

FAMINE IN THE LAND
AMOS 8

Of all the natural disasters, few are more devastating than a famine — it results in widespread loss of human life (e.g., the Irish Famine in 19th cent.; Chinese famine in 1959 — 43 million people died...).

Famine victims are like dead men walking. Where there is no food, there is no human life. Food is necessary for human life. But no matter how devastating a human is, far more devastating is the devastation of a spiritual famine — it has spiritual consequences, the second death.

Wherever a spiritual famine exists, there can be no spiritual fruit. Pulpits dry up. Preachers become droughts without rain. Churches become dust bowls. People begin to die on the vine. This is precisely what the prophet Amos said in his day. It was the best of times politically and culturally. Jeroboam II was the King and outwardly his kingdom was at the zenith of its success, but inwardly and spiritual there was corruption and hypocrisy. The people heard but did not heed the Word of God. The nation gave outward appearance of obedience, but she was dead inwardly. So God warned through Amos of a coming famine.

We are living in such days — the famine of the Word continues of massive proportions in most places in N. America. (W. Kaiser) The reason is the utter absence of Biblical preaching in the pulpit. The church is not in good health. She is languishing because she has been fed spiritual junk food. There is Biblical malnutrition that has infiltrated our culture.

We stand in a very unique time in history as God has called us to stand and minister His Word and we are standing in the midst of dead men walking. We serve in a time of famine in the land. Have we exchanged biblical preaching for behavior modification and the supremacy of God for the supremacy of man? Is the church bored with the Bible?

As we look at the text today, there are five headings:

1. The certainty of the famine

God is speaking and He begins — “Behold.” He is awakening sleeping troops — days are coming! Days, plural, are coming. An extended period of time is coming that is inevitable and inescapable and irreversible. These days cannot be diverted and they are soon upon us. God Himself says it is coming. He declared it and it will come to pass. Num. 23 asserts that God cannot lie — if He said it, it will occur! God will bring to pass all that He said He will do. This is a certainty. The people of God had gone to far and hit the point of no return. There is no avoiding this famine. So it is for any land when God declares it to be so.

Those who refuse to hear the Word of God will likewise face just such a famine. I wonder where

our land stands today with God.

2. The controller of the famine

“Days are coming when *I* will send a famine...” God Himself will send the famine. God exercises control over the spiritual control of every land. This is a divine famine. When it comes it will break with divine fury and severity. It will not be passing but will hit with great power on the land.

the Land is a reference to the Northern Kingdom — the hearing was accessible but they turned a deaf ear and the 10 tribes will be taken away in judgment to the Assyrians. This will be a horrific captivity — once they arrive they will be enslaved and subjected to cruel treatment. But once in Assyria, there will await yet a more severe judgment — a famine of the hearing of the Word of the Lord. This famine will follow them all the way to Assyria. And there is no greater judgment.

God is sovereign over the conditions of every land and nation and prophets. It is God who controls His prophets and preachers and where they go; there is no greater judgment than to be in a land where God withdraws His preachers.

3. The character of the famine

Both negative and positive characteristics of famine are given:

- ✓ It is not a famine that is given by natural disaster — a lack of bread and water. There had been such famines in the land, but that is not what God speaks of here. It will be far worse and far more devastating.
- ✓ It will (**but** — on the contrary) be a famine of the hearing of God. They will no longer hear the Words of God. It will be a revelatory famine. In the days of their captivity and there will be no prophets to speak the words of heaven. The heavens will be as brass. The people will no longer hear the Word of God. God’s people will languish under the oppressive famine of the Word of God. It is better to be deprived of food and drink than to be deprived of the Word of God. There would be no more “thus says the Lord” or divine revelation. Worse than strong words of judgment is to have no words at all. They have been abandoned to go their own way.

Spiritually speaking the would have bloated bellies and shrunken eyes — walking dead men in the land because there is no Word from the Lord.

“The greatest curse that God can send on a people is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, unskilled guides.” [Whitfield.]

The greatest curse is to come to the house of God and not hear the Word of God and to hear the vain imaginations of ungodly men and to hear secular ideologies and to hear only the religious babblings of the blind leaders of the blind. The greatest curse is to be subjected to a famine in the land.

I believe we are living in such days of a famine of the hearing of the Word in the land.

Pulpits are replaced with performance. Drama has replaced doctrine. We are not surrounded by places who serve an abundance of food to their people. We will be alone in serving the food of God's Word to God's people.

4. The cause of the famine

Why did God send such a famine? Because when they had the Word of God brought to them, they would not hear it and heed it (vv. 1ff).

Verse one begins the fourth of Amos' visions — one of summer fruit. It is the end of the summer season; it is fruit that has reached the final stage of ripening.

The point of God's question (v. 1) is teaching Amos and us something — to force Amos to think. It is an object lesson for the prophet. God's people are ripe for judgment. The words **end** and **fruit** are similar — the fall of the year is the time of the fall of God's people. There will be no more opportunities for God's people — no more servants will come.

So He says in v. 3 that the songs of the palace will turn to wailing. The songs referenced are probably the songs of the feasts of booths, normally a time of merriment and joy. Instead there will be the ear-splitting cries reserved for the funeral. This would be the coming of the Assyrian army. There will be shock and awe on the faces of the people. Rather than laughing, it will be replaced by absolute silence because of the dead bodies around them (v. 3 — **many are the corpses**).

They no longer heard the Word of God — while they were in the house of God, hearing the Word of God (**new moon**, v. 5), they only wanted to go back to their true love — making money. They only wanted back into the world to engage in the activity of the world. They wanted to indulge the lusts of their eyes...

The whole time they were under the preaching, they could barely endure it so they could go back to making money. They did not want the words of the prophet, but the profit of the marketplace.

Even worse, they were conspiring in their hearts how they could bilk the people out of even more money — paying far more for far less. It was dishonest and a total lack of integrity. The whole time they are under the sound of the Word of God, they are conspiring (v. 5b).

There were those who had sold themselves into slavery to those who were selling them the product and those who bought them into slavery went back into worship and did not repent of their sin and were stiff-arming God and bored to death so they can go back to their life of worldliness and godlessness. They are buying people for the price of a pair of shoes (v. 6).

The preaching of the Word of God meant absolutely nothing to them. They heard the truth of the Word over and over and the entire time they were day dreaming and fantasizing about how they might get even more — get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the lid.

They could only think, “when will all this preaching be over?” Do you see a similarity to this day? Spiritually dead churches start at 11:00 sharp and get out at 12:00. They are the bland leading the bland.

There is a buzz of excitement, but there is no preaching of the Word of God. Spiritually bare churches cannot even endure the simplest preaching of the Word of God.

What has God said? He has sworn (v. 7) by no greater oath than He can make — ***I can never forget any of their deeds.*** No boredom of the Word of God will be overlooked. There is a judgment that will come on this people that will be like an earthquake — a flood of judgment that will consume this people (v. 8).

In the day of calamity (v. 9) the darkness will be a spiritual darkness — they will be left in absolute darkness. God will shut down the worship services and the end will be a bitter day (vv. 9-10). What was the cause of this attack? In the midst of the prosperity of the nation, the nation rejected the Word of God and God took them to a land where they would never hear the Word of God again.

This is precisely what has occurred in this land. Never before has a land had more preaching, Bible colleges, seminaries, radio, tv, theologians, translators, publishers, pastors and teachers and no land has so intentionally repudiated the Word of God so that it might go back to the things of the world. And God will not tolerate *His people* when they refuse to hear the Word of the Lord.

5. The consequences of the famine (v. 12)

People (the people of God) will stagger like drunks, searching and looking and never finding the Word of God. This represents the totality of the land (north to east) — they will all be looking for the truth. And none will find. It will be like immediately after 9-11. People were desperate for answers, looking for a rope to hang onto. It was not true repentance, but grasping for a straw. So it was in the day of Amos. Businesses were closed. People were desperate for help. But there would be no Word from God. There would be no message from heaven. They had crossed the deadline with God. ***They will not find it.***

Jesus said much the same thing in Mt. 13:12. If the hearer does not react to the Word of God, then God will remove that word from his ears. When you hear the truth and receive and act on that truth, more will be given to you, but if you reject it, God will remove it from you, lest the person be saved. Cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-12.

We cannot play fast and loose with the truth. Either we use the truth or we will lose it. This is Romans 1 (vv. 21ff). Note the judgment of God — vv. 24, 26, 28. If a generation will not receive the truth that is given to it, then God will abandon them to it and there will be a famine for the hearing of the Word of the Lord.

The result — the most beautiful and athletic will stagger from the lack of the Word (v. 13). Not only do they turn away from the Word of God, but they turned to the worship of pagan gods (v.

14). The church today has done the same, bowing to pragmatism, ecumenism, universalism, liberalism, ritualism, secularism, “every –ism that oughta be a –wasm.”

They will fall (v. 14) and will not rise again. This scene has been repeated through the centuries among the people of God. When those people who had the Word of God and turn away, they fall and never rise again — Wittenberg (Luther) and Geneva (Calvin) and Oxford (Owen and Whitfield) and Edinburgh (Knox) and St. Andrews and on and on — have all fallen and have not risen again. This has occurred in every generation.

When God sets a famine it is a devastating and lasting judgment on that land.

What are we to do?

1. Compassion. We must feel compassion and weep over the times in which we live (like Jeremiah and Jesus wept). Let us feel compassion to those who are subjected to ministries where there is no food for their souls.
2. Saturation. We must be ourselves saturated with the Word of God. We must have a voracious appetite for the Word of God — for we are eating for those who are in famine conditions. We must feed ourselves to feed the languishing souls of others. We must be walking Bibles in this day of famine in the land. We must speak words of truth.
3. Proclamation. We must preach now as never before. We must serve a feast and banquet week by week to feed the souls of our people. Let there be thunder and lightening in our pulpits.
4. Expectation. We must not lose heart and hope. The One who sends the famine also sends the rain and growth — after the famine there is the season of refreshment from the Lord.

Now more than ever we must preach the Word of God and feed the souls of hungry people around us. This is the strategic hour in which God has placed us and it is at this time more than ever that we must, while others are languishing in famine and starvation conditions, spread a banquet feast before the people and serve the Word of God as never before. After darkness is light. And after days of famine, surely the God of famine will hear from heaven and bring blessing to His people.

Let us look to the Lord and minister His Word in days of famine for the hearing of the Word of the Lord.