocletian’s successor, Constantine, issued another edict ordering fifty Bibles to be published at government expense (Eusebius).

In 1778 the French infidel Voltaire boasted that in 100 years Christianity would cease to exist, but within 50 years the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to publish Bibles (Geisler and Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible, 1986, pp. 123, 124).

Robert Ingersoll once boasted, “Within 15 years I’ll have the Bible lodged in a morgue.” But Ingersoll is dead, and the Bible is alive and well. (Men Who Were Converted Trying to Disprove the Bible, Part 1. April 4, 2017, David Cloud)

Ironically, the most destructive misuse and abuse of God’s word through the ages has been from the Church itself!

The Middle Ages, which lasted from about the 5th to the 15th century, was dominated in Europe by the Holy Roman Empire. This was the time of the Crusades, the Great Schism, the Inquisition, and the iron rule of the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout this difficult time, God still had witnesses to the truth. The common man did not have any access to God’s word unless he went to Mass, and much like the creation of the Sadducees and Pharisees during the Intertestamental Period, the Church left void of God’s word, attempted to fill the void with rules and a culture that were not biblical in the least, and the common man was captive to what was being taught in the Catholic Church because of their domination of the Church and culture.

Because God’s was still working in history, the Reformation was eventually formed out of protest (thus the name Protestant), to the Holy Roman Empire’s rule. Think about 1,000 years of darkness, emptiness, and confusion within the Church during the Middle Ages because of the suppression of the word of God and most attempts to find God’s word outside the Catholic Church.

Today we are going to talk about an important prophesy in Amos regarding God's word. The destruction of Israel that Amos prophesied had shocking consequences that would change the world forever.

The words of the Lord and the response of Amos (Amos 8:1-3)

The Lord showed Amos a ripe basket of fruit as an illustration of Israel's ripeness for incapable judgment. Amos 8:1-3:

This is what the Lord GOD showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," declares the Lord GOD. "So many dead bodies!" "They are thrown everywhere!" "Silence!"

In basic Hebrew parallelism God and Amos talk. God shows Amos a practical illustration about what he is thinking. Like summer fruit that is left out in the warm air or the sunny window, fruit that is ripe and soon to be over-ripened, Israel is ripe for judgment. It has taken time for God to lose patience over Israel's ongoing sin and be ready to judge them like fruit that is almost too ripe to eat.

I wonder if God's statement, "I will never again pass by them", made Amos think of the Passover and how blood on the door posts protected God's people on the Passover night when they were slaves in Egypt?

God is God of the whole world (Amos 8:4-9:1)

Israel had lost sight of God's sovereignty. God is the God of the whole world, even over Israel, who was abusing the poor under their influence and care. Israel was proud and ignored God and His commands. Israel was God's chosen people and even though they still followed the religious patterns laid out in the Law, their hearts and actions did not reflect a love for God nor His people. They had a form of godliness but denied its reality.

I will never forget their deeds (Amos 8:4-7)

God showed great patience with Israel, but they failed to give God the worship he deserved, even though they continued to follow their religious form. They followed the religious prescription laid out in the scriptures, but their hearts were far from God. You could see this in the way they abused the poor and cheated in their businesses. God told Amos that he would never forget their deeds. Verses 4-7:

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds."

The abuse of the poor and needy and deceitful business practices (Amos 8:4-7)

The people of Israel were trampling the needy and abusing and destroying the poor. They used silver to own the poor and to force the poor to do whatever they wanted. They could not wait until the Sabbath was over so they could use their deceitful business practices and false balances to take advantage of those less fortunate.

The land will tremble, and the people mourn (Amos 8:8)

Because of God's pending judgment against his people, everyone will suffer, including creation. Even for those who are not directly responsible for sin against God, judgment often ends in suffering, though they may be "innocent" bystanders. Even though God saved Israel when they were being pursued by the Egyptians, now Israel will "not be passed over" for their sins and they will suffer like the Egyptian soldiers crossing the Red Sea in pursuit of the Israelites.

"Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?"

The sin, suffering and mourning will all rise like the waves of the rising and falling of the Nile River. Think of how painful it sounded to the readers to have a reference to their time in Egypt brought back up as a reminder of the captivity they had come from so long ago.

Sufferings (Amos 8:9-12)

On that day of judgment, God's people were going to suffer because of their consistent unconfessed sin, and their independence and arrogance towards God. Because of their great sin, the whole community would suffer, and if/when they would finally try to find wisdom, knowledge, and comfort in God's word, it would be nowhere to be found.

Suffering as a community (Amos 8:9-10)

"And on that day," declares the Lord GOD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day."

Most Old Covenant prophecies had multiple horizons. Even in the immediate historical consequence of Amos' prophecy, the people heard a warning of judgment, but historical fulfilment wouldn't come for 20-40 years after Amos prophesied. In this language, these are images that a New Covenant reader might see "the mourning for an only son" as the day of Christ's death on the cross, and the distress of the Day of Judgment at the end of time. Only this time, judgment was focused solely on God's people.

The famine of God's Word (Amos 8:11-12)

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words"

of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.

When I first read this, I was shocked! I still remember what I felt when I read this, and it truly gripped me. I guess I never really thought about the reality of that curse before and how devastating that would be in the life of God's people. My initial thought was, what if that happened to us today? Would we even care? How would we live? How dependent are we on God's word as our daily food? Would we even notice if God's word was forcibly taken from us, would our daily lives change?

Why was this such an important judgment? Why a famine of God's word? What does Moses say in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, that Jesus quotes to Satan in Matthew and in Luke?

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

We can see the effects of this famine of God's word in history. The famine of God's word took place for 400 years during the time after the prophet Malachi and up until the birth of Christ. Amos prophesied in 780-760 BC, shortly before the Assyrian Captivity, but it wasn't until some 400 years later that Amos' prophecy regarding the famine of God's word was fulfilled. During this silent period, there was no prophecy, recorded miracles, or any recorded word from the Lord. God's presence was no longer in the Temple or with His people directly. This judgment created a hunger for the people of God to look for God's word, which ultimately created the perfect time for God to send Christ, God's word in flesh, into the world to save his people from their sin once and for all. This famine was necessary to create the right time for Christ's birth. God's people were looking for God's word for over 400 years and found nothing but silence! The stage was finally set for the birth of Jesus.

God's Word in Flesh

How did Jesus fill the void left for so long with no word from the Lord? Jesus is God's Word sent in flesh. John 1:1-5 and verse 14 says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

After 400 years of silence God sends his son to the world to live among us and die for us and save his people from their sins once and for all!

God's Word in print

How does the New Testament fill that void?

The New Testament is God's word about Christ and the final revelation concerning Christ and God's Word. Once Christ came in the flesh, the Holy Spirit inspired writers to put God's living word into scripture. The written word now is God's spoken word to his chosen people. We still hear from God today through the preaching, teaching, and reading of his written word. Scripture is God's final word until Christ returns at the end of time.

God's Word rejected

Today, God's people have often chosen out of ignorance or disobedience to turn to the world for wisdom, or other false narratives, including error, rather than to turn to God's revealed Word. Where there is error in the preaching and teaching of God's word there will be error in the understanding of God's word and therefore error in the application of the word in the daily life of the believer. Error within the church in the preaching and teaching of God's word leads to many in the church believing worldly lies and false teaching, as well as incorrectly acting on the truth of God's word.

The chastening of God's people

The current situation in the world today shows that people are still turning their back on God and refusing to believe God's revealed word. Too many professing believers are content to follow their own heart idols and are seeking the security of the world, which in turn is helping create a world that doesn't know God or his word, and like the community of God's people in Amos, God's church will suffer under chastening because of their lack of knowledge, understanding and application of God's word.

Given this, it is easy to see how the church has come to embrace and accept Critical Race Theory and Critical Social Justice within its own communities. The world can't push the Word out of the church, but the rise of false teaching, errors and myths within the church, as well as the acceptance of worldly philosophies, fill the void created by ignoring the truth of God's word.

God's word shines light on darkness, and darkness cannot push out the word, but where the word is not biblically preached or taught, people will find something to fill the void that God's word should fill. Without God's word, especially in the local church, errors and myths will come into the church and into believer's lives and they will become ineffective and fall prey to sin and suffering. This is God's chastening for our own foolishness and disobedience.

Can you see the similarities between Israel and the church today?

Those who fall will never rise again (Amos 8:13-14)

Because of God's judgment of his people, Israel would never rise again to the prominence they once had in the world. God's patience had run out, and once they fall into judgment, they will never rise again as God's only chosen people. The curse of judgment would fall on the whole nation and even the youngest, strongest, and fairest would suffer. Because they were guilty of rejecting God and worshiping the idols of Samaria, Israel would fall and never rise again.

"In that day the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by the Guilt of Samaria, and say, 'As your god lives, O Dan,' and, 'As the Way of Beersheba lives,' they shall fall, and never rise again."

The famine of God's word that Amos prophesied eventually led to 400 years of life without God's presence among his people. That time of darkness laid the stage for the perfect timing of the Son of God to come to earth a baby boy, to eventually die a sinner's death to save his people from their sin once for all.

The Word will never leave his people again (Hebrews 13:5)

Quoting Joshua 1:5, the author of Hebrews writes, *keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Unlike this famine of God's word as prophesied by Amos, we can never have Christ as God's word taken away from us, even if those who oppose the church try to take away the written word. We will always have Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit. This should be an encouragement to us even during suffering and hard and difficult times.

Conclusion

We are in a famine of the word of God currently within the church. There is a lack of regard for God's word, a lack a biblical understanding of scripture, and a lack of biblical preaching and teaching and application of God's word.

This famine is leaving a void within the church, and therefore the church is often accepting false teaching, and the lies and false philosophies of the world. Political agendas, Nationalism, "Defunding the Police", Critical Race Theory, The Black Lives Matter Movement, the LBGQT agenda, etc....are all inside the church and are accepted by the leadership and from the Pulpit. There ends up being no difference between the Church and the World.

The solution is to prize God's word along with the biblical preaching and teaching of the word. We prize biblical thinking, wisdom, and correct doctrine here at the Chapel. There should be a clear difference between the Church and the World and the way we think, live and approach life.

We don't know how much true biblical preaching and teaching from the Word of God can change the world and its philosophies, but we know it can change people for eternity!

Everything we think, say, and do should be informed and filtered through the lens and understanding of God's word.

We are called to take the truth of scripture into the world and make disciples; teaching and baptizing in the name of Christ. That is our mission, and it means living and dying for that Word, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, no matter what the rest of the World around us does. Do not confuse which kingdom you truly belong to.

