

“Amos: It is still famine in here”

Many of us came here from Japan, and it is bordered by water on all sides, unlike many other countries. This terrain has protected Japan from outsiders for a long time, while many other countries have borders that adjoin with other countries. Sometimes enemies will come to invade the other countries that are beyond their land and borders, and such events have happened time and time again in this world. These events could happen at any time and our world map could be changed once again in the near future.

We’ve looked at how the first Israel kings, Saul; David; and Solomon ruled Israel. These three were the kings of Israel, but even with that status they were still human, and they made various mistakes. At the same time the heart of Israel’s people wondered far from God. Even though God had protected, led, and blessed the Israeli for such a long time, they stopped following God teachings and started to follow their own desires and lived egotistically.

Therefore, they gradually lost their strength and in 933BC the kingdom of Israel was split in two, the kingdom of Judah to the south and the Northern kingdom of Israel. The Northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrians in 722BC and the kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Babylonians. However, we can’t find Assyria or Babylon on our current maps. Needless to say these countries were overthrown by some other countries.

There was a prophet, named Amos, who lived in this period in Northern Israel. I would like to focus on this prophet and the Israeli people who were involved at this time. From April 13th to the 21st, in our daily bible reading material, we were also covering Amos; therefore, some people might have read and learned about Amos just recently.

The kingdom of Northern Israel was threatened by the surrounding larger countries. Within this period in which Amos had lived was a short time of prosperity for the kingdoms, because during this period some of the powerful countries such as Egypt and Assyria had lost their power. These power struggles happen because of relationships between the countries; it can bring about prosperity or poverty, always wavering between the two; and this is true for countries of today as well. The things that destroy the moral fibers of people, such as unjust trials, exploitation of the weak, or even bribery were prevalent during this period of prosperity. This is also very much too how it is now.

The words of God fell to Amos repeatedly instructing him to give a prophecy to the people of Israel. This prophecy stated that because of their ill conducts the Northern Kingdom of Israel was going to be judged for breaking God's laws. Amos spread these words of God to the Israeli, but they never corrected their conduct. After this the Kingdom of Northern Israel was invaded by Assyria and fell.

The prophet Amos was from the city of Tekoa, which was a small village 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He was "one of the shepherds" (Amos 1-1) and he was also the person who takes care of sycamore-fig trees. (Amos 7-14) He was not a landowner, nor a Rabbi; he was just a daily employment farmer. However, God chose him and said 'Go, prophesize to my people in Israel.' (Amos 7-15)

Once we belong to or become a member of some form of group, party, or organizations for a long time, we tend to get tied up by various relations. We tend to hesitate when speaking out, especially when saying our honest opinions among the other members in the group. Amos however didn't have such factors to concern him. He didn't care what other people thought about his prophesy, he didn't care that this prophesy might tangle up or destroy his relations with others. He was able to keep passing on God's words without hesitation. He said. **The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken. Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:8)** Amos, as he said, prophesized God words like a solitary Lion.

From Book of Amos, it is said that they gained their wealth from the poor. The Israeli forced the Nazirites to drink wine, who tried to abstain from such things, and they commanded the prophets not to prophesize. (Amos 2-12) As Jews they had to keep the practice of the Sabbath which was passed down from generation to generation, and during the Sabbath the Jews would spend the day only worshipping God. Sadly, their minds were occupied with things like: **"When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?" — skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. (Amos 8: 5~6)**

Let me see if I can apply this to our current lives. For example, when we are attending the service, sometimes we are not actually worshipping God. Our minds are wondering and calculating what we can gain by dishonest means, and then we go out and practice these thoughts after we leave service. Those people might be able to deceive humans but not God. He knows everything. That is why Amos received His words, to warn the Jews and to condemn them. He prophesized to them and this is what the Lord said:

"For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not relent. They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.⁷ They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.⁸ They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god they drink wine taken as fines. (Amos 2:6~8)

They did what they wanted, without control and desecrated the holy place. To those people who valued the fleeting prosperity of the world, God spoke; of the coming time they will see things for what they are.

"The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life.¹⁵ The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the oarsman will not save his life.¹⁶ Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day", declares the LORD. (Amos 2;14~16)

When everything is going well people may start to think like this, because we are fast, strong, powerful, courageous, and well equipped we are prosperous. However, in this passage it said those things are neither reliable nor permanent at all. Being aware of this makes us realize that we can't go on without faith in God. "Everything depends on my ability" that is very bold statement, but is it really? If your circumstances shift and shake a little, your boldness, confidence, and comfort can easily disappear. The people of Israel never listened or accepted God words. His words were fulfilled in 722 BC when their kingdom was overtaken by the Assyrians. When the day draws near to Israel, Amos also prophesized that a certain famine would attack Israel.

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.¹² People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.¹³ "In that day" the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.

When their possessions were gone, that is to say, when they lost their strength, then they would realize how powerless they were. This recognition makes the human soul thirsty. There is no way that our souls will be quenched without the word of God and this is the thirst and famine which the bible is indicating.

These words were given to not only the Israeli but to us who are living in present time. Today we are living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. I don't think anyone here is saying that this morning's breakfast will be my last meal and that I have nothing to eat tonight. Conversely, today our society is far from famine and we restrain our consumption of food for our health. However, even though our bellies are full and satisfied, we are in hunger for the words of God, this is what the bible passage is talking about.

I came to California 19 years ago. When I went shopping to the Japanese market I took all the various free Japanese magazines home and read them thoroughly. I guess I was hungry for my native language. Now that I think of it and I realize that I no longer feel such hunger for Japanese. The reason for this is the widespread use of the Internet. We can be exposed to our own language as much as we want even when we are outside of our country. It is true that words and information pour out from any internet site, and if we aren't careful we can start to confuse ourselves. Just like when you watch what you eat you have to watch what you read. Because so many peoples share their free thoughts around us, I am starting to feel that some words are losing their real value and purpose. However, the words of the Bible will never lose value. Far from losing, the words of the Bible are helping numerous people around the world, and are finding the truth every day.

Jesus Christ was once led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and there He fasted there for 40 days and nights. Jesus felt a great hunger afterwards. The bible said that Satan tempted to Jesus by saying "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus expelled Satan's temptation by saying this "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

There are some deep meanings in these words that Jesus spoke. 1400 years before Jesus had said these words several millions of Israelites, who were slaves in Egypt, escaped from the Egyptian lands and roamed in the wilderness for 40 years. After these 40 years they finally settled down in one place. At that time Moses, who was the leader of all the people, looked back on the life they had spent wandering in the wilderness. He spoke to them about the food that God had provided for them every morning from the heavens.

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to

teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:2~3)

Please imagine that this is our life. What if food fell down from the sky every morning to our homes? The perfect food that contains all the necessary nutrition for humans to sustain their bodies and as long as we eat the food we could live without starving. Many of us probably think that it must be tough eating same food every single day. Actually those Israelites complained about this very reason again and again. However, there were miles and miles of barren land all around them. It was impossible to obtain any food, not even for a single family of five, not to mention the other several million Israelites every day. This everyday meal was a great blessing for them.

This passage here **"then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."** is very interesting. Because the Bible says that the people were not satisfied with this, every day free food fell from the skies, and yet they kept complaining to God about this Manna.

This means, that human being are not creatures who are simply satisfied with only meeting the necessities. It is true that, human souls are not filled just when their bellies are full. We see this phenomenon everywhere in the world. Just listen to your heart and you will see that their thoughts are the same as ours.

When Jesus referenced these words from Deuteronomy during his 40 days in the wilderness, the miracle food of manna never fell from the sky for him. Although Jesus felt severe hunger he understood the truth of these words and rejected Satan's temptation because of these words.

These words from Deuteronomy are the testimony that was made clear by the several millions Israelites who took the 40 years' journey. Humans were not created to be fulfilled by just physical nourishment, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

**(Psalm 19 1~4) The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**

**²Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.**

**³They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.**

⁴Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,

their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

The words of God's have already spread to the ends of the world. When we look up to the heavens we see all of God's creation, which were created by his words. The meaning of this is that the world is filled with God's word. The Bible is telling us, that by listening to God we are truly living through and through.

If there is someone here today who feels emptiness, even if you know that you have everything you need, and have tried to fill this emptiness with various things, but everything you've tried has failed to fill you, know that this is normal. If there is someone who has lost something that you were relying on and now you feel that everything around you is frail, know that this is ok. I would tell you that this is a great chance for you to learn some great information from the book of Amos.

"prepare to meet your God." (Amos 4:12) "Seek me and live; (Amos 5:4)

Today, our world has a lot of the same aspects that Israel had before receiving a sentence of judgment. Even though, the world that surrounds us now has a thousand times more secular words than before, we are also surrounded in a famine for the words of God. These secular words are surrounding us and are passing between us. We take more than enough food and chase the convenient life endlessly. Are our hearts filled with comfort? No, I think our hearts are feeling the thirst more and more. Are we making every effort to look for a solution to quench this thirst?

As I mentioned in the beginning of this sermon, in 933 BC the kingdom of Israel was split into two, the kingdom of Judah to the south and the Northern kingdom of Israel. The Northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown by the Assyrians in 721 BC and the kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Babylonians in 586 BC. Then I said that there is no Assyria or Babylon on our current maps, because these countries were overthrown by other countries.

However speaking of Israel, the Jews in the Kingdom of Judah returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity in 536 BC, and rebuilt their country once again in the same place. But in 70 AD, Jerusalem fell once again to Rome, and they were later dispersed around the world. Then, 1900 years later, on May 14, 1948, the Jewish people returned to the lands of their ancestors and rebuilt their country. Needless to say there is no other country like Israel, a country that was founded again in the same place after 1,900 years. Besides this, while they were scattered throughout the world, they kept the same language and faith that their ancestors had kept. If there

is no God, can we explain everything that has happened in the Jewish history without using the word "God"?

However, we as believers are not surprised by hearing this fact. In the book of Amos 1 to 8, Amos reproaches the Israelites sins and warns them by prophesizing that they will be destroyed. However the book of Amos closes with this passage on the 9th chapter.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. "They will rebuild the 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," says the Lord your God.

The 10 tribes in the Kingdom of Israel which Amos had given his prophecies to, were gone without recovery. But the two tribes in South Judah that were brought to Babylon as captives were returned to Jerusalem after being released from this captivity. It was said this last prophecy of Amos is represented by the release of the two tribes from Babylon and their return to Israel, along with the subsequent rebuilding of Israel. What we can see from this, is that the eyes of God still continue to watch over Israel, even after its reconstruction the work of the Lord's hand keeps this country of Israel on this earth till this day. Its existent is miracle of mankind.

Certainly Israel was punished by God because of what they did, however the true Ruler of this world will never forget Israel. We cannot deny these words of God, as it is happening in front of us. The words we should pass down are the words of God; only these words fulfill our hearts and points in the way for which we should live our lives.

What is the foundation for your life? What should you rely on? I should not need to say, "What we need is the word of the God almighty". Now is the time, we should listen to the words of God. Brothers and sisters, this morning, why don't we dedicate ourselves to listening to the words of the Lord again? If anyone is looking for the foundation of life, you can find it in the word of God.

Translated by Atsuko Laskaris