

Is the Teaching about Judgement Optional?

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- [0 : 0 0] Our Bible reading for this evening is taken from the prophet Amos, and tonight we're in chapter 8, Amos chapter 8, and you'll find that on page 769 in our hardback church Bibles. Page 769, Amos chapter 8. And we start this chapter with another vision, a kind of dream almost, that the Lord gives to Amos to show him what is soon to come. So Amos chapter 8, and I shall read the whole chapter. This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what do you see? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then the Lord said to me, The end has come upon my people Israel. I will never again pass by them. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day, declares the Lord God. So many dead bodies.
- [1 : 0 9] They are thrown everywhere. Silence. Hear this, you who trample on the needy. And bring the poor of the land to an end. Saying, When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath that we may offer wheat for sale? That we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances. That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the chaff of the wheat. The Lord has sworn, by the pride of Jacob, surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt? And on that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation.
- [2 : 1 3] I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head. I will make it like the morning for an only sun, and the end of it like a bitter day. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land. Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east. They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. In that day, the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, and say, As your God lives, O Dan, and as the way of Beersheba lives, they shall fall and never rise again. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may the Lord add his blessing to it for us this evening. Amen.
- [3 : 1 8] Amen. Amen. Amen. And let's also turn to Amos chapter 8, page 769. My title for tonight is a question. Is the teaching about judgment optional? One of my personal problems is a hankering to become a universalist.

And because you're human beings like me, I can only assume that it might be your problem as well. Universalism is the idea that everybody will be saved in the end, that there will be no rejection of anybody, no eternal condemnation for anybody.

You can't really call universalism a doctrine. It doesn't deserve such a dignified label. It's an aberration. It's like a cuckoo in a songbird's nest.

The Bible gives it no support at all. But the human heart hankers towards it because it appears to present God in a rather better light.

[4 : 36] Now, it doesn't really present him in a better light at all, as I hope we shall see this evening, but it seems to, we think, wouldn't it be kind of God and gracious of God just to open the gates of heaven to everybody in the end?

Wouldn't it be lovely if he were just to forgive even the worst and the most wicked of people, to say to them, it's okay, it's okay. I know that you hardened your heart against me for all those years.

I know you refused to submit to Jesus as your king, but I'm a gracious and compassionate God. I don't want to hold these things against you forever. So come in. Do come in.

We might even think, wouldn't it be lovely if Jesus had never made that distinction between the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to life?

Couldn't he just have said, it's all right, everybody. There aren't two different roads. There's only one road. We're all on it together, and it leads to the peace and joy of heaven for everybody.

[5 : 36] Well, friends, if you've ever thought those thoughts, if you've ever had a hankering, even a small hankering for universalism, a passage like this eighth chapter of Amos will help to clarify things and, I think, drive those hankerings away.

It will help us to see God's nature and God's method, that he graciously warns people, often repeatedly over many years, that he is wonderfully patient, but that his patience is not infinite.

If after many warnings and many years of delay there is no response of repentance, the judgment will come. And we need to get this understanding deeply into our systems, because if we don't, our worldly human nature will make us drift into universalism.

And once a person has drifted into universalism, he loses the gospel entirely. There's no good news of salvation if there is nothing to be rescued from. Now, the judgment that was being announced by Amos in his own day was local and limited and temporary.

Since the coming of Jesus, we live in a different era. In our era, the gospel has been broadcast and is being broadcast throughout the world. And when the final judgment comes, it will be global and permanent.

[7 : 04] But the principle on which God's judgment is carried out is the same. He saves those who love him and turn to him, who depend upon him for salvation and fashion their lives according to his will.

And he rejects those who harden their hearts against him and refuse to fashion their lives by his teaching. Now, let me give you a brief reminder of the historical situation in which Amos was preaching.

The year is about 760 BC. And at this stage, the promised land had been divided into two separate kingdoms. Israel in the north with its capital city at Samaria and Judah in the south with its capital at Jerusalem.

Amos was a farmer, a sheep farmer and a fig producer. He came from Tekoa in Judah, a small town near Jerusalem. But as he says in chapter 7, verse 15, The Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, Go prophesy to my people Israel.

So he obeyed. He went north and he began to preach in Israel. We don't know how far into the country he went, but certainly he was preaching for a time at the town of Bethel.

[8 : 17] And if you were here last week, you'll remember that we read the account in chapter 7 of the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah, the self-important priest of Bethel who tried to shut Amos up but didn't succeed.

Now, Amos was more than a preacher. He was a prophet. And that means that the things that he said in Israel were not just his own opinions.

They were the very words of God, the precise and particular things that the Lord God wanted the people of Israel to hear. Israel at that time economically and commercially was doing very well.

In the middle of the 8th century BC, there was an affluent ruling class and they were very well off. There were plenty of poor people as well, but there was an affluent class. But as far as God was concerned, Israel was deeply wayward and corrupt.

They had lots of religion, but very little obedience. The rich had plenty of pleasure, but very little morality. To put it in short compass, they were riding a coach and horses through the law of Moses, which is the law of God.

[9 : 27] And God was both grieved and angry with them. So he sent Amos to them. And the message that Amos brought was the characteristic message of the Old Testament prophets.

Repent of your sins, turn back to the Lord and find life. But if you won't repent, God will bring judgment and punishment, not total obliteration.

The Lord is going to go on to say in chapter 9, verse 8, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. So not total obliteration, certainly not the end of the covenant, but a very severe judgment.

And Amos is seeking to jolt the Israelites out of their complacency by speaking graphically and in painful detail about their wicked lifestyle, their corruption in the law courts, their self-indulgent hedonism, their promiscuity and drunkenness, their grinding oppression of the poor people, and their religious gatherings, which were very showy and noisy, but empty of any real devotion to the Lord.

Now the book of Amos is not all judgment. If you'll look with me back to chapter 5, verse 4, you'll see how the Lord promises life to those who will turn to him.

[10 : 44] To chapter 5, verse 4, Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, Seek me and live. Or look on to verses to verse 6, Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like a fire in the house of Joseph.

Or look on to verse 14 in the same chapter, Seek good and not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you. So in chapter 5, at this stage, all hope is not lost.

And the warnings of judgment are there to shock people, to shake them into realizing that destruction will indeed come to the unrepentant. Behind the threats of judgment is mercy.

That's always like that throughout the whole Bible. It is because God is so merciful that he warns the world that catastrophe will come to the unrepentant. But if there is still hope in the prophecies of chapter 5, by the time we get to chapter 8, the hope has gone.

God's message to Israel through Amos in chapter 8 is that the door is now shut. God has come to his sad decision, and nothing can now keep back the disaster that he's planning for Israel.

[11 : 56] And indeed, historically, it came barely 40 years later as the dreaded army of the Assyrians came in from the north and east and devastated Israel, taking its people far away into exile in the Assyrian Empire, which must have felt to them what you and I might feel if we'd been sent to a labor camp in Siberia under the old Soviet regime.

Well, let's look now at this painful and sad chapter, which I'd like to take under three headings. First, we see the end of Israel in verses 1, 2, and 3.

Verse 1, This is what the Lord God showed me. Behold, a basket of summer fruit. Now, we had three vision revelations, you may remember, given to Amos in chapter 7.

There was going to be judgment by locusts in verse 1 and judgment by fire in verse 4, and both of those catastrophes were withheld in answer to Amos' pleading.

But then in chapter 7, verse 7, there's a third vision, and the Lord is measuring his people, Israel, by dropping a plumb line down against a wall.

[13 : 07] The plumb line reveals just how crooked and tottering the whole structure of Israel is. And it's at this point in chapter 7, verse 8, that the Lord utters his decisive judgment that he is never again going to pass by Israel.

You see there in verse 8 of chapter 7, verse 9, The high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

So God's patience at this point has become exhausted. And the vision at the beginning of chapter 8 confirms that third vision of chapter 7. That starts off, apparently, innocently.

The Lord God showed me, behold, a basket of summer fruit. But there's a pun here. There's a play on words. And the force of this vision lies in the pun.

Look down at the footnote there, and you'll see it says, the Hebrew words for end and summer fruit sound alike. And the New International Version translates it rather well and brings out the force of this pun.

[14 : 12] It reads, This is what the sovereign Lord showed me, a basket of ripe fruit. What do you see, Amos? He asked. A basket of ripe fruit, I answered.

Then the Lord said to me, The time is ripe for my people Israel. I will spare them no longer. Now this is surely the most heartbreaking thing for the Lord God to have to say.

Look at the phrase he uses there in chapter 8, verse 2. My people Israel. My people. The end has come upon my people Israel. He doesn't speak of the wretched Israelites.

It's his own special people, his beloved, his bride. It's a divorce. It's the rupture of a treasured relationship. Now this was 760 BC.

Moses, way back in about 1400 BC, had warned the Israelites that this could happen. He taught the Israelites in Leviticus chapter 18 that the reason why the Lord was driving out the Canaanite tribes, the Hittites and Hivites and Girgashites and so on, the reason why he was driving them out of the promised land to let Israel come in, was that their lifestyle had become abominable to the Lord.

[15 : 31] And for that reason, says Moses, the land vomited out its inhabitants. It's a shocking image, isn't it? You vomit something out when your system can tolerate it no longer.

And the Lord goes straight on to say in Leviticus 18, but you Israelites, you shall keep my statutes and rules and do none of these abominations, lest the land vomit you out as it vomited out the nation that was before you.

So the warning comes there back in 1400 BC. And here we are in Amos chapter eight, almost 700 years later, and Moses' words of warning are coming to a dreadful reality.

The end has come upon my people Israel. I will never again pass by them. They are about to be vomited out. And verse three intensifies this.

It's really like a nightmare, isn't it? It's as though Amos is, look at verse three, it's as though he's walking through the town. And there are lots of people, people thronging the streets everywhere. And nearby, there's a religious service taking place.

[16 : 36] There's a loud singing of hallelujahs and praise the Lords. And yet in Amos's nightmare, the whole thing morphs into a scene of terror and destruction. The songs of praise turn into the wails and shrieks of people who are mourning their dead, loudly as they do in the Middle East.

And the throngs of people in the streets become corpses. Look at the second half of verse three. So many dead bodies. They're thrown about everywhere.

I remember when I was a teenager, seeing some photographs taken at the end of the Second World War, when the Allied troops went into some of the Nazi concentration camps and discovered piles of corpses heaped up or dropped into pits.

I'm sure some of you would have seen those photographs. It's the kind of vision that Amos has here. So many dead bodies thrown everywhere. Silence. We probably wish that a vision of this kind was not in the Bible.

But it is here because God put it in for our education in the school of truth and reality. He wants us to take the reality of his judgment seriously.

[17 : 49] The world is not going to take it seriously, so the church needs to. So there's the first thing. The end of Israel is imminent. Now, secondly, Amos shows us one of the main reasons for this, and that is the love of money.

The love of money. The addiction to money-making is one of the main reasons for God's anger with his people. Now, at verse four, we're brought suddenly back into the life of Israel in 760 BC.

Verses one, two, and three have given us a vision of future judgment, the future of 40 years down the line, when the Assyrians, indeed, were going to heap the dead bodies of the Israelites in the streets of Samaria.

But verses four, five, and six bring us back to Amos' own day, and they tell us the reasons why the judgment of God is coming. And the heart of God's charge, in verses four to six, is that the love of money has become the ruling power in the land.

Remember how Jesus said, it is impossible to serve both God and money. And these people, described in verses four, five, and six, are clearly being ruled by the love of money.

[19 : 01] And where money becomes king, love for God and love for other people are inevitably driven out of the human heart. So let's see how Amos expresses this. First, he shows that the love of money drives out compassion.

Hear this, he cries in verse four, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end. The poor. Now, in the law of Moses, it was recognized that there would always be poor people in the land.

Just as Jesus said, the poor you will always have with you. It's a fact of life. Every society has rich and poor in it. But the law of Moses teaches the richer people to care for the needs of the poorer people.

So, for example, when you're cutting your corn, said Moses, don't just take every last sheaf of corn out of the field into your barn. Leave some of it lying there on the field so that the poor people can come in and help themselves and thus keep the wolf from the door.

And when you're harvesting your vines and your olives, don't strip every branch bare. Leave some behind for the poor to come and gather. And in your law courts, and the law of Moses is very strong on this point, in your law courts, make sure that the judges don't favor the rich because they're rich.

- [20 : 19] Now, of course, this is a very contemporary thing. It's a temptation in every society. Justice is supposed to be impartial. Justice should be blind as the scales are weighed up. But if you're a judge with a wobbly record of integrity, a rich man who is fighting a case in your court has only got to slip some banknotes into a brown envelope and pop them under your front door on the evening before the court session, and he snared you. Now, the poor man can't give you a brown envelope. He's got nothing to put into it. There's something about the power of money that drives the compassion out of the rich man's heart and causes him to disregard the needs of the poor. I'm okay, says the rich man. I'm all right. But if the poor live or die, what is that to me? Secondly, the love of money drives out the love of God. Look at verse 5. In verse 5, the rich man says, When will the new moon be over? That we may sell grain. And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale. Now, the new moon was a time of festival to the Lord.
- [21 : 28] And the Sabbath, of course, came around once every seven days. So you can imagine these rich merchants sitting in church, looking at their watches. I know they didn't have watches in those days, but imagine them sitting there looking at their watches. Can't wait to get out of this place. How many more psalms and hallelujahs do we have to sing? Is this sermon going to be so long that I shall have to be carried out in a box? Now, what is filling their hearts as they say those things? It's not love for the Lord. It's love for money, for business. They're sitting there doing their mental arithmetic, working out how to push up their profits and how to minimize their losses. So compassion goes, love for the Lord disappears, and thirdly, the love of money drives out honesty. What are these men wanting to do? Well, verse five again, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat.
- [22 : 38] So these merchants are wanting to skimp on their measures. And ephah was a measure for selling grain or flour. At two pounds of flour, madam, or with pleasure, madam. But when madam gets home and checks her purchase, she realizes that she's only got a pound and a half. Let's make the shekel great, say the merchants, and they boost the price. Let's deal deceitfully with false balances. So you take your iron weights, the ones that you use in the shop to put on the scales for weighing out your goods for the customers, and you shave your weights off a little bit. You file a bit off one side. You trim it. It doesn't look smaller if you do your shaving rather cunningly, but of course it is smaller. And then look at the end of verse six. Let's add a bit of chaff to the wheat. Not so much that the people really notice, but enough just to bulk out the product. The love of money drives out honesty. And where honesty is driven out, and there's so much of this in our society, and we know it, where honesty is driven out, it means that people can no longer relate to each other with openness.
- [23 : 47] Confidence becomes sapped. Trust is undermined. There used to be a saying, somebody tell me if it's still around, honesty is the best policy. Do we still hear that? Older ones we know that, don't we? I don't know if the younger ones do. But it used to be said, honesty is the best policy. Now that saying didn't just mean that it's best to be honest. What it meant was, honesty is the best business policy.

In other words, if a business is run on transparently honest principles, people will trust that business, and therefore that business will flourish. Honesty will lead to profit.

Now it's not a biblical proverb, but it's very much in line with the Bible's teaching. But we know that honesty is a highly endangered species in today's business world.

Those of you who are in that world, you know it only too well. I think of a friend of mine, a Christian man, who used to work for, I won't mention the company's name, but a very well-known national company with a very high-profile name.

[24 : 49] And by the age of 50 or 52, my friend had reached a fairly senior management position in the firm. But he left the company because his senior colleagues were constantly putting pressure on him to tell lies about the company's products and performance.

They would say to him, tell that client we can get the job done by the end of September. Assure him, promise him that we can do it. If you don't, he'll not sign the contract with us and we'll lose the job.

But my friend knew, and his colleagues knew, that the job simply could not be done within that time frame. So that company was trading in dishonesty. And this man, being a Christian, he just couldn't bear it any longer.

And dishonesty is a kind of virus which has invaded almost every corner of our culture. The revelations tumbling out of FIFA, the football authority, over the last few days are not really a surprise.

We hang our heads in shame and sorrow as we listen to the news, but we're not entirely surprised. And God hates it. It is destructive of human happiness.

[25 : 57] It threatens the very structure of society because it eats out the heart of human relationships. How can people trust each other if we're always out to fleece each other? Look then at the Lord's words about all this in verses 7 and 8, which follows straight on from 4, 5, and 6.

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account and everyone mourn who dwells in it and all of it rise like the Nile and be tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt?

Now verse 8 you'll see is describing an earthquake. The whole land is trembling on this account, on account of the sins of verses 4, 5, and 6.

The whole land is rising up like the river Nile. It's being tossed about before it sinks down again. No wonder, as verse 8 puts it, that everyone who dwells in such a land mourns.

So the love of money, it's a deadly enemy to human society. In the end, Amos is saying, the very earth beneath our feet will be convulsed because of it.

[27 : 08] In the Bible, from Genesis chapter 3 onwards, the convulsions of the planet are always linked to the sins of humanity. Thank God that Christ has come to rescue us for a new creation.

Well now thirdly, let's see the horror of the aftermath of all this. The horror of the aftermath as it's described in verses 9 to 14. Now there's an important little phrase that comes three times in this chapter and it gives us a clear clue as to what Amos is talking about.

verse 9, and on that day. Verse 13, in that day. And Amos has already used it back in verse 3.

The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day. That's a familiar phrase. It comes again and again in the Old Testament prophets and it refers to a day when the Lord will visit his people and will call them to account and if necessary bring judgment and punishment upon them.

We'd be wrong to think that there is only one such day described in the Bible. There are a number. The one that Amos is referring to here is the one that came in about 721 BC when the Assyrian army invaded Israel and sacked Samaria.

- [28 : 32] There was to be another one about 140 years later when the Babylonians came in and sacked Jerusalem and took her people into exile. And the greatest one of all, the greatest day of all is the one that lies ahead of us when the Lord Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead.

Now Amos has already spoken of the day of the Lord back in chapter 5 verse 18. You might turn back to that, 518. Woe to you, he says, who desire the day of the Lord.

Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness and not light as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall and a serpent bit him.

It's a fearsome day of darkness, not to be desired, but dreaded. And Amos tells us more about it in these final verses of chapter 8. Look at its characteristics here.

Verse 9, darkness. Again, that same idea comes. I will make the sun go down at noon, darken the earth. A sense that the Lord is withdrawing his blessing from the very earth.

- [29 : 40] Darkness at night is something we're used to. We expect it every night, don't we? But this darkness is at noon, the sun disappearing at midday. Remember the eclipse of the sun we had a few months ago?

March the something? And it was mildly eerie, wasn't it? Just for about 20 minutes. But this is a different thing. This is a suggestion that creation itself is in turmoil, groaning under the unbearable weight of human sin.

And then verse 10 deepens the sense of despair. The jolly parties, the food and drink feasts of the Israelites are going to become like funeral wakes.

The bands and the choirs playing their jolly music will be silenced and nothing will be heard but wailing. Fine clothes will be replaced by sackcloth. I guess the equivalent in our culture would be black suits and black ties.

Every head will be shaved to baldness as a sign of mourning. And the last phrase of verse 10 is so painful I can really only read it. I can hardly bear to comment on it. I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

- [30 : 52] Now we must notice this or we will miss something fundamentally important. Verse 9, I will make the sun go down. Verse 10, I will turn your feasts into mourning.

I will bring sackcloth on every waist. I will make it like the mourning for an only son. Do you see the point? These things will happen not as a consequence of economic or political forces but because of the purpose and decision of the Lord himself.

God will do these things to the ones that he calls in verse 2, my people, Israel. Friends, we must allow the seriousness and the weight and the pain of the judgment of God to sink into our hearts and the more deeply these verses cut into our hearts the more deeply we shall thank God for sending us his son to save us from the wrath to come.

And that's not all. This judgment on Israel and Samaria is going to engulf everybody. Look at verse 13. In that day the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst.

A country looks to its fine young people as the future. Think of the joy that we feel especially the older ones as we look at our fine young people and we see them growing up into maturity and responsibility.

- [32 : 17] Well here God is going to bring his judgment even upon the youth of Israel which is tantamount to saying there is no future. the whole nation will indeed be dissolved as indeed it was when the Assyrians came.

And verse 14 assures all those who have been worshipping at the idle shrines of Samaria and Dan and Beersheba that they shall never rise again they shall fall. But I want us finally to notice the horror of verses 11 and 12.

There's going to be a famine says the Lord not of bread nor a thirst for water but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. And where will this famine come from?

What is to be its origin? It will come from God himself. I will send a famine on the land. It's like the I wills of verses 9 and 10. God himself will cause his word to be no longer heard.

And when will this take place? Well the phrase used in verse 11 is not on that day as in verse 9. It's a phrase that suggests a longer period into the future.

[33 : 29] Behold the days are coming. It's not a defined period because God wants to warn us about a situation that could happen in any period of history. It's going to be a famine of verse 11 the words of the Lord verse 12 the word of the Lord.

There's not much difference between those two phrases. Amos may mean the voice of the prophets like himself or he may mean the written word of the Lord written in the Bible. But what he's telling us is that God as he gives humanity over to the consequences of its rejection of him will send a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.

Now centuries earlier the Lord had said to Israel through Moses man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Bread bread meat and all the rest of it bread merely brings us existence it's the word of the Lord that brings us life. Man shall not live by bread alone.

To have no more than bread is not to enjoy life. Life comes through listening to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Now if that's so the situation here in verses 11 and 12 is a dreadful one because it pictures people who are lacking life and yet somehow they are desperate to find it.

[34 : 56] In verse 12 they're wandering about from sea to sea from north to east they're running to and fro a bit like desperate animals trying to find their way out of a cage but and here's the judgment at the end of verse 12 they shall not find it.

God will withdraw from them the blessing of life. It's like a sentence of death. To be unable to find the word of the Lord is to be unable to find the Lord. Now don't we see this today in much of our society even here in Britain where the gospel has been faithfully preached in many places for centuries.

You think of so many folk that you know those that you work with and rub shoulders with who are searching restlessly looking for something. They might not say I'm looking for the word of the Lord but you're aware that they are looking for something.

Something wise. Something to bring stability and comfort. Something to make sense of human life and human mortality. Something true. Talk to any general practitioner doctor and they'll tell you how many people stream into their surgeries week after week miserable looking for something to bring them a sense of life and joy and knowing that that something must be better than just another sick note.

And people turn to such extraordinary places don't they to find meaning. I don't know whether you heard this but there was a man being interviewed on the radio the other day who was being introduced as a palm reader.

[36 : 29] Palm. Did you hear it? The anchorman or the interviewer was boosting this palm reader's authority by saying that he had had 20 years experience as a palm reader.

Show us your palm darling. Oh look at this. There's a tall dark stranger coming soon and a lovely sum of money going to land in your lap. How would you feel if you were to spend 20 years of your life telling people that kind of good news?

And yet many British homes have a Bible in them. Even if it's only the one that was given to great-grand in 1934 when she was at Sunday school. There it is still up on the shelf in pristine condition.

Never opened. Now how can we respond to verses 11 and 12? I think the answer is that although the Lord sends this famine we can respond with determination.

Let's play our part in stemming the famine. Some of you younger ones will be elders and responsible leaders in congregations years from now.

[37 : 32] Let me sow this thought into your minds. Make sure that the congregation you're responsible for gets fed with the life-giving Bible. Not just from the pulpit on Sundays.

It needs to be there too. But not just there. It needs to be there in all the meetings and gatherings of younger and older people which take place during the week. The Sunday school, the three and four and five-year-olds and the older ones, they need the Bible.

The teenagers need the Bible. Plenty of it. Big helpings. Teenagers can take much bigger helpings than we sometimes imagine they can. The old ladies groups in our churches need the Bible.

The elders meeting needs the Bible to guide and shape the decision making body of the church. You might find yourself possibly in a church at some future point where the Bible is largely unknown.

There are all too many churches in Britain like that. Churches where the Bible might be read out loud briefly on a Sunday, but it's never engaged with seriously. Well, if you find yourself in that kind of church, bring the Bible into that church if you possibly can.

[38 : 37] If you can bear it, carry on there, be persistent and gracious. Persuade the members and the minister that it's the only way to life. Well, let's finish where we started with this question of judgment and universalism.

I guess if you wanted to be a universalist, you'd simply have to cut this chapter out of your Bible. But then you would have to cut every chapter out of your Bible in order to be a universalist. You'd end up with two covers and nothing inside.

It is part of the glory of God, the glory of God that he is the judge of the earth and its people. He's judging Israel here in the book of Amos because of her persistent, defiant disobedience.

He's not ending the covenant, but he's chastising his people. It's the most severe form of discipline. But can you imagine a world in which God exercised no discipline?

A world where no one was accountable to him. It would be rather like a school without discipline where everybody runs riot and nobody says enough. It is to the glory of God and to the praise of God that he brings temporal judgments in this life and a final judgment at the end.

[39 : 59] And we need to learn to rejoice in his work of judgment and not to feel the slightest bit embarrassed about it as though it's an element in the Bible that we're slightly ashamed of and we'll only talk about if we're really pressed.

No. In the New Testament, the word hallelujah comes only four times. And those four hallelujahs all occur in one chapter, the 19th of the book of Revelation.

They are sounded by the great multitude who are worshipping God in heaven. Now, hallelujah means praise the Lord. And why are these multitudes in heaven shouting praise to him in Revelation 19?

The answer is because he's the judge. Hallelujah, they cry. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are true and just. For he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

And once more they cry out, hallelujah, the smoke from her goes up forever and ever. That is the smoke from the burning of everything that has opposed the people of God.

[41 : 12] Of course, it is a matter of great sadness for Christians that some people should be eternally condemned. But it is right that they should be because they have defied the Lord Jesus and have refused the eternal life that can only be enjoyed through his gracious gift.

The multitude in heaven cry hallelujah for his judgments are true and just. And we must learn gladly to echo that cry of praise.

So as the prophet Amos announces judgment on Israel, he is giving us a foretaste of the glory of God. And when we see the rightness and the righteousness of God's judgment on the day of judgment, we shall realize then, as we've perhaps never realized on earth, how great and how loving is the achievement of Jesus Christ, God's grace.

Because he alone can save us from the judgment of God. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Dear God, our Father, have mercy upon us and train our hearts to love your truth, to be unashamed and unembarrassed about it, and to seek to proclaim it because it brings glory to your name, being a great assertion of what is true about you.

And our prayer is that you will so stir us up to love you that we are made willing to share the wonderful good news of salvation through Jesus to more and more people. And we pray that you will stir us up and send us out to share this lovely revelation with many and that they should be drawn to you in our church and in other churches so that your name is honored and joy and praise is given to you in heaven.

[43 : 19] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.