

THE BOOK OF AMOS
Lesson 9, Chapters 5 and 6

When we read the Bible, and especially when we read the Prophets, we are faced with a choice of perspective: to think of these Scriptures as perhaps an interesting, but not particularly relevant, history lesson concerning ancient Israel. Or, we can think of them as a divine record of how God has always decided and behaved...revealing His immutable principles and patterns... and therefore it is, and will always be, greatly relevant because He decides and behaves the same way in all generations including with ours, His modern-day worshippers. I certainly hope that you accept, as do I, that the latter and not the former is the case.

In our previous lesson, as we studied Amos chapter 5, we looked-on as Amos prophesied that, as a result of Israel's rebellion against their covenant with Him, God would reformulate His relationship with them from acting as their protector to acting as their adversary. This was not an idle warning or hypothetical threat, as (through Amos) God explains just what this new relationship with Israel is going to look like, and what it means for them. It means first and foremost that God is going to entice a powerful nation to invade and decimate Israel...that nation acting as His hand of punishment for His chosen people's unfaithfulness. While the promised invasion is perhaps a few years off, it is coming at God's direction and so it is irreversible and unstoppable. Therefore, Amos urgently warns the people to prepare first by repenting, and second by arranging their lives and their affairs to protect themselves against the inevitable disaster that is coming. Further, God explains that He has already pulled His blessings away from Ephraim/Israel; it is only that the leadership and the people are oblivious to it primarily because Israel continues as a wealthy, powerful, and important country in the region. As the people look around them, reveling in their power and prosperity, patting themselves on their backs for their success, they assume their lofty and envious position exists because they've done it themselves, but it also indicates that God must be pleased with their lifestyles and with their worship of Him. But...they are deceived. Rather, says the Lord in verse 17, He is going to "pass through" Israel. He is using the same words He promised to Moses that He would "pass through" Egypt to kill all their firstborn of humans and livestock.

We know from history that God did exactly as He said He would do to Ephraim/Israel. Only in the 21st century...after the passing of 2700 years... are the remnants of the destruction of the 10 tribes of Ephraim/Israel finally being beckoned from Heaven to return to their ancient homeland from the far-flung places they were sent. Believers; there is something far more personal and relevant in Amos's word to us, which we are meant to take to heart, than a history lesson about the fallen Northern Kingdom of Israel. It is an ominous reminder that God, with sufficient provocation and with enough reckless faithlessness towards Him, will not only pull His hand of blessing and protection from His elect, but He will also reverse our redemption. The Church **rightly** has, for hundreds of years, drawn the close parallel between Israel's redemption from Egypt and our redemption from sin and oppression. While we usually speak of that redemption as being unconditional, that statement is too broad and it can leave us spiritually exposed. Israel, too, thought that their redemption had been unconditional and the consequences for that grave error are what we have been reading about. There is a condition to our salvation; for ancient Israel they had to trust in Yehoveh (and the proof of their trust was to paint the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their Egyptian homes), and for the past 2000 years it is that we must first sincerely trust in the blood of Yeshua the Messiah to receive our salvation. But, there is another and even larger question that looms; is there an ongoing condition after we first trust, or are there no further requirements of us? When we look a bit closer at the New Testament we find that what is actually unconditional is God's **love** for us...not our salvation. Those same verses also explain that God's love is for all mankind; not just His elect. So, God's love is by no means the indicator or result of our personal redemption, anymore than it was for Israel. God continued to love Israel even as He was in process of reversing their salvation history, using the Assyrian Empire war machine to destroy 90% of the Ephraim/Israelite people, and exiling the remaining living from their Promised Land. While gaining our salvation is without condition except for the condition of trusting Jesus for it, maintaining our salvation is another matter. We must consciously and with purpose hold-on to our redemption, once given, by remaining faithful and obedient to God, which reveals our level of trust (or lack of it) in Him; something that if real and true in our minds and lives shows up as the good fruit we are to bear as we continue to glorify Him. However, should we go in a different direction and eventually cross some cosmic line in the sand of TOO

much unfaithfulness, and TOO much disobedience and rebellion, and the de facto end of our trust in God, He will rescind our redemption because that trust in Him that we once had has become a farce and is worthless.

In the Book of Hebrews, the anonymous writer was inspired to warn Believers of exactly this situation...of the folly of thinking that we can make a good show for a time of claiming trust in God's Son for redemption... or even our actually sincerely believing at first... but then later pulling away from that trust and living in sin, and yet still expecting God's grace to remain upon us.

CJB Hebrews 10:22-29 ***²² Therefore, let us approach the Holiest Place with a sincere heart, in the full assurance that comes from trusting- with our hearts sprinkled clean from a bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us continue holding fast to the hope we acknowledge, without wavering; for the One who made the promise is trustworthy. ²⁴ And let us keep paying attention to one another, in order to spur each other on to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not neglecting our own congregational meetings, as some have made a practice of doing, but, rather, encouraging each other. And let us do this all the more as you see the Day approaching. ²⁶ For if we deliberately continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but only the terrifying prospect of Judgment, of raging fire that will consume the enemies. ²⁸ Someone who disregards the Torah of Moshe is put to death without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Think how much worse will be the punishment deserved by someone who has trampled underfoot the Son of God; who has treated as something common the blood of the covenant which made him holy; and who has insulted the Spirit, giver of God's grace!***

Hear, please, that series of conditional words of our salvation found in this passage. SINCERE (not flippant or casual) faith, CONTINUE to hold fast (not hold fast initially for a little while, but no longer), KEEP paying attention to one another (not loving your neighbor with good deeds at first only to grow disinterested later), knowing the truth and wrongly CONTINUING to sin. We can't claim God and redemption and then knowingly do wrong. If we don't follow this urgent pleading, what is the result? There no longer remains the effect of the

sacrifice of Christ on our behalf for our sins that we may escape eternal punishment; instead, we will certainly face terrifying judgment.

The thrust of this message was brought to Israel by a number of Prophets, and rejected by most of the leadership and the people. We are right now reading about the consequences.

Open your Bibles to Amos chapter 5.

READ AMOS CHAPTER 5:18 – end

Amos is the first to use the term "The Day of the Lord" in our Bibles. What it really says, though, is "The Day of Yehoveh". Keep that in mind as we continue. And the context of its use is "woe to those who want it", and "why do you want it?" because it is going to be a day of darkness and not light. With a bit of tongue-in-cheek I have asked this same question of you Torah Class students in some earlier Bible book studies. Why are you so anxious for that day? Why do you raise your hands to the heavens and ask that it not be delayed? I do understand that most Believers, at least those of the more evangelical branches of Christianity, think of The Day of the Lord primarily in regards to the return of Christ and ridding the world of evil. But, I also suggest that most don't fully think-out what that event is going to actually look like. The few years leading up to The Day of the Lord are going to be the darkest of times...beyond our current ability to even imagine it...that the world has ever known. The Day of the Lord is about judgment...not joy. The divine judgment that brings to an end the mass cruelty of the Anti-Christ and other evil tyrants will be even more terrible. The collateral damage, staggering. The price humanity will pay for there to finally be a lasting peace on earth and good will to all men is beyond our comprehension. Billions of people are going to die. Billions more are going to suffer. So, what did "The Day of the Lord" mean to Amos, and what mental image was formed within the minds of the people who first heard those prophetic words? Because within that meaning and mental image is generally how we are to understand it all these centuries later (acknowledging that with the passing of history we now have more information about it than those of Amos's day).

There is probably a half-dozen rather nuanced opinions of its exact meaning that are subscribed to throughout the world of theology. It is noted that in Middle and Near East cultures existing well before the time of Israel there was a belief of a coming cosmic catastrophe that would eventually befall the earth. Von Rad posited that a calamitous Holy War was the context for the Day of the Lord. Another commonly held opinion is that The Day of the Lord has to do with an appearance of God...a theophany. There are others. However, I think what we can say without venturing too far out on a limb is that The Day of the Lord does not point us towards a day...a single 24 hour period... of great devastation, but rather it points towards a period of time. Somewhere during that period of time, the Lord will make an appearance in order to rescue His own, and to bring judgment (destruction) upon His enemies. Who are His enemies? All those that He determines do not hold a sincere trust in Yeshua for their salvation.

For Amos and for the people of Israel (all 12 tribes) this would have been envisioned as God coming to take revenge on Israel's enemies and through that bring full and final salvation to the family of Jacob. In other words, the bad stuff is coming, but not for us. So, Amos is acknowledging that indeed a period of planet-wide divine judgment is coming. However, Israel has deceived itself into thinking that they are immune from it. That is, this judgment is for Israel's benefit, and it is all about propelling the well-deserving nation of Israel into a golden era of national prominence above all other nations on earth. They were wrong to think it, and we are wrong to think that we, as Believers, will be held harmless to the coming horrors associated with the Day of The Lord.

So, verse 18 says "woe"; woe not to the pagan nations but rather to those (Israel) who ignorantly yearn for this day...The Day of the Lord. In this case, at this moment, this is specifically about the Northern Kingdom. Amos has just popped a balloon of a popular doctrine that the people of Ephraim had embraced and were relying on as a given. You can imagine that it was not at all well-received; it would take a Prophet of great courage and dedication (like Amos) to deliver this message of doom to a people who honestly believed that they had elevated themselves spiritually to such heights of great piousness before God that it made them untouchable. As Shalom M. Paul puts it: Amos says that "past salvation is not an unlimited guarantee for future life insurance". Israel is going to

experience the reverse of everything they expected. The Day of the Lord for them will be darkness and not light. Death and destruction, and not salvation.

Verse 19 uses a literary simile to emphasize the point being made. Just like a person frantically runs away from a lion but right into the jaws of a bear, or like a person who runs inside their home to get away from danger only to be met by a poisonous snake in their house, so will Israel think that Yehoveh will provide a means of escape from what others are suffering only to find out there isn't.

Verse 20 seeks to erase even the faintest of hopes for their survival. The darkness of that day will be total darkness, not partial. No light whatsoever...not even a glimmer... will be seen. Again, this calls to mind the same sort of phenomena that happened to the Egyptians in order to redeem Israel. Only now, this darkness is going to happen to Israel to reverse their salvation history...to UN-redeem them.

CJB Exodus 10:20-23 ***²⁰ But ADONAI made Pharaoh hardhearted, and he didn't let the people of Isra'el go. ²¹ ADONAI said to Moshe, "Reach out your hand toward the sky, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness so thick it can be felt!" ²² Moshe reached out his hand toward the sky, and there was a thick darkness in the entire land of Egypt for three days. ²³ People couldn't see each other, and no one went anywhere for three days. But all the people of Isra'el had light in their homes.***

Note how in Egypt, the darkness was so total you couldn't even see the person standing next to you. But...the Israelites DID have light in their homes. The people of Ephraim/Israel expected the same thing to happen on the Day of the Lord...that they would receive the Lord's favor. But, no, says Amos. This time Israel will experience the same darkness that the Egyptians felt because, just like for the Egyptians, God is now going to treat Israel as His adversaries.

The final 7 verses of chapter 5 revolve around this principle: religious ritual does not save. Even more, religious ritual that is void of morality makes God reject those performing it. What is proper morality as regards ritual? We have to go to God's code of morality...the Law of Moses... to know. For Ephraim/Israel, their religious ritual was not moral because it didn't follow the ritual practices and

conditions as set down in the Law of Moses. The Northern Kingdom had reworked some pagan rituals to suit them, and substituted these rituals for the ones God had ordained on Mt. Sinai. Even the place of the rituals (it was only to be at the Temple in Jerusalem) was wrong, because Ephraim/Israel had created their own cult worship sites. I recall some years ago when talking to a friend about my doubts and concerns over Christian Easter and Christmas observances, due to the bulk of these observances clearly being of pagan origin, she told me not to be concerned because "Jesus had baptized them". That is, the very things that were used for pagan ritual were now deemed by the Church as OK to use to worship God because Jesus had cleansed them and made them suitable. I have no doubt it was with this same kind of misguided logic that Ephraim/Israel borrowed so many of their worship practices from their pagan neighbors, and felt justified in using them to worship Yehoveh, God of Israel...even though the Law of Moses warned them not to.

In verse 21, God goes so far as to say that He hates and despises their feasts. While "hates and despises" is not a wrong translation, a better and more apt one is that God hates and rejects their feasts. That is because while our knee-jerk reaction is to make the term "hate" into one of intense emotional dislike, that is not the case here. Biblically, hate is the opposite of love. And far more often than not, biblically speaking love is meant in the sense of allegiance and faithfulness; not of emotional warm affections. Therefore, to hate is to reverse allegiance; to hate is refuse or to dissolve allegiance. Thus, to hate involves rejection of the hated person, and rejection is the better translation for the Hebrew word used here, which is *ma'ac*. In fact, says God, He also hates (He rejects) **all** of their solemn assemblies...no doubt meaning assemblies other than the annual feasts such as perhaps special occasions of communal worship. And, by the way, don't think of those occasions of communal worship in terms of Church-like or Synagogue-like weekly meetings. There is no evidence within the Bible, nor from other ancient Jewish sources, that weekly assemblies ever occurred in Israel's history until well after Judah's return from their Babylonian exile.

In verse 22, God essentially rejects **all** of Ephraim's sacrificial offerings. Specifically, He calls out the 3 most frequent ones: the *Olah*, the *Minchah*, and the *Shelamim*. Commonly called the Burnt Offering, the Grain Offering, and the Peace Offering, the first 2 are usually performed together and are about atoning

for sins. The 3rd, the Peace Offering, is a voluntary offering that can involve the making of vows or simply an offering of thanksgiving. Thus, God is saying He won't accept any required offerings or voluntary offerings, which together covers all possible reasons for sacrifices. Why? Because they can say that they are sacrificing to Him, but they are doing it within an illegal worship system, which means they are disobeying His laws and commandments. It seems that whether it is the most ancient Hebrew, the early Israelite, Judaism or the Christian faith, we have a penchant for insisting on doing things our way; and being equally insistent that God will accept our worship any way we wish to give it to Him. And this belief is desperately held onto despite example after example in the Bible of God's harsh reaction to those who attempt it. Being sincere when what we're doing is morally wrong in God's eyes, makes it no less wrong and unacceptable.

Once again; this particular reaction of God towards Israel's perverted worship practices is called for in the Law of Moses; so, God is only executing the terms of the Covenant to which He and Israel mutually agreed.

CJB Leviticus 26: 26-31 ***26 I will cut off your supply of bread, so that ten women will bake your bread in one oven and dole out your bread by weight, and you will eat but not be satisfied. 27 "And if, for all this, you still will not listen to me, but go against me; 28 then I will go against you furiously, and I also will chastise you yet seven times more for your sins. 29 You will eat the flesh of your own sons, you will eat the flesh of your own daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your pillars for sun-worship, and throw your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols; and I will detest you. 31 I will lay waste to your cities and make your sanctuaries desolate, so as not to smell your fragrant aromas.***

Verse 23 now focuses on the songs and music used in the process of worshipping God. So, He not only rejects their sacrifices and their feasts, but also even the praise they offer-up to Him in the form of music. Is it the choice of music and the words of the songs that make it unacceptable? We're not told so. I suspect that the point being made is that every form of praise and worship of God is no longer acceptable to Him because the people who are attempting it don't have righteous hearts, and so they don't live righteous lives, and thus their motives and their spiritual condition make them as outcasts to Him. They can call on His name day and night; but without a sincere, God prescribed righteousness, it is all for

naught. Fellow Believer, do you seriously think that has changed because of the advent of Yeshua? Can we intentionally go on sinning...living an unrighteous life, bearing an unrighteous heart... and still expect God to accept us?

CJB Romans 6:1-2 *So then, are we to say, "Let's keep on sinning, so that there can be more grace"? ² Heaven forbid! How can we, who have died to sin, still live in it?*

Not living righteously (that is, sinning) is anathema to our relationship with God.

What is the remedy for unacceptable worship? God tells us in Amos 5:24.

²⁴ Instead, let justice well up like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

This is the same thought that the Prophet Samuel uttered to a sinful King Saul nearly 3 centuries earlier.

CJB 1 Samuel 15:22 *Sh'mu'el said, "Does ADONAI take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what ADONAI says? Surely obeying is better than sacrifice, and heeding orders than the fat of rams.*

Ritual is good when it is God ordained and performed by righteous people with the right motivations. But even God-ordained ritual observances are useless if not done with a contrite and righteous heart.

Verse 25 has God asking Israel to recall their history; specifically, their wilderness experience. During that 40 years in the desert, sacrifices could not, and were not, done every day exactly as prescribed. So much of the sacrificial system looked ahead in time when Israel was settled in the Promised Land. For instance, when Israel was on the move, there was simply no feasible way to pause, set up the Tabernacle and Altar, and sacrifice daily. So, Yehoveh is reminding Israel that while the prescribed sacrifices and rituals are good, yet His extreme and vigilant care for them was not based upon those rituals. Rather, it was all based on God's grace in exchange for their sincere trust and faithfulness.

I'll get a bit preachy for a moment, and I'll ask up-front for your forgiveness for my frankness. The idea within Roman Christianity (and Roman Christianity represents virtually all branches of Western Christianity) that it was with the advent of Jesus whereupon grace entered this world and became the basis of God's relationship with humans is absurd and ignorant. God's relationship with humanity was always about His grace; it has never changed. Even Israel's redemption from Egypt was God's act of grace because Israel had done nothing to deserve it nor did they work to make it happen. The Law of Moses was yet another act of grace, and especially was the sacrificial system based on God's grace. God agreed to allow a guilty human to be forgiven for his or her sins by means of one of God's innocent animal creatures being slaughtered and burned-up in the guilty person's stead. So, God is saying to Israel in verse 25, hey, when did you get the idea that sacrifice and ritual were what I want most from you? Perhaps the time of the most intimacy between God and Israel was during that wilderness journey when Israel was 100% dependent upon God, and they knew it. Yes, they certainly failed from time to time, and often were punished for it. But they knew who to turn to, they knew whose commands to follow and what happened when they didn't.

Even before Israel left Egypt, God had given instructions to Israel's elders.

CJB Jeremiah 7:21-24 ***²¹ Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el: 'You may as well eat the meat of your burnt offerings along with that of your sacrifices. ²² For I didn't speak to your ancestors or give them orders concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. ²³ Rather, what I did order them was this: 'Pay attention to what I say. Then I will be your God, and you will be my people. In everything, live according to the way that I order you, so that things will go well for you.'***

²⁴ But they neither listened nor paid attention, but lived according to their own plans, in the stubbornness of their evil hearts, thus going backward and not forward.

The Hebrews living in Egypt under oppression from the Pharaoh still didn't obey God. No amount of ritual or sacrifice was even ordered at that time; only their obedience to the ways (the righteous ways, the morality) that God showed to them.

And yet, here stands Israel in their Promised Land; a land dripping with abundance and Israel a wealthy nation. All of it because of God's grace. A Land God is about to take back from them because their hearts grew evil, their souls dark, and their minds arrogant. They invented their own doctrines, their own worship practices, and expected God to accept them.

Verse 26 describes Israel carrying around a couple of pagan idols, which of itself is a complete repudiation of their claim of loyalty to Yehoveh. So, after social injustice has been addressed, as well as the decadent living of Israel's elite and their disdain and oppression of the working poor, now God's complaint against them turns back to idolatry. These two named pagan deities were astral deities, both of which have long histories behind them. **Sikkut** (also called **Sakkut**) and **Kiyun** were long part of the various ancient Mesopotamian religions. So, what is being talked about is a great religious procession (a parade) that the Ephraim/Israelites copied from their pagan neighbors, even using their pagan star deities whose images they carried in the procession, and then dedicated it all to Yehoveh.

For all these offenses against God, and more, verse 17 pronounces judgment. All the false things that Israel had relied upon to support their false manmade religion would prove to have been worth nothing. God is essentially telling Israel to go ahead and hang on to those 2 deities and to take them along as they go into exile. Let's move on to Amos chapter 6.

READ AMOS CHAPTER 6 all

Interestingly, Amos now includes Judah in this prophecy against Ephraim when he speaks of Zion. So, this oracle is directed (for now) at the entire family of Jacob...all the tribes. Even more specifically this woe is against those described as at ease and complacent. These folks feel confident and secure in their wealth and in the defenses they have prepared against any eventuality.

The 2nd half of verse 1 is a bit difficult to translate and so a few different attempts have been made. While they all are generally in agreement as to the substance, it still requires some guesses as to the meaning of the expressions

that are being used to describe these notables of Israel. One of the things we have to realize is that even though tribalism was in full swing at this time, nonetheless the capital cities of Jerusalem and Samaria were administered outside the usual manner that tribes were. Since these were the centers of political power, then wealth was of course attracted to it. Everyone wanted some type of relationship or connection to the monarchy. That connection could come via marriage, or by birth, or (for all but the very privileged few) it could be because of employment by the monarchy or simply living nearest to the king and his court. Living near to the king was always reserved for only the wealthiest.

These notables, then, had the king's ear. They also were given special privileges and power that only the monarchy could bestow. Some were given the power to tax the people and to control very profitable national building projects. Therefore, it was the common citizens...the house of Israel it is called here...that came to the notables when they needed government help and justice. So, it is this elite group...the notables... of both Judah and Israel that verse 1 is addressing.

In verse 2, a comparison is drawn between Israel and 3 gentile nations: Calneh, Hamath, and Gath. The oracle asks a rhetorical question whose answer is "no". The question is: are you, Israel, better than those 3 nations? Even though Israel would instinctively answer "yes" as they thought themselves the cream-of-the-crop and all-important, God makes it clear that He sees them as no better than those 3 pagan city-states. At this time in history, Calneh and Hamath were actually under the control of Ephraim/Israel. Gath (one of the 5 major Philistine cities) was under Judah's control. So, part of the point of choosing those 3 cities for comparison includes the idea that these are all subjugated cities...they were invaded and lost their freedom...just as Samaria will soon be invaded and overrun (and Jerusalem several decades later will, too). The other point being made is that nations and kingdoms may think they have priority before God...Israel included... but, like Israel, they have badly assessed their situation.

Verse 3 continues to speak to the elite of Israel. "Putting far off that evil day" means these folks push away and deny any thought that such a thing as terrible as what Amos is proposing could actually ever happen to them. They simply continue their decadence and immorality believing they cannot be touched. Yet,

it is that same attitude that causes the coming violence only to accelerate, and for their wealth and position to be dashed to pieces even sooner than it might have been. Put another way: it is the leaders and the elite of Ephraim/Israel who are fully responsible for bringing about the calamity that is about to befall them. I dare say, that is the case nearly every time a nation or a kingdom falls. Incompetent and arrogant leaders are certain their wealth and power will insulate them from whatever the result is of their folly. There's nothing new under the sun in this.

The next 3 verses are a somewhat detailed list of the decadent behaviors of these notable elite who harbor no thought that they could ever lose what they have. Verse 4 paints them as basically lazy. Leisure is their preferred way of life and it is how they spend the bulk of their time. The beds of ivory were expensively crafted wood inlaid with ornate ivory, and were not "beds" as we think of them today (mattresses), but rather we would call them couches. These wealthy dine on nothing but the finest. They eat meat daily; lamb or beef. Even then these are the choicest of the sheep and cattle they use for their meat source. Most Israelites could not imagine such a thing. Eating meat was well beyond them (most of the animal protein they consumed was fish). Sheep and cattle were for sacrificing, and so many of them probably only ate meat as a direct result of attending one or another of the pilgrimage festivals... Matzah, Shavuot, and Sukkot... and offering a sheep or cow as a sacrifice. The first feast occurs in the springtime, the second is a summer feast, and the last is a fall feast. So, eating meat was very infrequent. Mentioning the regular eating of meat by the elite is meant, then, to point out the lavish and excessive lifestyle they led, in contrast to the meager diet of the average Israelite family.

We'll stop here for today, and continue in Amos chapter 6 next time.