

## Journey Into God's Word



II Chronicles 25-36

Amos 1-9

Philemon

Dear Co-workers,

How is it so easy for the multitudes to accept the fact that each night thousands of women, children, and men are homeless in the richest country in the world? What spell immobilizes and paralyzes us when it comes to decisive action in behalf of the poor? How can so many claim to follow the world's greatest revolutionary, Jesus Christ, and then ignore His Words when He say, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for Me.'(Matt. 25:40) To those who consider themselves religious, yet allow justice to be denied, as politicians ignore the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act's provision of federal surplus property being used for the homeless, Amos would declare, "I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religious projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to Me? Do you know what I want? I want justice--oceans of it. I want fairness--rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want."(Amos 5:21-24, The Message Bible) As the Word of God is ignored, or at best implemented as theory, but rarely put into practice, the denial of basic justice for the poor is considered normal. Developers, in the name of economic development can rob the needy of their homes, monopolistic utility companies can shut off their heat in the middle of winter, and yet the religious remain silent--even though Amos 5:24 declares, "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."

How tragic it is that so many feel that all they have left in life is their dominoes, dogs and doctor visits. This view of life is a result of building walls between ourselves and the needs of others. Living behind such walls causes us to deny the value of the poor. Such a life of isolation causes those living this way to become slaves who prostitute themselves before the pimps of profit and power. In the Book of Philemon we see how Jesus can destroy such walls. In this book Paul identifies with a slave by the name of Onesimus. "Perhaps the reason he was

separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good - no longer as a slave but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.”(Philemon verses 15-17) For Paul there are no longer walls between slaves and freemen, haves and have-nots. Jesus has broken down the walls of inequality. His death and resurrection has opened the doors of fellowship to all people, both now and for all eternity. Paul’s intercession to Philemon in this slave’s behalf illustrates what Christ has done for all of us. Jesus has set us free from the slavery to sin, which caused us to be separated from others. As Onesimus was reconciled to Philemon, even so we can be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. No longer are we regulated to a life of loneliness, where we feel like porcupines at a picnic, but instead we find ourselves secure enough in God’s love that we can reach out to others. When someone is harassed because they are homeless and hurting, we also feel harassed. After all, these are our brothers and sisters. Therefore, how can we remain indifferent as the elderly and poor are driven from their homes because of severe code restrictions, the homeless locked up at random and children are left without utilities. “They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” (Amos 2:6,7) These are our brothers and sisters who are being denied health care, children of God who need food, shelter and our acts of compassion. At this hour when so many are in need, may the Word of the Living God speak to our hearts as it declares, “Listen to this, you who walk all over the weak, you who treat poor people as less than nothing. Who say, ‘When is my next paycheck coming so I can go out and live it up? How long till the weekend when I can go out and have a good time?’ Who give little and take much, and never do an honest day’s work. You exploit the poor, using them – and then, when they’re used up, you discard them.”(Amos 8:4-6, The Message Bible)

Thank God, He is a God of mercy, patient and long suffering. We must awaken to the fact that the pimps of profit have too frequently led us all into captivity. Like Manasseh, who as a prisoner was led with a hook in his nose to Babylon, we also find ourselves possessed by our possessions. How we must respond as Manasseh did when “in his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.”(II Chron. 33:12,13) Knowing that the Lord is God totally changes our view towards life and other people. Freed from the idolatry of self-gratification, we are free to reach out in love toward God. We

desire to obey when the scriptures say, “seek God and live! You don’t want to end up with nothing to show for your life.”(Amos 5:6 The Message Bible) All around us He has given us opportunities to make a difference for good in the lives of others. Now His Word clearly tells us to “seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say He is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.”(Amos 5:14,15)

Our desire to do well must not be just a tokenistic half-hearted effort. II Chronicles 25:2 says, “He (Amaziah) did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly.” What was the end result of Amaziah? Uzziah in II Chronicles 26 started out serving God, but then we read in verse 16, “But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.” As you read the rest of chapter 26, please describe what happened to Uzziah? How important it is that each day we remain close to the Lord God, seeking Him with all our heart. In II Chronicles 27:6 we read, “Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the Lord his God.” But his son Ahaz did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”(II Chron. 28:1) In fact we read in verse 22, “in his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord.” Ahaz’s son Hezekiah saw the disastrous results of his father’s idolatrous life style. In II Chronicles 29:2 it says, “He (Hezekiah) did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father David had done.” In II Chronicles 29-31 we see Hezekiah purified the temple, got rid of idols and brought tithes into the house of the Lord. How did Hezekiah respond to the pending attack by Sennacherib, King of Assyria, in II Chronicles 32? Did you notice his words of encouragement in verse 7 where Hezekiah declared, “Be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the King of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” In what ways do you feel this verse could help you next time you face overwhelming odds? “So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib King of Assyria and from the hand of all others. He took care of them on every side.”(II Chron. 32:22) But in the midst of God’s protection and provision we must beware of pride. In verse 24 we see how God miraculously healed Hezekiah but then in verse 25 we read, “But Hezekiah’s heart was proud.” Thank God we read in the next verse that “Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the Lord’s wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah.” But as we read II Chronicles 33-36 we see that was not the case for the Kings who followed Hezekiah. Please read these chapters and then note how these Kings responded to God and what ultimately happened to the land of Judah.

The hour is late and God is warning us, “Woe to you who are complacent... and to you who feel secure.”(Amos 6:1) We must begin to seek the Lord with all our heart, finding our security in Him. No longer can we afford to be indifferent to the plight of the poor, the fatherless, the homeless and the hurting. There is so much preaching today, but how much of it is based upon the scriptures and its cry for justice? Jesus Christ is Risen and His resurrection should affect every dimension of our lives. Experiencing Christ means letting Him tear down the barriers in our lives, which separate us from one another. Yes, the hour is late. “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.’”(Amos 8:11) Such a famine has a direct impact on the world in which we live. “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God--having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”(II Tim. 8:1-5)

Are you daily feasting on the Word of God so that when a famine of God’s Word arrives you will have much of it committed to memory and know how to live in the light of it? Are you able to separate the preaching and teaching of the word of God from prosperity theology, which distorts the Word for personal profit? “People will drift from one end of the country to the other, roam to the north, wander to the east. They’ll go anywhere, listen to anyone, hoping to hear God’s Word--but they won’t hear it.”(Amos 8:12)

This week let us continue our journey into God’s Word by studying Ezra 1-10, Obadiah, Jonah, 1-4, and James 1-5. “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement.” (Philemon verses 1-3)

Yours in Christ

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