

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
September 9, 2016

Amos 1:1-4:5. Judgment on Israel and the nations.

Acts 8:26-9:19. The Ethiopian.

Job 19:13-29. Job’s isolation and the Lord’s understanding.

COMMENTS:

Amos 1:1-4:5. As you read through this section, note the various sins of God’s people, Israel, and pagan nations that elicit divine judgment—everything from mistreatment of Israel to unfaithfulness, economic exploitation of the poor (**4:1-3**) and religious hypocrisy (**4:4-5**). As far as religious hypocrisy in the last aforementioned passage, it should be noted that “sacrifices” were offerings in which an animal was slaughtered and consumed as part of a sacred meal. “Tithes of produce” were set aside every three years in order to help the poor (Deut. 14:28–29). The purpose of the thank offerings was to express gratitude for blessings and answered prayers (Lev. 7:11–15). “Freewill offerings” were voluntary and spontaneous gifts, born of an inner devotion to God (Lev. 7:16; 22:17–19). But all these offerings, Amos charged, had become a sham. The people’s religious activities were carried out to impress others, not to fellowship with God. The Israelites would brag about their devotion, but their day-to-day conduct violated the spirit of their offerings. Some of the produce they tithed came from stolen land. Some animals they sacrificed had been fattened on unjustly seized fields. Their very worship was an offense to God as it hypocritically offered the fruits of their *rebellion* against His covenant.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God. Every believer needs to examine his motives in going to church. Just because someone goes through the motions of coming to church and giving does not mean it is acceptable to God. The people of Israel “loved” going to religious meetings, but they didn’t love the God they claimed to worship. Making a pilgrimage to Bethel or Gilgal was the popular thing to do in that day, and everybody wanted to keep up with the crowd. There was no growth in understanding of the nature of sin, no brokenness before the Lord, but only a religious event that made the participants *feel good*. The whole system was corrupt; the people were sinning when they thought they were serving the Lord. Again, the application to today’s church is obvious. It’s very easy to find a large church with encouraging messages that make one feel great with all of the rousing songs followed by offering plates, and yet not grow in understanding of God, creation, man, or the nature of knowledge/science. The test of a spiritual experience is not “Do I feel good?” or “Did we have a big crowd and a good time?” The real test is “Do I know God and truth better and am I becoming more virtuous like Jesus Christ?” “Am I growing in proper knowledge and proper love?” I would add that adding layer after layer of conduit spiritual systems only brings more darkness as it focuses on function rather than understanding, as more and more of the beauty of Total Truth, the Word of God, as well as God and the spiritual life of concurrence are covered up, rendering the believer unable to read, understand, or even love to read his own bible. This results in increasing improper knowledge, which is faith in the pastor and his systems rather than God through His Word.

Acts 8:26-9:19. The Ethiopian in this section represents many people today who are religious, read the Scriptures, and seek the truth, yet do not have saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are seeking, but they remain lost! They need someone to show them the way. As Philip drew near to the chariot, he heard the man reading from the Prophet Isaiah. (It was customary in those days for students to read out loud.) God had already prepared him to receive Philip's witness. Isaiah 53 was the passage he was reading, the prophecy of God's Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 describes our Lord Jesus Christ in His birth (Isa. 53:1-2), life and ministry (Isa. 53:3), substitutionary death (Isa. 53:4-9), and victorious resurrection (Isa. 53:10-12). Isaiah 53:4 should be connected with 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:7 with Matthew 26:62-63; Isaiah 53:9 with Matthew 27:57-60; and Isaiah 53:12 with Luke 23:34, 37. The Ethiopian focused on Isaiah 53:7-8, which describes our Lord as the willing Sacrifice for sinners, even to the point of losing His human rights. As Philip explained the verses to him, the Ethiopian began to understand the Gospel because the Spirit of God was opening his mind to God's truth. It is not enough for the lost sinner to desire salvation; he must also understand God's plan of salvation. It is the heart that understands the Word that eventually bears fruit (Matt. 13:23). The idea of substitutionary sacrifice is one that is found from the beginning of the Bible to the end. God killed animals so that He might clothe Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21). He provided a ram to die in the place of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). At Passover, innocent lambs died for the people of Israel (Ex. 12); and the entire Jewish religious system was based on the shedding of blood (Lev. 17, especially v. 11). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of both the Old Testament types and the prophecies (John 1:29; Rev. 5). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The Ethiopian believed on Jesus Christ and was born again! So real was his experience that he insisted on stopping the caravan and being baptized immediately! Water baptism is mandated for believers and the Ethiopian was only too happy to comply with God's will. He considered it a privilege.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God. Philip's experience ought to encourage us in our own personal witness for the Lord. To begin with, God directed Philip to the right person at the right time. You and I are not likely to have angels instruct us, but we can be assured of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing if we are *walking before, with, and after the Lord in true fellowship*. If we obey the Lord's leading and live with Him in second-person fellowship, we can be sure that God will go before us and open the way for our witness and everything else in life.

Job 19:13-29. Job expresses his isolation in this section. He went on to explain how his suffering affected his relationship with people. We must recognize that extreme and prolonged pain often isolates sufferers from people and circumstances around them. When people really hurt, they may tend to withdraw and give the impression that others don't really understand what they are going through. Job felt alienated from those left in his family, from his friends, and even from his servants. But there was more to this alienation than Job's pain. He was now bankrupt and ill, living at the city dump; and nobody wanted to be identified with him. Furthermore, people were convinced that Job was a guilty sinner suffering the judgment of God; so why be his friend? His appearance was repulsive, and people avoided looking at him. He was being treated like a leper, an outcast who was not wanted by family or friends.

Growing in proper knowledge and proper love of God. In times of isolation, confusion, and feeling like no one really understands or cares, it is very important to focus on the Lord. In times of isolation, we all need to focus on the Lord's compassion for all who feel abandoned. Evidence of our Lord's compassion was the way He identified with outcasts. He ate with "publicans and sinners" (Matt. 9:9-13), touched the lepers (Matt. 8:1-4), accepted gifts from prostitutes (Luke 7:36-50), and even died between two criminals (23:32-33). Jesus knew what it was like to be "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). How important it is that we, His disciples, have this same kind of compassion. It's easy to identify with people we know and like when they are going through trials, but we tend to overlook the helpless, the poor, and the neglected in their sufferings. We all need to reach out with the love of Christ to all men, especially those who really suffering and need the comfort of Christ. We are the only ones on the planet that have hope for the otherwise hopeless. We have been given the privilege of representing Jesus Christ to the world.

Life in the Lord by proper knowledge and by proper love,

Pastor Don