

Famine or Feast? part 1

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“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD, “that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.”

Amos 8:11

Here is a pronouncement of God’s judgment in the form of famine: **“not a famine of bread ... but of hearing the words of the LORD.”**

One of the ways God judges a nation is by taking His Word away. Many people in the U.S. today do not realize that the Bible’s influence on our culture has largely made life what it is for many: safe, peaceful, prosperous, and pleasurable. But a deprivation of God’s Word in any society leads to confusion, chaos, oppression, depression, and misery. These are manifestations of God’s judgment.

After spending many years ministering in the U.K., it struck me that dysfunction in British society could be a fulfillment of Amos’ words. It’s as if people *can’t* hear. What is wrong? Why can’t they hear? It’s because God Himself has brought the famine. And I’ve experienced that elsewhere, in other parts of Europe and the U.S. But here’s the question: Why would God do such a thing? We know God wants people to hear and believe His Word. So why would He call for a famine of **“hearing the words of the LORD?”**

I believe the answer is this: God’s Word is so precious and valuable that continued indifference, contempt, or disregard for it must be met with judgment. That’s the context of Amos’ words.

Indifference

During this time, the Israelites were indifferent to God’s Word—much like many people are today. Many have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward the Bible: *Some say it’s God’s Word, but I’m not sure.* The Lord spoke through Hosea, **“I have written for him [speaking of Israel] the great things of My law, but they were considered a strange**

thing” (Hosea 8:12). From God’s perspective, His Word is a great thing. Nothing is more valuable.

Psalm 19:10 says, **“More to be desired are they [these words] than gold ... sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”**

Years ago, the Queen of England spoke of the Bible as the British people’s greatest national treasure. She was right. It is the greatest treasure anyone could possess.

Contempt

God said in Hosea that His Word was a **strange thing** to people. Then in time, their indifference led to contempt. The Lord declared through Amos that His people actually **“despised the law of the LORD”** (Amos 2:4b).

Fathom that. These are not heathen, pagan people. These are God’s people.

Disregard

Contempt led them to disregard God’s Word by no longer keeping His commandments (Amos 2:4). God would pronounce this indictment repeatedly as He brought judgment upon the nation.

I believe this same progression—indifference, contempt, disregard—can be seen in American culture today. When I was a child, there were displays of God’s Word throughout society. Public schools had the Ten Commandments posted in classrooms, and generally, people were indifferent. Parents didn’t bring lawsuits against these displays; they just ignored them. But it’s interesting: One generation is indifferent, and the next is contemptuous. That’s what we see today. To our judiciary, it is quickly becoming unacceptable to display the Ten Commandments publicly. There is the suggestion that we disregard them. Some have said, “We don’t need them—they’re outdated, irrelevant. We need to come up with a set of new commandments. We need to come up with commandments of our own.”

The same is true in liberal churches. Most started with a passion for God’s Word, but

at some point, indifference set in. People began to take it for granted. A few generations later, contempt emerged. Now we see some liberal churches talking about the Bible being filled with hate speech, saying things like, “We can’t trust the Bible as a text to guide our lives because of these

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things.” Some have gone so far as to disregard it: “We don’t care what the Bible says about that. We don’t agree with the Bible on that. We think Paul was wrong.”

This same progression can happen in our personal lives. Even we who regard the Bible as God’s Word can begin taking it for granted. We have God’s Word in such abundance; sometimes we can fail to appreciate it.

Jesus said, **“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him”** (Luke 8:18). Jesus was telling those who were hearing God’s Word, “Take heed how you hear.” It’s not enough to hear it audibly; we need to receive it. Our receptivity will determine whether we continue to receive and benefit from that reception. If hardness or resistance sets in, then, as Jesus said, **“even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”**

So, how do we avoid bringing this type of judgment on ourselves? And how can we avert this kind of judgment from coming upon our nation and our communities? We will address these questions in the next issue. ✍️