

Amos 8:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD:

Analysis

Amos prophesies a devastating judgment worse than physical famine: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." The Hebrew *hinneh yamim ba'im ne'um Adonai YHWH vehishlachti ra'av ba'aretz lo-ra'av lalechem velo-tzama lamayim ki im-lishmo'a et divrei-YHWH* (הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם יְהוָה וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא-רָעָב לֶלֶחֶם וְלֹא-צָמָא לַמַּיִם כִּי אִם-לִשְׁמוֹעַ אֶת דְּבַר יְהוָה) describes divine silence as judgment.

The phrase "famine... of hearing the words of the LORD" (*ra'av... lishmo'a et divrei-YHWH*) is terrifying. Physical famine starves the body; spiritual famine starves the soul. Israel had rejected God's prophets (2:12, 7:12-13), silenced His messengers, and refused His word. Now God will grant their wish—removing His prophetic voice. They'll desperately seek divine guidance but find none (verse 12: "they shall wander from sea to sea... seeking the word of the LORD, and shall not find it").

This judgment demonstrates a sobering principle: God's patience has limits. When people persistently reject His word, He eventually withdraws it. Proverbs 1:24-28 warns: "Because I have called, and ye refused... then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer." Similarly, Ezekiel 7:26 prophesies: "they shall seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients." The ultimate form of divine judgment isn't destruction but abandonment—God giving people over to their chosen path (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

For the church, this warns against despising preaching, ignoring Scripture, and silencing prophetic voices. Revelation 2-3 threatens removal of lampstands (churches) that lose first love or tolerate false teaching. Yet the New Covenant promise assures that God will never completely withdraw His word from His people—Christ promised the Spirit would guide into all truth (John 16:13), and His word endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). Still, individuals and churches can experience spiritual famine when they persistently reject sound doctrine. As 2 Timothy 4:3-4 warns: "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and they shall turn away their ears from the truth."

Historical Context

Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah, prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). This was a time of territorial expansion and economic boom, creating massive wealth inequality. The wealthy elite oppressed the poor through debt slavery, corrupt courts, and economic exploitation. Despite maintaining elaborate worship at Bethel and Dan, Israel had abandoned covenant faithfulness for social injustice and religious syncretism. Amos condemned their exploitation of the vulnerable while predicting imminent judgment through Assyrian conquest. His prophecies were fulfilled when Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 BC, about 30 years after his ministry.

Amos was contemporary with Hosea and ministered during Israel's last period of prosperity before destruction. As a southerner from Judah called to prophesy in northern Israel, he was an unwelcome outsider delivering an unwanted message. His emphasis on social justice and his declaration that religious ritual cannot substitute for righteousness make his message perpetually relevant.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Amos 8:11 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

הֵן הַ	יָמֵי יָם	בָּא יָם	נֹאֵם	אֲדֹנָי י	יְהוָה ה	וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי י
H2009	Behold the days	come	saith	the Lord	GOD	that I will send
	H3117	H935	H5002	H136	H3069	H7971
כָּעַב	בָּא רֶץ	לֹא	כָּעַב	לֶלֶם חֵם	וְלֹא	צָמָא
a famine	in the land	H3808	a famine	of bread	H3808	nor a thirst
H7458	H776		H7458	H3899		H6772
						H4325
כִּי	אֵם	לִשְׁמַע	אֵת	דְּבַר י	יְהוָה:	
H3588	H518	but of hearing	H853	the words	of the LORD	
		H8085		H1697	H3068	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 74:9 (Parallel theme): We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long.

1 Samuel 3:1 (Word): And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.

2 Chronicles 15:3 (Word): Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.

1 Samuel 28:6 (References Lord): And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

Ezekiel 7:26 (Word): Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients.

Micah 3:6 (Parallel theme): Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

Matthew 9:36 (Parallel theme): But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Isaiah 5:6 (Parallel theme): And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

1 Samuel 28:15 (References God): And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.