

June 21

Amos 5-9

Welcome to our June 21st edition of Project 4:4. Lisa Ashton with you again...along with none other than our Famous Amos Cookies!! We continue on today in Amos 5-9 to hear from our former shepherd/fig tree farmer, now prophet of the Lord. And I would like to cover a few things today. One, what's up with these bizarre visions of judgment? And two, I have some thoughts regarding the "seek me and live" section at the beginning of your reading.

Let's get started. Amos has these visions of judgment on Israel. The locusts, the fire, the plumb line, the fruit, and the altar. I want to comment briefly on these five.

Locusts – Just like a plague of locusts could come in quickly and ruin crops, so was the judgment of God that was going to fall on Israel.

Fire – Just like fire could come in and consume the land and dry up the sea so was God's judgment going to overtake the people.

Now in these first two, Amos pleads with God and God relents. Now, that raises a question, Did God change his mind? Does God change his mind? Through our readings thus far in the Daily Bible we have run into this before. We need to remember that because God never changes, he can never change his mind. He always has all the information He needs. He is always conscious of every bit of that evidence at all times. We must conclude then, that the final action was the one that God intended all along. So why the visions to Amos then about wiping out Israel? Possibly for two reasons: First to move Amos to intercede for His people -- God wanted to move Amos to prayer. Prayer has a way of strengthening our faith and our relationship with God. And second, to underscore His mercy and the gracious commitment that God had made to spare a remnant of His people. God would preserve them through the time of judgment so that some day Israel could be re-established.

Next we have the vision of the plumb line. A plumb line is a string with a weight on the end of it used to show if a wall is straight or not. So wherever one would hang the string it would hang vertical as the weight points to the Earth's center. If a wall next to it is parallel to the string then you know the wall is perfectly vertical. Amos here is saying that Israel, the wall, is far off from being "vertical," if you will, with the God's law. Israel is on the verge of collapse. And unlike the first two visions, Amos does not ask God to relent because Israel is too far gone.

Ripe fruit – The Lord says the time is ripe for his people and he will spare them no longer. Ripe fruit could be translated summer fruit here which signified the last of the harvest. In other words, summer was over, God's patience had come to an end and there had been no harvest of repentance.

Lastly, the altar. The judgment starts out negative with destruction but then turns towards restoration...which is the purposes of God's judgment. We read in the last section of chapter 9 that Amos ends on a note of hope and promise! God says even though Israel is about to be judged in an unparalleled way, a day of restoration is coming! "A day when I will restore David's fallen tent and repair its broken places and restore its ruins. A day when I will bring back my exiled people, Israel. They will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine. They will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them." How awesome that more than 2500 years after Amos prophesied we have seen God's words fulfilled! Because the line of David was restored, Jesus came to Earth to rescue his people. And not only that but Israel did, indeed, become their own nation.

The second thing I wanted to comment on today was the "Seek me and live verses" in the beginning of your reading. We see this command twice from the Lord. What I found powerful about these exhortations is that they were coupled with what not to seek as well. Do not seek Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba. Well why not? I thought they were places of worship like we learned yesterday. Hang with me here as I think this is pretty cool.

Bethel – Two significant events at Bethel were found in Gen 28 and 35. Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel ensured him a future (all your offspring will be blessed). He named the place "Surely God is in this place" and then in chapter 35 God renamed Jacob to Israel at Bethel. Jacob became a new man. So now when Israel heard Amos words about not seeking Bethel, this was probably startling because they knew the history of Bethel and believed it to be a place where "surely God was in that place". So what was the problem? Hold that thought.

Gilgal – The place where Israel erected a 12 stone monument after they crossed the Jordan River in Joshua 4. It was to be a symbol of remembrance of the mightiness of God. It was also the place where the Israelites ate the produce of the land and ceased eating manna. Saul's kingship was also confirmed at Gilgal (I Sam 11). In short, Gilgal was a place that spoke of their inheritance of the Promised Land. So if this place was a great symbol of God's goodness, why would the Lord now tell Amos that Gilgal would go into exile? Hold that thought.

Beersheba – It was at this location where all three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were assured of the companionship of the Lord on their lives. In Gen 21:22 Abraham was told "God is with you in all you do. In Gen 26:24 the Lord appears to Isaac at Beersheba and says, "Fear not I am with you and will bless you..." and then years later in Gen 46:1-4 the Lord speaks to Jacob at Beersheba and says in short 'do not fear I will go with you'. So if Beersheba was a symbol of God's companionship to the people of Israel, imagine their shock if Amos now tells them, do not journey to Beersheba.

So why would I take the time to tell you about these 3 places? Here's why. I think God is saying "Israel I want you to seek ME...not a religious place...not an experience...not a symbol of my goodness...not a memory of the past...seek ME and me alone. Bethel

was known to be a place with re-orienting power. Gilgal spoke of God's promises. Beersheba proclaimed God's presence. But they were not God. Get this, God's people would make pilgrimages to Beersheba, a place of worship, to meet with Him. Now, it's as though the Lord is saying through Amos, "Israel, make ME your pilgrimage...not the place". I believe there is something in this for us to learn about the heart of God. How often do we seek a place or an experience to satisfy us besides God himself? For example, we approach church like maybe the Israelites approached Bethel or Gilgal. God's presence is there and so we depend on the atmosphere and the right songs or the perfect sermon for us to feel in touch with God. And in this attempt to meet God, we worship the experience instead of God himself.

Friends, we have a God who pleads with us, "Seek me and live" Are you seeking him today? Make God your journey, your pilgrimage, in your day today. And when you do that he will become the most beautiful and ultimate destination.

Good to be with you. Again this is Lisa Ashton and I'll see you tomorrow.