

## September 22 : Scriptures Hosea 8-10

### SUMMARY

#### Summary:

An army is coming for Israel. Why? Because they claim to know Yehovah but have rejected His good ways. Israel sought safety and security in the wrong ways, through man's solutions and false gods. They've installed their own leaders rather than seeking God's leaders and embraced foreign gods rather than their fathers' God. A calf-idol stands in Israel's capital city, a fitting image of what has happened to Israel. Therefore, they're going to harvest what they've planted. They've "sown the wind" (idolatry), and now they'll reap the whirlwind, a destructive judgment that will blow them away from their land (8:7).

Israel has pursued safety by pursuing other lovers, Assyria, for example. But this will only result in God rounding His people up and deporting them. They tried to find forgiveness and cleansing for sin through their idol altars, but this only dirtied them more (8:11). God could try to teach them, but they wouldn't understand it. They think they're honoring Yehovah, but they aren't. He's turning down their offerings and will bring demand payment for their sin. Because Israel and Judah tried to find security through fortified cities rather than Yehovah, Yehovah will allow them to be consumed by fire when their enemy attacks (8:14), for they've forgotten Him.

In chapter 9, Yehovah warns His people not to be rejoicing because doom is on the way for selling themselves to other nations and pagan gods. As part of the covenant punishment, famine is on the way (9:2), and so is exile (9:3). The Israelites will be taken to Assyria and Egypt, where they'll eat unclean Gentile food. The "bread of mourners" reference is food and people defiled by contact with death. It's totally unacceptable to God and reflects how unacceptable Israel is to God. It will find them even if they try to flee from the devastation of their land (9:6-7). The Israelites were so steeped in sin and hostile to God that Yehovah's genuine prophets seemed crazy and insane, and the people were hostile to them.

Initially, the Lord was delighted with His people, like a person who finds a treat of grapes in the desert or the first sweet fruit of a fig tree. This picture refers to Israel's wilderness wandering. But Israel soon fell into idolatry in the Midian Baal-Peor incident of Numbers 25 and became as disgusting as the pagan god they worshiped. They didn't even make it into the Promised Land before they turned their back on God! So Israel's glory (God) will leave them, and the land and people will become infertile (9:11). Even if the Israelites

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have children, they'll lose them. God points to Gilgal as a center of Israel's sinful idolatry, and because of that idolatry, Ephraim will languish, lose their children and live in exile.

Yehovah describes Israel as a fruitful vine that only produces fruit for itself, not Him. The more Israel's people prospered, the more they wallowed in idolatry. Furthermore, Israel rejects their current king while lying, and covenant-breaking (taking false oaths in God's name) has become rampant. The calf-idol of Beth-Aven (Bethel) that the false priests rejoiced over will be taken to Assyria, Samaria's king will be deposed, and the Beth-Aven worship center will be destroyed (10:5-8).

The reference to Gibeah is an interesting one. It hearkens to the incident in Judges 19, where a Levite overnights in the town, and the men of Gibeah pulled a "Sodom and Gomorrah" maneuver. The tribe of Benjamin refused to hand over the perps, and the rest of the tribes attacked them for their terrible sin. Benjamin prevailed at first but was nearly wiped out. Hosea uses the area's history to prove that spiritual rebellion has been a part of their earliest history in the Promised Land.

Speaking of calves, Hosea switches from the Calf-idol of Beth-Aven/Bethel to describing Israel and Judah as well-trained calves. Calves were used to walk over stalks of wheat and barley to release the heads of grain. The calves were allowed to forage as they worked. However, the Lord will put a yoke (a euphemism for His Law) on them to discipline them. What does Yehovah want His "calves" to do? "Sow righteousness for yourselves (do what's right) and reap faithful love (remain faithful to God); break up your unplowed ground (soften their hearts and repent). It is time to seek the Lord until he comes and sends righteousness on you like the rain" (10:12). If they do what they need to do for the Lord, God will do what He wants to do for them.

However, instead of plowing to produce righteousness, they've plowed and planted injustice and lies and trusted in their strength rather than their God. So, Yehovah declares their fate: "So it will be done to you, Bethel, because of your extreme evil. At dawn the king of Israel will be totally destroyed." (10:15).

## INSIGHT

"Indeed, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). We reap what we sow. That's as clear as it gets. What do we want in this life and after death? Galatians 5:7-10 says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for *whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.* And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let

us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (*italics author*). What we sow in this life affects both this life and the next – mostly. I say mostly because what we sow in this life may not return to us before our deaths. We may invest love, care, compassion, treasure, time, and effort into others' lives, and it may not be returned. That's the stubborn reality of living in a fallen world. *BUT* our Lord never forgets. We will be rewarded and recognized (as if *that's* going to matter in the presence of our King!) later. The Lord's commendation is the best reward we can ever get, and it will come to those who sow in the Spirit (doing things for Jesus).

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## September 23 : Scriptures Hosea 11-14

### SUMMARY

Remember when I mentioned that we could find many Older Covenant/Hebrew scripture quotes in the New Covenant scriptures? Here's an example in chapter 11:1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This scripture applies explicitly to Israel here and Yehovah's historical deliverance of His people from Pharaoh's clutches. On the other hand, the Gospel writers see Hosea's word as a prophecy of Jesus and His family going down to Egypt to escape King Herod's assassination attempt on Israel's Messiah (Matthew 2:13-15). Please don't read over the Older Covenant too quickly; read it often to keep it fresh in your mind. When the links with the New Covenant scriptures start coming, it will give you more insights.

Chapter 11 opens rather sadly with Yehovah's lament that even though He rescued His firstborn son out of Egypt, His people never left their idolatrous ways, first looking back to Egypt and later joining in with Baal worship (11:2). Like a clueless toddler, Israel didn't realize or appreciate that the Lord was the One teaching them how to live right (teaching them how to walk), freeing them from captivity, and feeding them. For their sin, God's firstborn will not return to Egypt, but they will be attacked and taken captive by Assyria because they refuse to turn back to God.

*And yet*, the Lord's heart breaks for His wayward son! Like a loving parent who is grieved when they have to discipline their child, Yehovah won't "vent the full fury of my anger; I will not turn back to destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man, the Holy One among you; I will not come in rage" (11:9). This stands out to me so much because throughout Hosea I see our God depicted as a loving and compassionate husband and father rather than a vindictive, spouse and child abuser as some claim (who are ignorant of what the Bible says). Bible verses like 11:8-11 erupt with the Lord's passion for His people (and by that, I would include all national Israel and born-again Jews and Gentiles). Woe to those who attack His people without His permission and not according to His purposes! Hosea says that even if Israel is exiled, Yehovah will "shake the branches" where Israel has been deported, and, like a flock of birds, they will fly home to rest.

All that said, Yehovah returns to His indictment against His people. Ephraim chases the wind (which is foolish), and that wind is Assyria. Ephraim is stupid for pursuing Assyria and Egypt for help (12:1). And it's not just with Israel that God has an issue. Judah is in trouble as well. Despite all the work Yehovah did in patriarch Jacob's life to straighten him out, to teach and train Jacob to follow God properly, his descendants, Israel and Judah, have wandered away. God tells His people to do what He often tells us to do as

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His followers, "return to your God. Maintain love and justice, and always put your hope in God" (12:6). But Ephraim is too wrapped up in making a dishonest profit.

Because of Israel's sin, represented by corrupt business practices, Yehovah reminds them of their past with Him and what He will do. He has been Israel's God since they both camped together in the wilderness at Sinai, so Yehovah's going to "take them camping" again, i.e., unsettle them from their land. He will send them prophets and see that their pagan altars are smashed (12:9-11). The Lord again references His past dealings with Jacob (the man and his descendants). Yehovah preserved Jacob in Aram while abused by Laban and (implied) brought him home. Yehovah preserved "Jacob" in Egypt and brought His people out under the prophet Moses' supervision. But, Ephraim/Israel has brought guilt upon themselves and "repay(s) him for his contempt" (12:14).

There was a time when the tribe of Ephraim had a lot of respect within the nation of Israel (13:1). But now they've fallen to worshipping Baal and the calf-gods, and Yehovah's "gonna blow them away." Long story short, Yehovah is the only God Ephraim knew in their early years, but the people prospered and forgot Him. So, like a wild animal, the Lord will rip Israel to shreds (like the imagery at the end of chapter 5). No king in Ephraim can stop what the Lord is bringing. Despite the devastation coming to Israel, God will turn back to Israel and "bring them back from the dead!" (13:14).

Since we're *Cruisin' Through The Bible*, I'd like to point out another historical marker – God's declaration through Hosea, "Death, where are your barbs? Sheol, where is your sting?" Apostle Paul uses this part of the verse to celebrate our future resurrection into glorified bodies. "When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory (barbs)? Where, death (Sheol), is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). When we see partial quotes like this, go back to the original quote to see what else the person might be referring to, like when Jesus wrote in the dust with His finger, alluding to Jeremiah 17. I've explained the allusion in the insight below.

Chapter 13 ends with yet another prophecy of Assyria coming from the east to lay Ephraim waste. So what should Israel do? Obviously, repent! Chapter 14 starts with Hosea's call for Ephraim/Israel to repent and trust Yehovah, not Assyria, for help. Without God, Israel is fatherless, but Yehovah specializes in showing compassion to the fatherless, especially if they are His children returning home (14:1-3). I like my Study Bible's comment that this is Hosea's "sinner's prayer." Will the Lord slap His children down for what they've done? Will He humiliate and punish them for their insolence and apostasy? Will He spurn His repentant, remorseful returning wife?

Absolutely not!

He will heal them from their adultery (idolatry). Once again, Yehovah promises that when His anger passes, Israel will again take root and become like flourishing fruit trees and grapevines, implying great abundance and fertility, the same things that Israel pursued when they sought the pagan gods. Only know it comes from their best and only source – Yehovah!

Hosea closes out his prophecy with a word for us all to think about, “Let whoever is wise understand these things, and whoever is insightful recognize them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them” (14:9). Amen!

### **INSIGHT**

“Death, where are your barbs? Sheol, where is your sting?” When Paul used this verse about the coming resurrection of the righteous, he only used part of Hosea 13:14. The preceding lines are, “I will ransom them from the power of Sheol. I will redeem them from death.” Yes, we *will* experience the extraordinary transformation of our bodies into eternity mode, but let’s not forget Who does it *for* us: the Great “I,” our Heavenly Father, through Jesus by the Spirit’s power.

## September 24 : Scriptures Joel 1-3

### SUMMARY

There was a time when God's truth was preached from most pulpits. That included the cutting conviction of sin and judgment and the Lord's deep love and forgiveness for the sinner. By now, in *Cruisin's Through the Bible*, you should also know the Lord's intense passion and desire for His people and how He lovingly embraces those who turn to Him.

But if we observe many online sermons and what passes for God's truth on popular social media, God is love... and that's it. When I was in pastoral church ministry, I can't tell you how often I heard that you must preach God's love alone to draw the sinners because preaching God's hatred for sin and hope for salvation would only turn them away. Well, God's prophets don't see it that way. Why? *Because they carry God's heart and transmit what's on His mind.* God is love, yes, and He also hates sin and everything that offends His holiness. The Lord loves every one of His people, too, and doesn't want them to fall under His anger and wrath. Therefore, *in love*, our Lord lays out the law and grace, the hatred and the love, the conviction and the cleansing. We fully need one to fully appreciate the other.

Negative messages have their place, as any child needing correction will tell you. IMHO, those who want to wallow in "positive" messages might want to check why they're avoiding God's negative messages. Perhaps it's because they have sins they don't want to face. Too harsh? Well, too bad. That's God's word. He never waters down His indictments or His commendations. The Lord speaks His heart and mind and forces us to confront the truth. That's a big lesson we hear from God's prophets, whether major or minor. God makes Himself known through His judgments as well as His love.

As you may recall having already read through a significant portion of the Bible, God's messages to people are often inspired by reality. Hosea lived his message through his turmoil with an adulterous wife. In the prophet Joel's case, his message was inspired and illustrated by a locust plague.

In the Bible, locust plagues are often a sign of God's judgment (Exodus 10:1-18). Joel draws on that idea, likely from an event that led Israel to ask if God was mad at them. Joel's response: "Think that's bad? Two greater judgments will rock you if you don't change your ways – a human army and the Day of the Lord (Judgment Day)."

The Day of the Lord (the time of God's judgment for wrath or good) is repeated frequently through the prophet Joel. The day of the Lord designation can be used for any

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time God does something specific in human history, such as bringing an army against Israel or Judah or bestowing His blessing upon them. *THE* Day of the Lord is about the transition point between the era of human dominion on earth (Eden through the End) and the messianic age (Jesus returns and rules the world for 1,000 years) and eternity after that.

All sorts of things describe the Day of the Lord. Are they literal or figurative? They can be both. Joel describes the Day of the Lord as fiery and the time when the Holy Spirit is poured out on God's people. Is that figurative? Check out Acts 2, "When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. *They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-3, italics author). Does that sound symbolic to you? Then let's leave open the possibility that the final Day of the Lord will indeed be a day of cosmic calamities that will rock the world and not just a poetic description. And if the Day of the Lord really does happen, as the Bible says, I think the issue of climate change will be the least of humanity's concerns. According to Joel, the concerns of every person will be, "Will I return to God, and will I cultivate the right motives within you?"

In Joel's first chapter, he points to a recent locust plague that has devastated the countryside (1:2-4). When locusts hit an area, the vegetation can be destroyed down to the roots. Prophetically, Joel sees the loss of grapes, figs, grains, olives, pomegranates, dates, and apples. Losing these kinds of products affect the drinkers (1:5) and the rest of the population (1:8). It's awful because the people have nothing left to offer in worship to the Lord (1:9, 13). Joel describes the locusts as "a nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness" (1:6), which aptly describes how voracious locusts can be. So, how should God's people respond? They should weep, be ashamed, lament, fast, and seek the Lord (1:5, 11, 131-4). Their cry is what follows in 1:15-20, "Our food is done for, our storehouses are ruined, the animals starve, our land is dry, and the vegetation looks like it's been burned up. Oh Lord, hear our cry!"

Joel switches his prophetic focus in chapter 2, drawing on the locust invasion and its terrible results to illustrate what's coming on the final Day of the Lord. Before we go further, I want to point out that the "blow the shofar" and "sound the alarm" in conjunction with the Day of the Lord hints at the final Days beginning and ending around the Feast of Trumpets (*shofarim* – plural, *shofar* – singular) in early-September to early October. This feast is followed by the Day of Atonement, the single day when sin is

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erased. Interestingly, Zechariah talks about a single day when Israel's sin is erased, forgiveness is granted, and a national cleansing happens (Zechariah 3:9, 13:1). I believe (and I'll let you know if I was right or wrong when we get there) that on or around the Day of Atonement Jesus will return to remove the wicked from the earth and begin His messianic reign (represented by the Feast of Tabernacles). We'll see.

According to Joel, the hallmark of this coming army (human army) is "such as never existed in ages past and never will again in all the generations to come" (2:2). Like the locusts consumed the lushness ahead of them and left destruction, so will the advancing army (2:3). Like the locusts pushed forward and surmounted every obstacle, so will the coming army on the Day of the Lord (2:7-9). The Day of the Lord will be accompanied by cosmic catastrophes (2:10), and the question is, "*Who can possibly endure it?*"

Answer: Those who repent and prove it by changing their motivations and how they live (2:12-14). What follows in Joel is a classic scene from the Day of Atonement ritual, where people deny themselves all allowed pleasures to single-mindedly seek the Lord and where the priests and Levites prostrated themselves in the Temple courts to seek Yehovah's atonement for individual and national sin.

After Israel repents comes the Lord's mercy, and He will restore His people's land as land renews itself after the locust plague passes. Yehovah will destroy the army from the north (if this is an End Time reference, then it likely pertains to the Antichrist *ala* Daniel 11), driving it north, east, and west to destruction. The Lord promises to make the land green again as He sends the early (Fall) and latter (Spring) rains as a sign of His forgiveness and favor. He will also restore what they lost in His judgment (2:25-26). The best part is 2:27, "You will know that I am present in Israel and that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. My people will never again be put to shame," which is the same promise Jeremiah and Ezekiel relay to God's people after they go through their punishment and discipline. Please note what is attached to people coming to know God and being His people. See how it's linked to a significant event – "After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity" (2:28). It will come with manifestations of fire and will be available to *everyone* regardless of race, gender, age, or economic status (2:28-29). The coming of the Holy Spirit to people will be the stamp that authenticates salvation (2:32). Why is that?

Because the Holy Spirit is God's supernatural presence with people. Jesus arrived in the flesh so He could die and rise again. When He rose from the dead, Jesus had the prototype glorified body that we'll all receive at the resurrection (John 20:19, 26; 1 Corinthians 15:35-39), and with that glorified body, Jesus ascended to heaven. When He returns, He will still be in that glorified body. Now understand this. His glorified body may be able to do

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extraordinary things. But it can only be in one place at one time. Jesus can only be “God With Us” with every saved person if He comes to us in a form that we can all share and experience – the indwelling Holy Spirit He promised (John 14:15-23). So what does all this mean?

Since Joel’s “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” is the sign of the Day of the Lord and the Holy Spirit was given to born-again humanity on the Day of Pentecost, the world has technically been living in the “Day of the Lord” for almost 2,000 years. The culmination will come in a great, single Day of the Lord, where Jesus will return, and the Holy Spirit will enter all saved people (Jew or Gentile, in regular or glorified bodies). Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the King, then all saved people will be stamped by the Holy Spirit as subjects of God’s holy kingdom on earth. Pretty heady stuff, right? And during this Final Day of the Lord, the world will be rocked as the cosmic shift of Jesus’ return and God’s judgment happens simultaneously, according to Joel (2:31).

Speaking of God’s judgment, Joel 3:1-13 describes why and how the Lord will punish those nations who stole Israel’s land and exiled His people. God, Himself, will be their Judge. He will draw the nations to a place called the Valley of Jehoshaphat (*The Lord Will Judge*), where He will wage war against them (3:2, 9-14). There’s no valley that we know of in Israel with this name. However, suppose we combine the rest of the scriptures dealing with God judging the nations through war. In that case, it appears this refers to the Jezreel Valley, near Mount Meggido (*Har Meggido*), aka the Valley of Armageddon. As for Israel’s land will again flow with water and “drip with wine and the hills with milk,” describing the lush restoration of agriculture and cattle. Once again, the Lord will dwell in Israel, for He will have forgiven her sin.

## INSIGHT

For some of us, life has been tough. It seems like everything gets eaten up no matter how hard we try. All our resources dwindle not from foolishness, but from life’s foreseen and unforeseen troubles. The unexpected bill or medical emergency. A divorce. A death.

Take heart if this resonates with you. *Your situation will not last forever.* This life is not all we have. God has us on a path toward total restoration, as wonderful as Joel describes to Israel. Most likely, it won’t happen in this life, but it will when we start the next part of our ever-lasting life after death, that is, if we have a relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus.

Life may have consumed so much that you’ve worked so hard to obtain (resources) or so much you’ve been given (your body and health), but you’ll have more than enough in

His presence, and that time will come soon enough. Compared to eternity, our lives right now are a flash in time. If all you can do is live in the promise "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust ate," then *live* in that promise. Head up. Chin out. Do the best with what you have, and keep your eye on what's to come!

## September 25 : Scriptures Amos 1-3

### SUMMARY

According to my Study Bible, Amos “is the first of the four 8<sup>th</sup> c. prophets, which also include Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah” (HCSB). This info means Amos is of the early prophets who prophesied against Israel’s hopeless idolatry and abandonment of their God during times of prosperity and military strength. However, the prosperous times didn’t seem to have reached the entire populous. As we will discover, there was an upper echelon of wealthy elites and a much bigger group of poor Israelites to whom the elite was taking advantage. As we read through Amos’ words, there are many reasons the Lord speaks against the Gentile nations and His people; pride, self-sufficiency, cheating and stealing from the poor, and those who think they’re unique to God because of their status or religious calling and who oppose God’s work (per my Bible’s commentary). Since these are problems we see in us and our society today, we would do well not to rush through Amos’ warnings.

Amos was a shepherd who lived in Judea, about 10 miles north of Jerusalem. Yehovah called him to go to the northern kingdom and preach His message, warning them to correct their ways or face discipline. He also emphasized the Day of the Lord. When Amos completed his task, he returned to Judah.

Amos begins chapter 1 with God’s message against the Gentile nations and carries it through chapter 2. From the last part of chapters 2 through 6, he points his finger at Israel and Judah. Then in 7 through 9:10, Amos releases the visions he receives that illustrate what’s happening in the northern kingdom. Finally, Amos delivers a beautiful word of forgiveness and restoration at the end of chapter 9.

Here are a couple of things to note from the start. Amos describes the Lord as “roaring from Zion and His voice from Jerusalem.” As a shepherd, Amos would know that allusion very well. A lion’s roar would cause a shepherd to fear the danger lurking not far away. A lion’s roar portends doom if a person isn’t prepared. A lion’s roar alerts the shepherd to be on guard for his sheep, and the shepherd is compelled to act when it’s heard. Amos, the shepherd prophet, hears Yehovah’s voice and must give warning to not just Israel and Judah but to the surrounding nations, who are also accountable to God for their actions.

The other thing to note is the “for three crimes, even four” phrase. It seems to imply the number 7, meaning the level of sin and infractions has reached its fullness. Therefore, Yehovah is now going to act. Let’s see what Amos has to say to each nation:

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Damascus (Aram/Syria) is under the lion's roar because they struggled with Israel over the territory of Gilead, east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Today, this area is known as the Golan Heights and is still a bone of contention between Israel and Syria. According to God's roar, Damascus is in trouble because they used brutal military actions against the Israelites in Gilead. A regular sledge was a board that had holes cut in it with stones wedged into the holes. The contraption would then be dragged over the grain to separate the seeds from the heads and stalks. A sled with iron teeth is an extreme depiction of harsh and brutal measures. Therefore, the Lord will bring Damascus down, the kings deposed, and the Aramaeans exiled.

Gaza (Philistia) hears the lion's roar because the Philistines captured Israelite communities in the southwest part of the land and sold them into slavery, particularly to the Israelites' family enemy – the Edomites. Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron are all major cities in Philistia.

Tyre (Phoenecia) hears the lion because they broke treaties with Israel and also sold the captured Israelites into slavery.

Edom gets the lion's roar because of their hatred and nasty actions (warfare) against their cousins, the Israelites, and Judahites, the sons of Jacob, Esau's (Edom's) brother.

The Ammonites hear the lion's roar because they not only attacked Gilead to the north but "ripped open pregnant women" as a tortuous and bloodthirsty way to cull the population. This act is no surprise because the Ammonites liked to sacrifice children as part of their worship rituals.

Chapter 2 continues the lion's roar against the Moabites. They're on the menu because of a seeming atrocity against an Edomite king. Whether it was to desecrate a dead body (which God was against) or it's a reflection of prideful victory over a foe, Yehovah will destroy Kerioth, a major city, along with Moab's leadership.

After all that, Judah doesn't escape the lion's roar. Yehovah accuses them of turning from His Torah and embracing "The lies that their ancestors followed have led them astray," idolatry. Yehovah will bring warfare to Judah and against Jerusalem.

And now Amos turns to Israel to deliver the lion's "big roar," which includes some nasty accusations. The elitist Israelites are abusing the poor, and Yehovah *hates* that because the poor are vulnerable (2:6-7). Taking advantage of the poor is explicitly forbidden by the Torah. What's also banned is a father and son sleeping with the same woman (2:7). The

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Torah also prohibited idolatry (sleeping by altars), sleeping on garments taken as collateral (the Torah said they had to be returned to the borrower so that they could sleep comfortably), and “drink(ing) wine obtained through fines” (2:8). Why is that so bad? Because it shows the elites were leveling fines to support their extravagant ways. Likely the fines were unjust and used to steal money from others. I hate to say it, but all this sounds like it could be applied to our (U.S.) society today.

For Israel, this ought not to be because the Lord delivered His people from Egypt and defeated the Amorites (Canaanites) on their behalf. God even gave them exceptionally dedicated people, Nazirites, to lead Israel (Samson and Samuel the prophet were Nazirites). But how did the people treat the other unnamed Nazirites and God’s prophets Yehovah sent to get His people back on track? They forced the Nazirites to drink wine (violating their vows) and commanded the prophets to shut their mouths. So, Israel will get it, and no military strength will protect them.

I want to share what my Bible’s commentary says about chapter 3 because it helps orient us to the content. Amos seems to respond to those who say he shouldn’t be prophesying against Israel because he’s from Judah’s territory. Amos answers that in three ways: 1) Yes, the people of Israel were God’s chosen people, but that doesn’t assure they will escape His judgment. Their covenant relationship *guarantees* judgment when they break the terms (3:1-3). 2) God’s prophet *must* speak when the Lord gives them a message (3:4-8). Period. 3) “Israel is so wicked even pagan nations could sit in judgment against them” (3:9-11). And then, the rest of the chapter tells us what Israel is about to face (3:12-15).

Going back to 3:4, 8, do you see the lion picture again? There’s a cause and effect with all the illustrations. If God causes a message to come to His prophet, then the prophet *must* speak, or they will be guilty of the intended recipient’s fate. This motivation is the same “watchman” principle Ezekiel faced (Ezekiel 3, 33). And what’s Amos’ message? Israel faces judgment for her idolatry and indulgences while turning their backs on God. For that, Yehovah will punish Israel for its crimes; “the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will demolish the winter house and the summer house; the houses inlaid with ivory will be destroyed, and the great houses will come to an end” (3:14-15). So roars the lion!

### INSIGHT

“Indeed, the Lord God does nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants the prophets.” It’s a biblical truth that the Lord speaks through prophets to speak to His people. As I’ve written, this can be fore-telling (the future) and forth-telling (the present). God continually communicates to His people whether the message is for the present or

future. For people to say God has no prophets today is to deny that God is still actively speaking to His beloved people. We do not serve a mute or inactive God.

Amos says God *does nothing* without revealing his counsel to his servants, the prophets, and it's true that God does all sorts of things without telling anyone anything. However, God's people are on a need-to-know basis. When something pertains to people, and His word needs to be shared, the Lord unleashes prophets and others who can receive His heart and mind on a matter and faithfully deliver God's word to its intended target.

Does that mean there aren't errant, misled, or misguided prophets? Of course, there are! There were lying prophets even while God had His genuine prophets. We must learn to discern the real from the fake, not simply deny *all* prophets and prophetic voices. If we do that, think how we'll remain uncomforted when God wants to comfort us, discouraged when He wants to build us up, and clueless in the face of doom when the prophet declares imminent judgment because in our pride, "God doesn't speak through prophets today." Do we really want to miss all that valuable communication from our Lord and Master?

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## September 26 : Scriptures Amos 4-6

### SUMMARY

I couldn't help it. I laughed, and maybe I shouldn't have. After all, it's very un-PC. But I still find it funnier than heck when I'm watching an old TV show, and one of the women in the scene calls the other one, "You old cow!" I guess it's the picture it evokes in my mind.

You can imagine my hysterics when I first read Amos 4, and Amos, the oh-so-serious prophet of God, points his prophetic finger at the overindulged and extravagantly living aristocratic women of Samaria, the capital of Israel. He calls them "cows of Bashan!" (I'm smirking as I write this!) Okay, so here's the question. Bashan? That region is east of the Sea of Galilee in the Golan Heights. Why call them cows of Bashan if Samaria is in the heart of Israel? Because Bashan had incredibly lush pasturelands and well-fed cattle. The cows of Bashan were pampered and highly sought after. Evidently, the upper-class women of Israel were the same – pampered and well-fed, with the added self-indulgent and privileged descriptors. You get my drift. For fun, we could title this first section, "Keeping Up With The Kows of Bashan," and it would capture Amos' point.

Amos depicts these hoity-toity women lounging about, drinking mimosas and margaritas poolside while they "oppress the poor and crush the needy" (4:1). The contrast can't get much starker than that. And what's God's decree for these beautiful bovines? They will be taken away ("lifted up") on meat hooks. This decree can be taken two ways. 1) They will brutally die. 2) The awful Assyrians practiced putting hooks and rings in the lips and noses of their captives and pulling them back to Assyria for display. So, God will humiliate the aristocratic women of Israel by allowing the Assyrians to treat them as a rancher would treat a – you got it – cow. In the meantime, Yehovah sarcastically tells them to keep doing what they're doing, going through their idolatrous religious practices, thinking all will be well (4:4-5).

Although Yehovah disciplined and punished His people for breaking the covenant, desiring that they would respond and repent, they refused. Therefore, Amos utters the very frightening words, "Israel, prepare to meet your God!" (4:12). The Lord, the God of Armies, is on the march to take down Israel.

Chapter 5 describes the aftermath. The land will lay desolate, and the army that marched out strong to defend Israel will have few defenders remaining alive. Therefore, Amos prophesies, "Seek God and live!" (5:4). Stop your idolatry at Bethel and Gilgal, where the calf-idols stood, because they will be wiped out anyway. Seek God, or He will consume

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you like fire, and you'll see how useless the idol at Bethel will be at stopping Him. Think about this, Israel – Do you really want to oppose the God of all creation?

How corrupt is Israel? The courts excuse the guilty, and the elites and rulers trample the poor, levy taxes on them, and take bribes. Those who know what's going on keep silent because they know the "times are evil," and they risk running afoul of the authorities. But the True Judge is watching, and He will take the oppressive elites' and rulers' houses and deprive them of their wine. God's call to repentance trumpets again. "Pursue good and not evil so that you may live," and "Hate evil and love good; establish justice at the city gate" (5:14-15). But Yehovah says they will not and will suffer the consequences (5:16-17).

It seems the Israelites were dreaming of the Day of the Lord (5:18). Why? Because while the Day of the Lord will be tumultuous (at this time, the concept is still being revealed through God's prophets and developing in the ancient Israelite's minds), God has made a promise to restore Israel and Judah as a single nation with a mighty anointed king on the throne who will conquer all enemies and create great prosperity. Therefore, the Israelites are yearning for that Day to come. But, reveals Amos, that Day is the opposite of what they think and worse than they fear. He describes it as a person escaping a threatening situation only to fall into a far more dangerous one so close it's unavoidable (5:19). On the Day of the Lord, the danger will exist even in what a person thinks is a place of safety.

The Lord tells His people that their religious practices stink, even if He commanded them, because of their sin. (Gee, when was the last time you heard a pastor preach that, even though it's applicable in our day?) *In short, religious activities are a stench if the person's life isn't filled with righteousness and just dealings* (5:24). Such hypocrisy is "all show and no go," and it won't help. They offered proper sacrifices when Israel had no land and was in the wilderness with Yehovah. But now they live in God's land and have turned their backs on Him to worship "Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, images you have made for yourselves" (5:26). Sakkuth and Kaiwan are "From a Babylonian incantation it is evident that Sakkuth and Kaiwan were interchangeable names for the god Saturn" ([biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Sakkuth-Kaiwan](http://biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Sakkuth-Kaiwan)). This is a brilliant Hebrew pun! They lived in tents when Israel was in the desert (*sukkot* – pl., *sukkah* – sing.) and worshiped Yehovah. Now the Israelites are messing around with *Sakkuth* and worshiping *another god*, Kaiwan. Well played, Amos!

The prophet continues with a stinging rebuke in chapter 6 against Israel's elitist leaders lounging about, eating lamb and veal, entertaining themselves, and getting drunk. God's

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rhetorical questions regarding Calneh, Hamath, and Gather can be answered, “No. You aren’t better than these three cities that were attacked by enemies and overthrown. You citizens of Samaria think your city is indestructible, but you’re fooling yourselves! I’m sick of your arrogance and your pride in your buildings. It’s all coming down. I’m handing your cities over to your enemies as well as you. Even if your houses are full of men, not one will remain alive. Relatives will have to come and conduct the funerals where My name won’t be invoked because the dead were under My curse” (6:9-10).

The questions in 6:12 are rhetorical questions that imply ridiculousness. It’s ridiculous to do these things (horses and where to plow with oxen), and yet Israel has done ridiculous things like “turning justice into poison,” not helping but rather hurting people, and “righteousness into wormwood,” also not a blessing, but bitterness. The Israelites boast over their military prowess (Lo-debar, Karnaim), but God brings an enemy that will crush their so-called military (6:14).

### **INSIGHT**

We often think deprivation is bad and abundance/prosperity is good, and it ain’t necessarily so. Deprivation spurs dependence on God, while prosperity provokes independence from Him. As you’ve seen, part of Amos’ message addresses the couching, self-indulgent wealthy and influential elites who have all the time in the world for themselves and seemingly none for the Lord. Why do we strive for such lame things? Let’s learn from Amos and strive for justice and righteousness rather than things with no eternal value.

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## September 27 : Scriptures Amos 7-9

### SUMMARY

In today's reading, we encounter a series of five visions with an interlude between visions 3 and 4, concluding with Amos' final declaration of judgment and restoration.

Chapter 7 opens with the Locust Vision. Amos sees a swarm of locusts forming as a manifestation of God's wrath. If it is unleashed, the swarm will destroy Israel's early crops (Barley, March/April). Of course, this would start a famine in the land. After Amos intercedes, Yehovah relents (7:2-3). Let's pause for a moment for a theological point. "*Did God really change His mind? How can an omniscient (all-knowing) God change His mind?*" Let me share how my study Bible commentary puts it.

"Two errors must be avoided. First, the conclusion that God is not fully omniscient and that there are things in the future that he cannot know. Second, the conclusion that God's relenting (or changing his mind) is only a pretense and that Amos' and Moses' acts of intercession did not really change anything God was planning to do. God is fully omniscient, and our prayers do matter. These two truths are certain even if they seem mysterious. Additionally, the change of God's mind would of course be something he foreknew he would do in response to intercession by prayerful men such as Moses and Amos" (HCSB). The Bible points out both aspects as true – God's omniscience and the effectiveness of intercession. We must put both together to square the circle, even if it seems like a paradox. God knows what He will do and invites us to participate in His plan; neither aspect negates the other. If you're studying this in a group, take a moment to discuss this view and your conclusions.

Next comes the Fire Vision. This judgment is so intense it consumes the deep oceans and waters within the earth. Again, Amos intercedes because such a judgment would utterly destroy Israel, and Yehovah relents.

The third is the Plumb Line Vision. For those who don't know, a plumb line is a heavy weight on the end of a string or rope used as a vertical standard when building. Yehovah reveals to Amos that Israel doesn't meet His standard of "uprightness," aligning with His moral standard and terms of the covenant. Therefore, like any tilted wall, they will fall. As any builder knows, a tilted wall is easy to knock over. In this case, Yehovah will bring war against Jeroboam II.

Hey! Look at this! *More* opposition to one of God's prophets. In this instance, Amaziah, the priest at Bethel (Israel's southern command for idolatry), runs to King Jeroboam II to

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tell him that Amos is prophesying the king's death and Israel's exile. Amaziah tells Amos to go back to Judah and prophesy there. Amos replies, "I didn't ask for the prophet gig. I was a shepherd, and God told me to speak for Him." And as we read earlier, "A lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who will not prophesy?" (3:8). But since the corrupt priest Amaziah has told Amos to stop prophesying, the Lion roars against him and his family: "Your wife will be a prostitute, war will take your children, your line will be given over to others, you will die in a pagan land, and Israel will still go into exile. So there."

Amos' visions resume in chapter 8 with the Basket of Summer Fruit Vision. Why summer fruit? Because they are ripe, meaning Israel is ripe for judgment. My study Bible points out that the word for "summer fruit" (*qayitz*) sounds like the word for "end" (*qetz*). Israel has come to its end. Yehovah: "The end has come for my people Israel; I will no longer spare them" (8:2). Their temple will fall silent, and bodies will be everywhere because the Israelites treat God's New Moon and Sabbath observances as inconveniences to their corrupt business practices, "reduce the measure while increasing the price and cheat with dishonest scales" (8:5). Plus, they trade on the needs of the poor.

For that, His people will experience darkness at noon, i.e., an allusion to the coming Day of the Lord and subsequent judgment, when the people will be distressed and mourn for their losses. Since Israel had some very affluent people at this time, losing everything would be devastating. It makes me wonder how many celebrities, athletes, business people, and "influential" government officials would fare if the Lord did the same thing to the U.S.

Yehovah declares a day is coming when there will be a "famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11), speaking of when the Lord no longer listens to His people because they insisted on not listening to Him. Although I'm tempted to say the same thing about the U.S., I know many people still seek Jesus and listen to His Spirit. May the Lord sharpen our hearing and continue to speak clearly because we desperately need His help.

We reach the end of Amos, chapter 9, with a final vision, a declaration of judgment, and a promise of restoration. The Lord Beside The Altar Vision is stunning. He calls for the tops of the pillars to be struck off and to fall on the people below, and none will escape. This vision represents God's call for the elite (the top of the pillars) to be struck down and the common people "below" them. No one will escape His coming judgment (9:1). No matter where the offenders flee, Yehovah will track them down (9:2-4). He can do this because He's the LORD. He is the one who moves nations around (the Israelites from

Egypt to Canaan, the Philistines from Crete(?) to the Gaza area, etc.). And Yehovah can move Israel out of their land just as easily, which He will (9:8).

*However*, God will shake the nations in a sieve. The nations will “fall out,” leaving God’s people in His hands. Not one will be lost except for the Israelite sinners.

And now a word of restoration. “In that day” – which day? The Israelites’ desired day of the Lord, *the* Day of the Lord. At that time, Yehovah will raise “the fallen shelter of David,” or David’s tabernacle, his royal family line. Israel will once again become a Davidic kingdom, and they will rule over Edom and the rest of the nations. Israel will become the first among all the nations on earth during the messianic reign. If the United States still exists, that includes us. After the Day of the Lord, Israel will become so productive that they will be planting even before they’re done with the harvest (9:13), and Yehovah will establish the Jews in their Promised Land, never to be uprooted by Him or another nation ever again!

### INSIGHT

I’m struck by the fact that God knows everything, can do anything and is everywhere at once. And yet, He invites us to participate in His work as His trusted workers, even in our fallible, pre-glorified, saved condition. We were perfect in Eden, and the Lord entrusted us to do His work. We’re imperfect now, but He still trusts us to work for Him. Don’t let how you feel about your imperfection keep you from accepting your assignment, even if it seems out of your wheelhouse, as they say. Amos was a simple shepherd, yet God used Him to speak the Lion’s roar and intercede for Israel’s life. What’s the task the Lord is calling you to do?

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## September 28 : Scriptures Obadiah, Jonah 1-4

### SUMMARY

Welcome to one of the shortest books in the Bible and the shortest in the Hebrew scriptures – Obadiah! The prophet Obadiah received this message, a vision, from the Lord (vs. 1) as a judgment against Edom. First, a little background. The Patriarch Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Before they were even born, the two brothers were duking it out in Rebekah's womb. When Rebekah asked the Lord, "Why is this happening to me?" the Lord answered, "Two nations are in your womb; two peoples will come from you and be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). I have to laugh because I can't count how many times when my older brother and I were fighting that my dad yelled, "Do I have to separate you two?" Well, before they were even born, everybody knew they wouldn't get along. The only question was which boy would be the first to be born.

As you likely remember (or maybe you're just finding out), Esau was born first, with Jacob holding onto his heel as if trying to pull Esau back so he could get ahead. And the wrestling match was on!

Jacob and Esau's history was rocky at best. After Jacob took advantage of Esau's hunger to snare Esau's firstborn birthright and deceived his father, Isaac, to snatch Esau's firstborn blessing, Esau was determined to kill the twerp (Genesis 27:41). With Jacob dead, the birthright and blessing would revert to him. From that moment on, there was bad blood between the brothers.

Esau gained a nickname – Red. When he was born, he was very hairy with a ruddy complexion (Genesis 25:25). Esau salivated for Jacob's red lentil stew (Genesis 25:30). And when he realized Jacob had cheated him out of the firstborn blessing, Esau "saw red" and wanted to dispatch his brother. The Hebrew word for "red" is *adom*, so Esau was nicknamed "Red" or Edom. Jacob received a name change as well. After wrestling with God, the Lord changed Jacob's name to *Yisrael*, Israel, "he struggles with God" (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob and Esau's descendants became nations – the Israelites and the Edomites – and the family animosity continued. During Israel's monarchy, Israel and Edom often fought, with Israel prevailing and forcing Edom into submission, at least for a time. Edom would rebel and break Israel's yoke off its neck. At times, Edom allied itself with Israel's enemies and fought against their "brother" nation. One of the worst times was when Edom joined the Babylonians to attack Judah, destroy it, and abuse the Judahites as Babylon took them

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into exile. With Judah destroyed, the nation of Edom dreamed of finally taking the land "that rightly belonged to them."

Because the Edomites were so proud, heartless, uncaring, and brutal toward their brothers, Yehovah downloaded this message to Obadiah. For your information, the nation of Edom was on the south/southeast side of the Dead Sea. Over time, the nation drifted to the west until it occupied the southern region of Israel's Negev desert. This geography lesson is important because, when Obadiah received his message, Edom's cities and population were in the hills, a very nice high-ground location with which to defend oneself. Edom's attitude was, "We're safe and secure. No one can possibly reach us!" Oh really, Edom?

The message is in four parts. In part 1, the Lord tells Edom not to be so smug. In their pride, they think they're all that, but Yehovah's going to bring them down from their height of arrogance (vs.3-4). Those allies whom Edom trusted will turn on them, attack, and pillage them. Why? Part 2 tells us it's because of the violence they inflicted on Jacob (vs. 10) and because they stood by when Israel was getting hammered. Edom helped Israel's attackers, coveted Israel's territory, and kicked the Judahites when they were being led away to Babylon.

Because of that, Edom will get theirs on the coming Day of the Lord. But Israel will rise again. They will "dispossess those who dispossessed them" (vs. 17). Jacob will burn Esau (Edom) as if the nation were dry stubble until no survivor remains. Then Israel will possess their enemies' lands with their deliverers ruling Esau's land and the whole of Israel under their divine King. "Hey, Edom! See what happens when you don't cooperate with God?"

Speaking of that, we come to another uncooperative soul, Jonah. His writing shows us God's love and mercy even to those who don't deserve it (Jonah, Nineveh). Nineveh was a major Assyrian city. Because the Assyrians were extremely cruel and committed to war, they were despised, especially by the neighbors they threatened or had attacked, like the northern kingdom of Israel. My study Bible notes archeologists have uncovered Assyrian scenes depicting how they impaled their captives, sliced their skin off, and beheaded them. Really nice guys! No wonder Jonah fled when God sent him to preach impending doom to Nineveh. It serves them right. Nineveh should burn in hell for all they've done. But God shows mercy even to His enemies. He gave Nineveh a chance despite Jonah's reluctance, and after the Lord had to discipline Jonah for three days in darkness and tossed about in a pool of whale stomach acid.

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What do we learn from Jonah? God loves everybody. To the Israelites, this was a bit of a stunning revelation. "What? God loves the Gentiles, too? Even the really nasty ones?" Yup. The Lord also has a lot of merciful grace for rebellious people because He loves them. Also, the Lord controls nature (the whale and the plant). Finally, a word to us all, it's useless to run from God when He has something for you to do.

Chapter 1 is about Jonah's flight to Tarshish. According to Dr. Michael Heiser, Tarshish was located on Spain's southwestern coast (Tartessos), which seems to be the majority agreement. It also makes sense because Jonah flees to Israel's city, Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast. Taking a ship from Joppa to Tarshish would certainly put one on a direct line away from Nineveh as far as the known western world. But the Mediterranean can be a terrible body of water to navigate, and the Lord creates a storm to impede Jonah's way. Apostle Paul encountered a nasty storm in the Mediterranean (Acts 27) as Jonah did.

The big thing that stands out to me in this chapter is God's sovereignty. 1) He commands Jonah to speak His word against Nineveh. 2) God creates a storm to halt Jonah's flight. 3) The Lord causes the pagan sailors' lot to point to Jonah as the offender. 4) Once the sailors throw Jonah from the ship, Yehovah, "the Lord, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land," calms the sea (1:9, 15). 5) Yehovah sovereignly appoints a large fish (some say whale) to swallow Jonah and retain him in its stomach for three days and nights. Of course, it's dark in a great fish's belly, so Jonah must have figured out how long he was the fish's lunch only after the fish barfed him up on the shore.

Chapter 2 is Jonah's prayer from the dark, smelly, horrible inside of a fish. Sheol is the place of the dead, what we would call hell. In Jonah's day, Sheol was where the righteous and wicked went after they died. According to Jewish tradition in Jesus' day, it was believed that Sheol was divided into two compartments – one for the righteous and the other for the wicked sinners. The place for the righteous was nicknamed "Abraham's Bosom" or "Paradise." Sound familiar? Anyway, Jonah uses his situation as an illustration of being in Sheol. After all, at this point, how does he know he'll ever come out alive? To him, he's finished, and any hope he has is in God. See? God's already building a message in him for Nineveh. Nineveh's "dead" unless God shows them mercy. Even in the depths of "Sheol," even in his hopeless situation, Jonah cries out to His God in faith.

Jonah's prayer doesn't blame the sailors who threw him into the water and acknowledges that God led his circumstances the whole way (2:3). He uses his experience of being tossed by the waves and billows of the sea as a metaphor for judgment and death and his descent

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into the sea as sinking into Sheol. But there's a light in the dark place – Jonah's trust in his God. And despite his seeming end, he cries out to the only one who can rescue him – God (2:7). Those who worship worthless idols abandon their love for God, but Jonah won't, even though he believes he will die. In faith, he promises to fulfill his vow if the one who is salvation will rescue him. And the fish vomits Jonah on shore. Yuck. And now, off to Nineveh (with seaweed hanging off of him and reeking of digested fish food).

What happens next in chapter 3 raises some questions. How did the people of Nineveh know that Jonah was speaking an accurate word of God and that their city would be destroyed in 40 days if they didn't repent? They worshiped their own gods, and Yehovah wasn't one of them. But perhaps they had learned of Him and knew of the powerful things He could do through interacting with the Israelite kingdom and hearing the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt a mere 700+ years earlier. Obviously, the king didn't want to chance it, so he proclaimed an extreme fast (no food or water – nothing!) hoping Yehovah would relent. Amazingly, God saw that they *turned from their evil ways*, forgave them, and relented from His declared disaster. Remorse, feeling sorry for what we do, is not enough. Actions *must* follow genuine repentance and a return to God. This truth is what Yehovah told His people, "(if) my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

You would think God's prophet would be happy. "Hooray! The pagans listened to God, and the people of Nineveh believed in God and changed their horrible ways, and God gave them mercy." Nope. Jonah was ticked off. *He wanted God to smite Israel's enemies!* That's why he ran away so they *wouldn't* have a chance to repent. How cruel is that? Imagine that you have the cure for someone's cancer, but you refuse to give it to them, so they'll die because of what they did to you and your family.

Frankly, many of us have this same attitude toward those we hate. There, I said it. We hate some people and want to see them get it. That's one reason why it's so hard to pray for our enemies, much less do something nice for them on God's behalf. I struggle with those who do very evil things to others. I find myself praying that God would let them burn in hell for what they've done to others, especially children. What usually hits me is this thought from the Lord. "You do what I've told you to do. Leave them to Me." I'm not saying people shouldn't get justice in this life for what they've done, but final eternal judgment? That's up to God. 1) We *all* deserve judgment and death for what we've done. 2) God doesn't want to lose anyone (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus was sent "to give his people (the Jews) knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77) and that saving knowledge is for everyone (John 3:14-17), even the wickedest person on earth.

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Their *eternal* fate is not up to us but God. Jonah lost sight of that. Now that Nineveh has repented, Jonah wants to die. He *knew* God was “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster” (4:2), and sadly (to Jonah), no smiting would ensue. Do we also believe that God is too merciful? God’s question to Jonah is pointed. “Is it right for you to be angry (that I saved the Ninevites)?” (4:4). Jonah doesn’t answer the Lord. Jonah’s too absorbed in his self-pity.

To correct His prophet’s skewed perspective, Yehovah causes a plant to miraculously sprout and grow to shield Jonah from the blistering heat of the day, and then God allowed a worm to kill the plant. Well, that really reduces Jonah to a bigger load of self-pity. “Things didn’t go my way, so I’m going to whine about the plant dying.” Yehovah’s point? “You whine that I spared the Ninevites and whine that I didn’t spare the plant. Seriously? You’re more concerned about a stupid plant than 120,000 people and animals!”

An interesting phrase here is graphic: “not knowing their right hand from their left” (4:11). This doesn’t refer to them being childlike or childish. It has to do with being clueless, especially about morality and the God of the Universe. To be blunt, in many cultures worldwide, people eat with their right hands and clean their behinds with their left. To not know the difference between the two shows gross (very gross) ignorance. Since the Ninevites were so ignorant of God and God wanted them to know Him, how dare a prophet let his animosity override Yehovah’s grace-filled desire to reach the lost people even if they were evil? By doing so, isn’t Jonah placing himself as a judge higher than God? Jonah never answers, but it hits us in the face, doesn’t it? It’s not up to us to decide who lives and dies for eternity. Our job is to proclaim and leave the results to God, even if we don’t like what He might do for our enemies. Maybe we should keep an “Enemies Prayer List” to remind us to pray for them regularly with the same compassion and mercy our God has for all of His human children. Maybe it was a saved person you regarded as an enemy who prayed for your salvation? I suspect we’ll all be surprised at who is in heaven with us. Who knows? Maybe they’ll be surprised God had mercy on us, and we made it.

## INSIGHT

Reflection time: “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good,

and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles[u] do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48). In other words, "Act like your Heavenly Father. Treat your enemies lovingly and pray for those who attack you."