

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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A Famine In The Land

Amos 8:11-12

The word "famine" can strike fear into the hearts of people. The prospect of no food or water opens up the possibility of hunger, thirst, and even death. This was especially true in bible times, when communities were sparse and widely separated from one another. Such catastrophic events cause the most unusual and repulsive of actions. People eat unclean animals, drinking the blood of animals in the absence of water. Some even driven to eat human flesh.

But our text speaks of a famine of a different character. A famine of the word of God. This is the most grievous of all famines. A time in which no prophet should appear, or no spiritual counselor. No faithful reporter, no one to point out the way of salvation or assure of the mercy of God. This is the severest of God's judgments.

Israel had rejected and trampled underfoot the word of Jehovah. Hence, God refused to respond to their cry for a message from him. They would seek, but would be unable to find it. They would wander from sea to sea, from one extremity of the earth to the other, And be left to stumble in their own self-created darkness.

I. There is a famine of God's Word today.

Just as then, today there is a famine of the Word of God. This one is self imposed. The word is available, but people refuse to heed or respond to it.

In 2Kings 22:8 during the reign of Josiah, and the renovation of the temple, Hilkiah the high priest found the book of the law of God. It had been 57 years since the temple had been taken seriously. It was now time to do what was right. It is a wonder that the book survived. How was it preserved during the reign of all the wicked kings? Had it been overlooked, or was it the plot of some wicked priest? Regardless of why or how it was lost, it had been preserved by the providence of God. When Josiah came face to face with God's word: He listened 22:10 "...Shaphan read it before the king." We too must listen. Faith comes by hearing Rom. 10:17. He lamented over the condition of the nation. (22:11) "he rent his clothes." Repentance was necessary then and now. Luke 13:3. He liberated the people from impending doom. God had promised calamity on the land and its inhabitants. But because he saw that the King's heart was tender and that he had received the word, God had mercy upon them. The King lectured the people admonishing them to obey the word of God 23:1-3. Finally he liquidated the abomination from before Jehovah (23:4) he burned the articles that were for pagan worship. This demonstrates what can happen when the Word of the Lord is honored, respected and obeyed. But remains a constant reminder of what happens when there is famine of the Word.

Today there is in many ways a self-imposed famine of the scriptures.

The people have no delight in God's law.

Jere. 6:10 "...the word of God is to them a reproach, they have no delight in it."

The denominational world slightly regards the sacred scriptures. True God seeking people will reject denominationalism, leaving only the Lord's Church Matthew 16:18. Behind the concept of denominationalism lies an ignorance of what is taught in the scripture. 1Cor. 1:10 "...I plead with you that there be no divisions among you..."

A failure to recognize error.

"Where there is no knowledge the people perish." The people of Josiah's day were steeped in error, but failed to recognize it because the word of God was lost. The rebellious people of Jeremiah 6 were repeatedly warned, but they refused to recognize error and cried "peace, peace, where there is no peace." Today people tend to see the good in things, rather than ask "is it scriptural?" or "is it right?" "Do the scriptures authorize it?" or "what's wrong with it?" Jesus said Mt.15:6-9 "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Buy the truth and sell it not" is more than a political slogan, it is a bed-rock principle of life. A. Lincoln once received a cherished gift from a delegation of black Americans. The Date: Sept. 7, 1864, he said "In regard to this great book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to men. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong."

A failure to confront error.

It is sad, but true that often unscriptural and unsound teaching, both in the sectarian world and the church goes unchallenged. A tendency to want to get along, and not create waves, causes some to refrain from challenging erroneous teaching. Fear of being accused of "causing trouble" or "making a scene" causes some to remain silent. The idea that "it makes no difference what we believe" or "that's just your interpretation" causes many to never correct religious error. "I don't want to be called a trouble make," they say. We must stand up for the right, if we are to combat the "famine of God's word" that exists today. The alternative is a situation parallel to that existing in the days of the Judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

II. A Famine of Spiritual Consecration.

If he who is greater than Satan dwells in us, 1Jno.4:4, then the world should see the difference. Our walk, our talk, our person, the essence of our very being should "shout" to the world in no uncertain terms the one to whom we belong. If you really want to "testify" about your salvation, or demonstrate "what great things the Lord has done for you," do so by allowing the Son of God to influence your conduct. The God of the prophets promised to forgive all iniquities and dwell within his people. Paul teaches that we are "the habitation of God through his spirit." Eph. 2:22
1Tim.2:2 "...that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

Jeremiah said of the people of his day "From the least of them to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness." 6:13 Many today are materialistic in both heart and life. "Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth..." "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Today there is a famine of spiritual concerns. People live for the "now" with no thought for the future. No time of the Lord, and little emphasis on the spiritual values of life. We teach and train our children how to get an education and make a living, how to save, horde, and survive. But we spend little time and effort developing and equipping them with the values that prepare them for eternity. What a waste, what a shame.

III. A Famine of Shame.

Jeremiah 6:15 "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush."

What causes people to lose their shame? (Three Things to Consider)

1. Familiarity---we become too familiar, too intimate, too comfortable with things that are questionable or wrong. Society is driven by advertisements, commercials, movies, TV programs, etc all of which present sex, free love, and inordinate desires in appealing packages. We soon feel comfortable with scenes and language that at one time we would have rejected. The breaking down of barriers by familiarity results in the destruction of "shame."

2. Acceptance---as a result of increased familiarity we slowly come to accept that which we once denounced. Nakedness, immodesty readily accepted by the masses today. We see it on bill boards, in magazines, on TV, in movies, walking down the street etc. Hence we accept it as normal behavior.

Homosexuality, same-sex marriages, promiscuity, living together without the benefit of marriage, children born out of wedlock, abortion, drinking, gambling are all accepted today by the masses. Such conduct is considered neither shameful nor wrong.

Jere. 3:24-25 "For shame has devoured the labor of our father from our youth Their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us, For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, From our youth even to this day and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."

In the long ago God declared through the prophet Ezekiel that Jerusalem was worse than Sodom and Samaria when he said "You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, because the sins which you committed were more abominable than theirs; they are more righteous than you. Yes, be disgraced also, and bear your own shame..." Ezek. 16:52

3. Practice---in the final analysis we come to practice the very things we once rejected. Why? because we have lost our shame. Familiarity, acceptance, and practice, these are the steps that cause us to lose our shame. Heb. 3:13 "But exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Deceitfulness is defined as "that which gives a false impression whether by appearance, statement or influence..." Vine. Hence, overcome by false impressions, we lose our shame.

Some things are so evil, so vile, so ungodly that it is shameful to talk about them. Eph. 5:11-12 "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather

expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."

MacKnight felt the reference here was to the things that happened in the heathen mysteries. "For the impure and wicked actions which are secretly done in the mysteries by the initiated, are so abominable, that it is base even to mention them."

How can we reclaim our shame? The answer: Reformation
We must reform by ceasing to practice those things declared sinful by the word of God.
We must then reject (the opposite of accept) all such practices a sinful. Finally we must distance ourselves from them, hence destroying any familiarity we might have with them.
This is done by refusing to countenance as valid any practice or behavior, regardless of how popular it might be, that is in violation of God's Word.

IV. A Famine of Respect.

1. A lack of respect for God, and His Name.

Evidenced by "taking God's name in vain," the persistent joking on TV and Radio, in songs, plays, and sitcoms etc. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God..."
Ex.20:7 "In that day a man will look to his Maker and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel..." Isa. 17:7

2. A lack of respect in our dealings with each other.

There was a time when men would rise to give a seat to a lady or open a door for others. People would respond by saying "thank you." Respect is shown by allowing others to go first, or listen while one talks, rather than butting in. All these are indications of a failure to respect each other. Such respect would minimize many of our problems. Romans 14:1 "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." It's about respect. Rom. 12:10 "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another..." It's about respect. Eph.6:1-2 "Children obey your parents in the Lord...." It's about respect. A lack of respect exists sometimes because parents fail to teach respect to their children. They don't teach them to say "Thank you" "please" "Mr. and Mrs." etc. "yes mam," "no sir." Hence some children grow up to disrespect their parents, school personnel, the law of the land. They end up in jail or prison.

1 Tim. 5-2 "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity." The idea is that we are not to treat harshly older people. Because of the respect for age, we should temper the expression of reproof of an old man's misdemeanors." We should treat him with the same respect we would our father. There is a famine of respect today, which should give us all pause for concern. The world and the church would be a better place if we all showed the respect due our fellow man.