

Amos 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el.

Analysis

Seek the LORD, and ye shall live (דִּרְשׁוּ אֶת־יְהוָה וְחַיּוּ, dirshu et-YHWH vihyu)—in stark contrast to verse 5's prohibition against seeking Beth-el, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba, God commands seeking Himself, not religious locations. The verb darash (דִּרְשׁ, "seek diligently") implies active, intentional pursuit of God's presence, will, and ways. The promise "and ye shall live" (vihyu, וְחַיּוּ) offers both physical survival (escaping coming judgment) and spiritual vitality. This echoes 5:4—seeking God is the only path to life.

The urgent warning follows: **lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el** (pen-yitsalach ka'esh beit Yosef ve'akhelah ve'ein mekhabeh leBeit-El, פֶּן־יֵצֵאֲלֶךָ כְּאֵשׁ בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאָכְלָה וְאֵין מְכַבֶּה לְבֵית־אֵל). The verb tsalach (יֵצֵא, "break out/rush forth") depicts fire bursting forth uncontrollably. "House of Joseph" refers to northern Israel (Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, dominated the north). God's wrath will consume like unquenchable fire—and Beth-el's shrine cannot save. The phrase "none to quench it" emphasizes helplessness before divine judgment. The very shrine Israel trusted will prove powerless.

Historical Context

Beth-el's fire imagery may reference literal burning during Assyrian conquest or metaphorical fire of divine wrath. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets use fire

imagery for God's consuming judgment (Isaiah 33:14, Jeremiah 4:4, 21:12). The New Testament continues this: Hebrews 12:29 declares "our God is a consuming fire," and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 describes Christ's return "in flaming fire taking vengeance." The "house of Joseph" terminology distinguishes northern Israel (Joseph's descendants) from Judah. By Amos's time, the kingdoms had been divided 150+ years. Amos's warning proved true—Assyria burned Israelite cities (confirmed archaeologically by destruction layers showing fire), and Beth-el's sanctuary couldn't save the kingdom.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why does God command seeking Himself rather than religious locations, rituals, or traditions?
2. How does the imagery of unquenchable fire emphasize both the intensity and inevitability of divine judgment?
3. What is the relationship between genuine seeking of God (verse 6a) and deliverance from judgment (verse 6b)?

Interlinear Text

דָּרַשׁ וְ	אֶת	יְהוָה	וְחִי וְ	פֶּן	יִצֵּל ח	כְּאֵשׁ
Seek	H853	the LORD	and ye shall live	H6435	lest he break out	like fire
H1875		H3068	H2421		H6743	H784
בֵּית	יוֹסֵף	וְאָכַל ה	וְאֵין	מִכָּבֵד ה	לְבֵית	
in the house	of Joseph	and devour	H369	it and there be none to quench	H0	
H1004	H3130	H398		H3518		
אֶל:						
it in Bethel						
H1008						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 55:6 (References Lord): Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

Amos 5:4 (References Lord): For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

Amos 5:14 (References Lord): Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.