

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 03/11/2012

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Num 26	Amos 6-9	Lam 4-5	1 Corin 6
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Israel Numbered on the Plains of Moab (Numbers 26)

The terrible plague of the previous chapter marked a turning point for Israel. The first generation that had come out of Egypt is now gone and God requires another census, which Moses and Eleazar (Aaron's son and successor) undertake: "But among these [whom they counted] there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai [in the first census]. For the Lord had said of them, 'They shall surely die in the wilderness.' So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun" (verses 64-65). The numbering is, in part, for inheritance purposes, as tribal inheritance will be according to the principle of "share, and share alike," with every tribe receiving proportions commensurate with their numbers (verse 54). Since someone is sure to say one piece of land is better than another, it is to be divided up by the casting of lots (verses 55-56).

A comparison of this census with the first one at Sinai is rather interesting. When the Israelites were delivered from slavery, the tribe of Simeon comprised 59,300 men of fighting age (1:22-23). Yet 40 years later, when Israel is about to enter the Promised Land, the Simeonites have only 22,200 men (26:4, 14)—a 62.5 percent drop in population, in contrast with an average 6.5 percent growth for the rest of Israel (even though four other tribes had shrunk slightly). What had happened? Though there could be another explanation, it is possible, as many have surmised, that a great number of Simeonites (known for their fiery temperament), along with groups from other tribes, left the mass of the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering. If so, where would they have gone? Since Jacob had prophesied that Simeon would be "scattered" among the tribes of Israel (Genesis 49:5-7), these early emigrants would probably have gone to the same place that other Israelites would go much later—Northwest Europe—paving the way for subsequent migrations (see our article about The 300 Spartans).

Interestingly, before the Romans invaded Britain centuries later, there was a Celtic clan living in what is now southwest England and Wales known as the Simonii, a name that may derive from the Simeonites.

Amos

Israel's Prosperity and Pride; Opposition of Amaziah the Priest (Amos 6-7)

As chapter 6 begins, those of Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) and Samaria, the capitals of Judah and Israel, are

warned together. The wealthy of both lands were overcome with pride in their possessions and indifference to the issues that really count (6: 6)—caring “nothing for the affliction of their fellow Israelites, though it was their transgressions that had caused it” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verses 4-6). Increasingly, it is becoming the same today. Amos told his audience to look at certain foreign cities. “It was the boast of Israel’s elite that no other nation was greater than they were. Their boast came back upon their own heads, for just as Calneh [the capital of a small kingdom in northern Syria], Hamath [an important central Syrian city north of Damascus], and Gath [one of the five main Philistine cities] were subjected to Assyrian rule, so Israel would be subjugated by the Assyrians” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 2). The paraphrase of verse 3 in the New Living Translation makes the situation very plain: “You push away every thought of coming disaster, but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer.”

Of the references to Lo Debar and Karnaim, the Nelson Study Bible states, “Israel’s pride in its military strength would be its downfall. Lo Debar was a city east of the Jordan that Israel regained from Syria when Assyria crippled the strength of Damascus. Karnaim, a city east of the Jordan near the farthest limits of Israelite possession, was also regained when Assyria weakened Syria. God’s punishment of Israel would fit its sin of pride. As the Israelites reckoned that they had extended their borders by their own military strength, God would allow them to be harassed and defeated from border to border” (note on verses 13-14)—ironically, by the very same enemy that previously enabled their growth.

In chapter 7, God showed Amos three visions.

Locusts (7:1-3): They were to come after the king’s reaping. The king apparently took the first harvest of hay as a tax. If the locusts came after that, the people would have nothing. This could utterly destroy the Israelites, a fact that induced Amos to pray for them. “One function of the prophet was to serve as intercessor for the people before God. Amos prayed that the vision decreed in heaven might be halted before it was accomplished on earth. The basis of Amos’s petition lay in the true assessment of Israel’s position. They were not large and strong, as they thought; rather they were small and weak. In response to Amos’s intercession, and out of His own love for Israel God stayed His decree” (note on verses 2-3).

Fire (verses 4-6): This is an all-consuming fire that was to dry up all water—even the springs from underground—thus destroying the land beyond hope. Again Amos prays—and again God relents. Thus, we again see God willing to change His mind—just as He did when Moses interceded for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 32:9-14; Numbers 14:11-20).

Plumb line (verses 7-9): “The plumb line is a simple but basic builder’s tool. A weight attached to a line was held against a wall to measure its vertical trueness.... When God measured the morality of Israel’s society, it was shown to be so far from true that the whole construction had to be torn down” (Bible Reader’s Companion, caption of illustration for verses 7-9). “Unlike the first two visions, God did not give Amos opportunity to intercede, nor did He relent. These judgments would be executed. The plumb line of God’s revelation in the law had been set in the midst of...Israel for many generations. Now God would stretch a plumb line to demonstrate how ‘crooked’ the people’s observance of His commands had been” (Nelson, note on verses 7-9).

God proclaims through Amos that He will bring “the sword against the house of Jeroboam” (verse 9). “Jeroboam may refer to Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel, who instituted idolatry in the northern kingdom (see 1 Kin. 12:25-33), or to Jeroboam II, the monarch during the time of these prophecies [given through Amos]. If it is Jeroboam I, then the house of Jeroboam is a metaphor for the nation. If it is Jeroboam II, then the prophecy specifically concerns the royal household” (note on Amos 7:7-9). If it was a prophecy against the ruling king, then it was not specifically about him but about, as it says, his dynasty, since we know that Jeroboam II did not die by the sword but that his son Zechariah was assassinated just six months after taking the throne (see 2 Kings 15:8-10). It seems more likely, however, that Jeroboam I was in mind as a

metaphor for rebellious Israel in general since the destruction mentioned did not come in the days of Jeroboam II or his son. Moreover, the prophecy of destruction is probably dual, mainly concerning that of the end time.

Amos' message upset Amaziah. He was the priest of Bethel and would not have taken kindly to Amos' prophecies against the worship center he presided over (Amos 7:9; 5:5-6). As Amos' name meant "Burden" or "Burden-Bearer," it is interesting to note that, though using a different Hebrew word, Amaziah complained to King Jeroboam, "The land is not able to bear all of his words" (7:10). Insidiously, Amaziah twisted the prophet's words. Amos never said that Jeroboam II himself would die by the sword, as Amaziah reported (verse 11). Worse still, Amaziah imputed motives to Amos that he didn't have—claiming Amos was behind a conspiracy against the king (verse 10). We should let this be a lesson for us. When seeing what others do or listening to what they say, it's very easy to let our imaginations take over from fact, imagining what the motive might be, often on the basis of our evaluation of the other person's character. But to act on this assumption as if it were fact puts us on dangerous ground spiritually.

Amaziah then addressed Amos. He seemed to recognize him as a "seer" (verse 12), a term used even of Samuel (1 Samuel 9:9, 19), but ignored Amos' message except for its "seditious" elements. As a national official, Amaziah ordered Amos out of the country (Amos 7:12). The inviolability of Bethel, in his eyes, lay in its royal sanction (verse 13). Thus, this religious leader chose loyalty to the king over loyalty to God. And, of course, for Amaziah to submit to God's true religion would have meant that he could no longer have been priest of Bethel—with all of the power and prestige of this position. No doubt, this played a part in his rejection of God's servant.

Amos responded to Amaziah by telling him that it was the great God who had called him to prophesy. And now Amaziah's own family would suffer the consequences of his sins.

Harvest of Judgment and Future Restoration (Amos 8-9)

Two more visions are related in the book.

The basket of summer fruit (Amos 8): Israel was ripe for punishment and it would come quickly. Again, Amos enumerates the Israelites' sins: their inhumanity, their dishonest business practices and their injustice. But now he adds another matter—their careless approach to the Sabbath. Instead of keeping the Sabbath as holy time (compare Exodus 20:10-11; Isaiah 58:13), they were busy planning what they would do when it ended. "You can't wait for the Sabbath to be over and the religious festivals to end so you can get back to cheating the helpless" (Amos 8:5, New Living Translation). Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), and, despite those who try to do away with God's commandments, His Sabbath law is binding on Christians today. Keeping the Sabbath is more than staying home from work and just going to church services for an hour or two. The Sabbath is an entire day—from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset—that God declared to be holy. Whenever that time comes to us, we are in holy time. It is God's time, not ours. He commands us to keep it holy. To profane it is a sin.

In verse 11, God says He will send a famine of hearing His words. Shockingly, the only thing that could rescue the Israelites at this point—i.e., God's truth, if they would only heed it—is taken away from them. That this is an end-time prophecy can be seen in the heavenly signs of verse 9. As God's "two witnesses" will be proclaiming God's words publicly for three and a half years leading up to Christ's return (see Revelation 11:1-13), it seems evident that the famine of the Word would precede their preaching. Putting other verses together, it is also evident that the two witnesses begin their preaching at the same time the Great Tribulation befalls Israel. Thus, it appears that the famine of the Word will occur prior to the Tribulation, when destruction and captivity is imminent. Still, it may be that the famine of the Word does run through the Tribulation, since it may not be so easy for the captive Israelites to hear the message of the two witnesses. In any case, with the coming famine of God's Word in mind, His servants today should have

the same urgent mindset that Jesus Christ had in His human ministry. He told His disciples, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

The Lord standing by the altar (Amos 9): “The people would have expected a vision of God by the altar to mean that He intended good for them, blessing them with His presence. Instead God would start at the altar, commanding that the destruction of the sinful nation begin there” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 1). If this meaning is correct, then the verse is parallel with Ezekiel 9:6, where God says that destruction will begin at His sanctuary. However, it may be that the altar of Amos 9:1 is the pagan altar of Bethel—perhaps indicating that false worship is to be destroyed. Or the altar image may symbolize God making a “sacrifice” of many people (compare Isaiah 34:6; Jeremiah 46:10; Ezekiel 39:17-20). In any case, this vision does not bode well for the Israelites.

God even seems to say that He will slay Israel to the last man (Amos 9:1), finding them no matter where they go (verses 2-4). Yet He clarifies that a remnant of Israel would survive, passing through the nations as grain is sifted through a sieve (verses 8-9). While the political entity of Israel is destroyed, the Israelites are not utterly obliterated as a people. This, we should note, is an end-time prophecy, referring to the final captivity of Israel. However, for Israel to even exist in the end time, the exact same “sifting” process must have occurred in the wake of Israel’s ancient captivity, making this prophecy dual in its fulfillment. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria, but the “lost ten tribes” survived, being “sifted” through the nations, later to emerge as modern peoples in Northwest Europe. In fact, the United States and Britain are the principal nations of Israel today (see *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more detailed information). We would do well, then, to take warning.

Amos’ prophecy ends with a picture of the wonderful restoration of Israel under the rule of Jesus Christ. The “lost ten tribes” will return to their homeland, and the land will flourish as never before. “Israelite farmers plowed at the beginning of the rainy season, from mid-October. They harvested the grain crop—first barley, then wheat—from late March to early June. For the plowman to overtake the reaper would mean such an abundant harvest that it would last all summer and would not be gathered until the plowing had started again. Grapes were harvested from mid-summer to early fall. The grain crop was sown after the plowing in late fall. For the treader of grapes to overtake him who sows seed would mean the grape harvest would be so abundant that it would be extended for several weeks. The harvest of grapes would be so great that it would seem as though the mountains and hills themselves were flowing with rivers of sweet wine” (Nelson, note on verse 13). The Jewish resettlement of the Holy Land in the 20th century has certainly not fulfilled these verses. They describe the time following Christ’s return, when Israel will never be uprooted again (verse 15).

Lamentations

The Horror of Jerusalem’s Affliction (Lamentations 4)

Lamentations 4 gives graphic descriptions of the result of a long siege. Children are starving (verse 4), the noble and genteel have lost their arrogance (verses 5, 8), and the dead are better off than the others (verse 9). Most horrible of all is the cannibalism that is described in verse 10. One can only imagine the horrors that were taking place. Jeremiah witnessed them in graphic detail, and God did too. The sorrow and anguish of even the most sinful and evil human being is not lost to God’s knowledge and enduring love. Hope is always extended—hope that the excruciating experiences will cause a stubborn and unyielding people to make lasting and permanent changes in all they think and do.

Some have objected to the wording of verse 1—“How the gold has become dim!”—because gold does not tarnish. However, “since the second line refers to the destroyed temple, we can easily see a reference to its gold-covered panels and golden vessels so covered with dust that their value is no longer discernible”

(Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verses 1-2). Moreover, the gold and stones of the temple are also used here to typify God's people—who were far more valuable than the physical temple (see verse 2). Yet they are discarded as broken pottery.

The siege of Jerusalem was so severe that no one was exempt, even those who were considered to be especially holy—the Nazirites, who were specially consecrated to God (verses 7-8; see Numbers 6:1-21). Interesting to note here is the skin color of these people. There are some today who argue that the ancient Israelites and Jews were black, brown or olive in color. Yet Lamentations 4:7 describes those in good health among them as “brighter than snow and whiter than milk...more ruddy in body than rubies.” Chambers Concise Dictionary defines “ruddy” as “red; reddish; of the colour of healthy skin in white-skinned peoples” (1988). King David was also described as “ruddy and of a fair countenance” (1 Samuel 17:42, KJV). This is not the red of Native Americans but of Caucasian peoples with “ruby-red cheeks.” Consider that the Jews of today are also white. The phrase “like sapphire in their appearance” in Lamentations 4:7 must denote shiny skin as opposed to bluish coloring. The fact that the ancient Israelites were white supports the identification of northwest Europeans as their descendants (see our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more on this identification). Yet in the terrible siege conditions the skin of the people, even the Nazirites, has become black and dry (verse 8) from malnourishment and lack of water.

Verses 13-20 describe the culpability of a corrupt religious leadership. “The guilt of prophets and priests was incurred in a variety of ways. They incited the leadership to resist Babylon and so brought disaster on the city. They also were responsible for the death of at least one prophet whose message was like that of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:20-23). Finally, Ezek. 22:1-22 shows that the concept of ‘bloodguilt’ was quite broad, and included acts which threatened the well-being and thus shortened the lifespan of another. The active hostility of the religious leadership to Jeremiah and their indifference to the needs of common men, as well as their destructive meddling in politics, all contributed to the corruption of Jewish society and made judgment inevitable” (Bible Reader's Companion, note on Lamentations 4:13-16). The religious leadership of the nations of Israel in the end time will be likewise culpable.

In verse 17, the people have watched for a nation that could not save them. In Jeremiah's day, this referred to the Jews looking to Egypt for deliverance—a deliverance that never came. Even some time after Jerusalem's fall, the Jewish remnant in the Holy Land will, as we will see, seek refuge in Egypt against God's command—and suffer the consequences.

In verse 20, we see that the people looked to their Davidic king as their life breath. For besides looking to their king as their deliverer, they considered the Davidic dynasty as inviolable. While this was true in the sense that the dynasty would not end, it was not true in the sense of trusting any particular king as being unassailable. That was clearly a foolish conclusion considering what had happened to previous Davidic rulers. And indeed, a worse fate befell Zedekiah and his sons. Moreover, as we know, God was in the process of removing the Davidic dynasty from the nation of Judah. Living under a divinely established king did not immunize them against needing to fear and obey God individually—any more than living in nations blessed by God today guarantees that everything will always go well, either for the nations or its citizens individually. Focusing upon being part of a “chosen” group takes one's eyes off of personal responsibility.

The chapter ends with a surprising reference to Edom, the perennial enemy of Israel. The Edomites routinely rejoiced over calamity that came upon God's people. Indeed, as other passages show, this enmity will persist to the very end of the age. Edom will even be part of the forces arrayed against Israel at that time. In verses 21-22, God basically says to Edom, “Rejoice while you can—you're next!”

Yet, as verse 22 states, Zion's punishment will be accomplished. This was not ultimately fulfilled in Jeremiah's day. The punishment of Zion was not yet over. It was finished for that moment, but destruction would happen again more than six centuries later under the Roman armies. Israel is still rebellious and is not yet turned to God. Scripture indicates a final great punishment for Israel as the return of Christ draws near. How difficult it seems to be for mankind to learn and to change. In fact, it takes a miracle and direct intervention by God through the gift of His Holy Spirit. Israel will undergo the terrible Great Tribulation that lies ahead, but God will draw the line before complete destruction has occurred. And when He intervenes on Israel's behalf, He will judge Israel's enemies.

“Turn Us Back to You, O LORD” (Lamentations 5)

“The final dirge (5:1-22) is a cry for relief. This poem is not an acrostic, and the use of some 45 Hebrew words ending in u bolsters the sense of lament. The poet cries out to God to act in view of the dread conditions of His people” (Bible Reader's Companion, chapters 4-5 summary).

Verse 6 mentions the people giving their hand to the Egyptians and the Assyrians. Yet the Assyrian Empire had long before fallen to the Babylonians. The reference may be to the sin of past generations, as verse 7 notes that their “fathers sinned.” Yet it may also indicate events of the end time, when Assyria will again be a dominant power—a major component in the Babylonian empire of the last days.

In verse 16, we find the people full of remorse over their sin. Things seem hopeless indeed. But all is not lost, as we see in the last verses of the chapter. The writer, probably Jeremiah, recognizes on behalf of the people that “God's eternal rule and reign are a hope and support during the bleakest moments of suffering and despair (see Ps. 80:1, 2; 89:3, 4; 103:19)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Lamentations 5:19).

Yet, as verse 20 asks, why must deliverance be so long away? None of the prophets could have foreseen centuries and millennia passing before God brings this evil age to an end. The history of the Jews tells of the plaintive condition that these people of God—the survivors of Jerusalem, we might say—have lived under for such a very long time. History does not record any other single small group of people who have been hounded and persecuted from place to place almost all over the world—while yet waiting for their God to rescue them. The final chapter of Lamentations is the cry of human beings about to return to their God in the full understanding of their sin and God's great mercy and love toward them.

The plea of verse 21, “Turn us back to You, O LORD,” is a recognition of the fact that God Himself must lead us to repentance. As Jesus Christ explained, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). Acts 5:31 states that God must “grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (NASB). And 2 Timothy 2:25 confirms that God must “grant...repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (NASB). He must remove the spiritual blindness that has come upon all human beings through the deceptive efforts of Satan the devil and their own corrupted human nature (see 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Revelation 12:9; Romans 7:15-23). God must reveal to us His truth, and help us to see the error of our ways. We will never come to fully realize our depraved condition apart from God's revelation.

The final verse of Lamentations seems an odd statement and quite a down note to end on. Yet it does make sense in context—and is not so negative after all. The people, through Jeremiah most likely, have acknowledged their sins and the fact that their punishment was deserved. Now they ask for God to give them repentance—to help them turn their lives around. To that they essentially add: “...unless you really have utterly rejected us.” But it is already recognized in the book that this is not the case (see 3:31)—which means that the final addendum is, in effect, saying, “...unless, contrary to what You have promised, You really have utterly rejected us.” Yet rather than doubting God, as it might seem, this statement implies trust that He will act to defend His integrity. In that sense, the statement is intended to prod Him to fulfill His promises to restore Israel. Ultimately, He surely will.

1 Corinthians 6

In this chapter, Paul opens with a lot of instruction concerning judgments in the assembly and what seems to be small contentions between the members. Are they taking their petty differences to be decided upon “outside” to the secular courts? That is what it sounds like. Paul says this is to their shame and rightly so. The wisest people should be among the assembly members, and we, as believers, as to be able to judge or at least appoint judges among us... to decide these matters.

It is a strange thought today, of having a courts system within a church isn't it? But it should not be so. Paul right here in 1 Corinthians is saying to appoint judges within the assembly to judge the matters between believers. We do not take these things outside to the secular world. But we do not do this today.

Paul points out two very pertinent points also. First of all, our Master taught us certain things about being wronged, ie turn the other cheek. Therefore, Paul states, “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” as opposed to taking one another to the secular courts. And secondly.... Why in the world are there these things going on within the Body in the first place! Why are these things happening between brothers? Quite frankly, the persons doing these things shall not inherit the Kingdom of Elohim!

Paul implores these Corinthians concerning their bodies and how all the things they used to do and be engaged in, they are now delivered from in Messiah. Especially the transgression of whoring and sinning against one's own body. It also sounds as though partying and drunkenness was an issue with them. “Do you not know that your body is the Dwelling Place of the Set-apart Spirit who is in you, which you have from Elohim, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price, therefore esteem Elohim in your body and in your spirit, which are of Elohim.”