

Superstition is not Salvation

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[0 : 00] In Amos chapter 5, we read these verses 4 to 8. Amen.

In these particular verses, we can see we have the kernel or the substance of this particular chapter. Where the prophet Amos is addressing a difficulty in Israel, particularly the northern kingdom of Israel, but also it applies to the southern kingdom of Judah.

And that is the fact that the Israelites were not without a measure of religion, we might call it. They did acknowledge the Lord with their lips. They thought the Lord was amongst them and that the Lord had to be there and that he owed them a certain sort of protection and blessing and help.

And indeed, at the time when Amos was prophesying, which if we turn back to chapter 1, we'll see that it is in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash, king of Israel, and Uzziah, king of Judah.

Now Uzziah was a good king of Judah and Jeroboam was the most successful politically of the northern kings of Israel. In his long reign, Israel did extremely well for itself.

[1 : 52] It expanded its borders. It became economically strong. You could say probably the rich got richer, perhaps. Maybe the poor got poorer. But as a political entity, Israel had never had it so good.

It was really strong as a northern kingdom in that sense. So Amos is, if you like, almost, it may seem, spitting into the wind. And his prophecies are that the Lord will come and judge this kingdom and this people because they appear to be neglecting him.

And yet they would look around and say, look on, all prosperity. Look at how good it is. Look at how, obviously the Lord is blessing us. He must be amongst us. And yet with the inspiration of the Lord, Amos is identifying what is wrong here.

They have mixed in, as we were saying with the children earlier, they have mixed in superstition with their worship of the Lord. So they are believing that if they go through certain motions and do certain things and go to certain places which once may have had holy associations, then the Lord must bless them.

That if they fulfill certain things and if you might go say certain incantations or spells almost you might say, or go through the motions of certain prayers or sacrifices, that's it sorted, that's it done.

[3 : 16] And that the Lord must look after them. He must bless them. The Lord must be amongst them. And what Amos is saying is, no, it's the Lord himself you have to seek, not these other things, these other places.

And if it's the Lord you're seeking, then things have to change in your life. You have to do righteousness. You have to have a care for the poor. You have to seek to do justice and goodness in your ordinary life and not just go through maybe the religious motions.

Okay. Thus saith the Lord, verse 4, unto the house of Israel, seek ye me and ye shall live. This is in the midst of an otherwise comparatively, we might say, judgmental chapter.

God is, through his prophet, pronouncing the woes and the ills that are going to come upon the kingdom. And they're exactly in line with what Moses had prophesied would be the case before, way back in Deuteronomy, if they turned themselves against the Lord.

And yet in the midst of it all, in the midst of the gathering storm, we have these little shafts of sunlight. It's a word. Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, seek ye me and ye shall live.

[4 : 28] It's not like saying, oh, well, it's too right for you now. Oh, all this judgment's coming on you. It serves you right. You should have sought me while you could. And we're saying, seek me now. It's like if you can see storm clouds coming in.

Sometimes you look out on the bay, perhaps. You can see the rain coming in. You can see it on the water. The tiny little puddles of the raindrops in the water as it works its way across. And this bit of the bay, it's clear.

And that bit's full of rain and the storm coming in. And you can see it travelling across. And it's as though it were coming and somebody were calling you from under shelter and opening it. They were saying, come in, come in out of the rain quickly before it comes. It's not broken yet. And you're just about getting caught into it. And you get inside just in time. That's what this is like here. Seek the Lord.

Seek ye me and ye shall live. But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, nor pass to Beersheba. For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity. Bethel shall come to naught.

[5 : 25] Now what is wrong with all these places? Why are these places specially mentioned here? Bethel, surely. That's where Jacob had his vision of Jacob's ladder. Of the ladder going up to heaven.

And the angels go ascending and descending. And Bethel, this is surely a holy place. It means house of God. This is where Jacob had his vision. This is near where Abram set up his first altar in the land.

This has got to be something special. But it's also where one of the two golden calves was set up. That the first king, Jeroboam, not the one in Amos' time. But the first king, Jeroboam, had set up as a place where he would worship.

And he set the other one up in Dan in the very far north of the country. Where all the people were to go and worship instead of going to Jerusalem. So what had been a place of purity and a place of a solemn meeting with the Lord and something that had been in a sense sacred.

Though not because of its location, right? But a place where there had been a holy encounter between a patriarch and the Lord. And people might venerate that place because of it. It had instead become a place of idolatry.

[6 : 37] It had become mixed in with superstition. Gilgal. What's wrong with Gilgal? I think not with Gilgal in itself. That's a place where when the children of Israel had crossed the Jordan, remember?

And it dried up before them. And they came across and they camped in Gilgal. And that's where they circumcised all the people. Because they hadn't been all the years there in the wilderness. And that was symbolic of their rededication to the Lord.

Of rolling away their approach. That's what Gilgal means. The rolling away of their approach of their unfaithfulness in the wilderness. So it's a place where they dedicated themselves again to the Lord. Surely that's got to be a good thing. Well, yes. But it's also the place where when the people gathered together, they demanded of Israel that they wanted a king. And he said, well, the Lord will reign over you.

He always has. He said, oh, no, we want a king. Just like all the other nations round about. And that was where they first departed in that regard. It had become likewise a place of idolatry.

[7 : 36] Saul set up his archway in triumph and so on. And made out like he was something special as opposed to the Lord who had given him the victories. Gilgal was not bad in itself.

But it had become idolatrous in that sense. And likewise, Beersheba. What's wrong with Beersheba? It means the well of the oath.

And if we go back to Genesis, we see that that's where both Abraham and also Isaac entered into an oath of covenant with the Philistine kings and so on.

Right about. They entered into a covenant of friendship there. They swore friendship. Beersheba, the seven wells that were there. That's surely a sacred place. A place where Abraham and Isaac did business with the Lord.

Where they honored the Lord. Where they dwelt. That's going to be good. Surely. Yes. But likewise, too. It had become a place. Where they set up idolatrous worship.

[8 : 33] Superstition. They came mixed in with it. It's like when Jesus went into the temple. If you think about it, remember. And nothing wrong with the temple.

But what did he find in the temple? Those buying and selling doves and beasts and all the clinking of the coin and the money and the bleating of the beasts and the cattle and so on.

And no doubt the smell that inevitably comes when you've got so many farmyard animals there as well. And all this in the house of God. And you say, well, of course, you need beasts for sacrifice. So they have to be. You've got to have doves. Because you've got to have oxen. You've got to have lambs and goats. Of course. Well, of course. Animals do what they do. There's going to be smell. There's going to be mess. Can't avoid that.

If they're going to be sold for the sacrifice. Well, money has to change hands. It's going to be the right money. It's going to be temple money. You can't have all this stuff with Caesar's head in it. So that's got to be changed. It's just the best place to do business.

[9 : 32] Surely nothing wrong with it. But the fact of it is, and the effect of it is, that God's house becomes turned into a place of merchandise. And that which is holy has that which is of the world.

And commerce mixed in with it. And you see what is happening here. Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba. They have become places of idolatry.

They have become that which symbolizes a mixing in of that which is sinful with that which is meant to be true.

In the same way as probably we as Protestant Christians would probably shy away. And we probably do shy away too much from giving our Lord's mother her due as a unique individual in this day of salvation.

And the reason we shy away from any sort of praising up of Mary, the mother of our Lord, is because we are afraid of falling over into merimetry. Because in other parts of the visible church, of course, that is what has happened.

[10 : 42] It has become an idolatry. The extent to which our Lord's mother, a perfectly good, virtuous woman, unique in history and chosen specially for her no doubt godliness and humility and appropriateness to bear her.

And be a Christ child. That she has been chosen for that but instead has been exalted to a position that it was never hers and which she never sought.

She was never called to be mother of God. She was called to be mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is this humanity to which she gave birth, not his Godhead.

But because we seek to avoid that idolatry, we may perhaps shy away from giving even her due.

Because when there is idolatry mixed in with things, we tend to want to have nothing to do with it.

It is right that we have nothing to do with idolatry. But this is the problem here. This is the problem at verse 5. This is the problem again that we find in verse 6. Now, leaving off judgment and righteousness in the earth.

[12 : 12] This implies oppression of the poor. Grinding down the poor. Getting them to work for you without wages because you can. Because if you withhold the poor man's wages, he's not going to take you to court.

He's not going to send the boys around to beat you up. He's not going to have any redress at all. He depends on you keeping your work. He depends on you paying him the fair day's wage for the fair day's work.

He depends on you doing righteousness. And because you're the strong one and he's the weak one, there's nobody to hold you to account. And if you want to get away with the abuse of those who are weaker than you, then for a while you can.

But the Lord says that he sees all of this. He who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth, seek him that maketh the seven stars in Orion. In other words, if you want to know what real power it is, look to the Lord.

Look to the heavens. Look to the starry host. Orion, the constellation there. And the seven stars is a reference to Pleiades, that constellation there.

[13 : 13] It's mentioned in the book of Job, of course. Chapter 9, verse 9. Which maketh Arcturus, another huge, massive star. Orion and Pleiades and the chambers of the south.

And again in chapter 38, verse 31. Cast thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion. These starry hosts were known and recognized, particularly perhaps by those whose business was shepherding and herding.

And Amos, remember, if we go back to the beginning of the prophecy of Amos, he says, Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tetoa, he looked after goats and herds of cattle and so on.

He was out in the fields. And at night they would look up and see the stars and all the constellations. They would know about Pleiades. They'd know about Orion. They'd know about the different constellations and Arcturus.

Because they would see them and observe them night after night throughout the year. They'd probably see the movements of the stars in their forces. And the one who made these coaxes, the one who made these stars and constellations, the pagans tended to worship these starry hosts as though they were gods.

[14 : 22] And he says, think about the one who actually made these stars. If you want to think in terms of power, if you want to think in terms of one who is really omnipotent, then seek the Lord.

He'd turn at the shadow of death into the morning. Now that can either, of course, refer to the darkness and sorrow of coming face to face with death and bereavement and loss.

Or in the immediate context, it's probably a reference to the darkest hour of the night, which is just before the daybreak. And how the Lord imperceptibly changes the darkness into the light.

When the light changes in the morning, it's not like flicking a switch. It's a gradual, imperceptible change. You couldn't put your fingers and say, right, now it's light and before it was dark.

Because the black just turns into a dark, dark gray and then into a lighter gray and then into a lighter again. And gradually it's dawn and then it's sort of that kind of twilight-y early morning light.

[15 : 20] And then it's daylight. And you don't see it happening. It's happening all the time around you. He turneth the shadow of death into the morning. He just does it by his power.

He maketh the day dark with night, as he did at our Lord's crucifixion, that calleth all the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth. Again, this can be a reference to either the waves crashing on the shore or, more likely, it's an inspired reference to the fact of how clouds are made.

Because if we think of how it's the evaporation of the seas and then the vapor rises, it forms the clouds, the clouds are blown up over the mountains and so on.

And then they empty themselves over the hills, over the lands, poureth them out upon the face of the earth. This is what has happened. The vapor has risen from the sea. It's gathered into clouds. It's emptied over the earth. This is what the Lord does. This is real power.

[16 : 21] This is real purity. If you want righteousness, if you want protection for the kingdom, this is where you seek. But you don't mix it in with the superstition of Bethel and Gildo and Beersheba and all these other places and so on.

There may be a tendency for us to think that if we are going through the right motions, if we are ticking the right boxes, then we should be right enough with God.

He must support us. He must be with us. He must help us because he owes us if we're doing the outward stuff right. But as Amos says, I know, verse 12, your manifold transgressions, your mighty sins, they afflict the just, they take a bribe, they turn aside the poor and the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time. But if you seek good, verse 14, and not evil, that you may live, and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you as you have spoken.

This is what the Israelites believed, that God was with them regardless. Micah chapter 3, we read at verse 11, the heads thereof judge for reward, the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.

[17 : 36] Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, it's not the Lord among us. None evil can come upon us. They regarded the Lord as a sort of superstitious protection, that he was always going to be there as long as they ticked certain boxes.

But you notice what it says in verse 13, the prudent shall keep silence in that time. And it's like what it says, you know, to Timothy, Paul says to Timothy, redeeming the time for the days are evil.

It is an evil time. And what is going to happen when the days become so evil? We read, the prudent shall keep silence. Instead of sending his prophets rising up early and sending them, instead of Amos saying, look, you've got to do righteousness, you've got to turn away from this wrongdoing. The voice will just fall silent. It says in Genesis, remember, chapter 6 of verse 3, my spirit shall not always strive with man.

And irritating as it may be for the world and the worldly to hear the voice of the prophet saying, you know, don't mix in the superstition, don't mix in the idolatry. Do righteousness, do justice, seek the Lord and his purity.

[18 : 43] Yes, you've got to go through these outward things, but there's nothing in themselves. These are the means to an end. It's the Lord who is the Savior, the Lord who is the power, who can redeem you.

And that may be inconvenient to those who don't want the king. They hate him, verse 10, that rebuketh from the gate. They abhor him that speaketh uprightly. For so much, therefore, as your treading is up on the pool, you take from him burdens of wheat, of taxes, in that sense.

You have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell on them. Have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine of them. If you don't want the voice to be spoken anymore, it will fall silent.

My spirit will not always strive with man. But what is prophesied in verses 10 and 11 there, that's exactly what Moses had prophesied, as I mentioned before, way back in Deuteronomy.

It's about 500 years before the time of Amos. And we read in Deuteronomy 28, verse 30, for example. Thou shalt control the wife, and another man shall live with her.

[19 : 46] Thou shalt build a house, and thou shalt not dwell therein. Thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. And in verse 38, thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather that little inn, for the locust shall consume it.

Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes, for the worms shall eat them. And why is this? We go back to verse 15 of Deuteronomy 28. It will come to pass, if thou would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe, to do all his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.

Now that's exactly what Moses had prophesied, and that's what Amos is saying now. And it's 500 years later. And they might be saying, well, come on, that was all right for then. Come on, Moses, 500 years ago.

That's like somebody saying nowadays, well, look at what John Knox did in the Reformation, and how Scotland turned back the word of God. People say, yeah, yeah, but you know, that's 500 years ago.

[20 : 47] We're modern now. We're up to date. We're sophisticated. We don't need all that old-fashioned religion. And because we are now 2,000 years later, we think in terms of it, ancient people in Bible times were always kind of God-honoring and religious and believing in all this stuff.

There would have been plenty of people then. They've said, you know, Moses, 500 years ago, come on. We've moved on a bit since then. We're a bit more modern than up to date. This is ancient stuff.

We've got new ways now of tapping into the supernatural. We've got new ways of being able to make sure now that we can access all the power of other worldly powers.

You know, we go to Bethel. We go to Gilgal. We make up these images so we can focus our worship. We have our sacrifices. We do all these things, and everything's just fine.

Because look at Anders. Jeroboam is on the throne. Everything is great. Israel has never had it so good. We're strong. We're great. And all the feeling that it will ever continue with us.

[21 : 50] And Amos is just speaking to himself. So what's the point here? The point is that because superstition is being mixed in with the true relationship of the Lord, there is no change being brought in the hearts of the Israelites here.

And going through our outward motions or mixing in superstition with the true love of the Lord, that is only going to harm us.

It's not going to help us. And if we're truly loving the Lord, then there will be a change in our hearts and a change of priority and a change of direction.

It's exactly in the New Testament as it was in the old. If we look at what John the Baptist says. You know, in Matthew, of course, chapter 3 says to the people, And in Luke 3, we read from verse 7 onwards, In other words, we're okay.

We're Israelites. Smoke, we're covered. You know. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise our children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees.

[23 : 19] Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, say, what shall we do then? Now what did he say?

Did he say, well, go and offer a few more sacrifices. Burn a bit more incense. And make sure you go and touch the side of the Ark of the Covenant or whatever or buy so much from the priest. He answereth and saith them, he that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath run.

And he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized and said to him, Master, what shall we do? Now remember the publicans were those that everybody thought were scum. They thought they were beneath, you know, contempt.

But he just said, exact no more than that which is upon to do. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him say, what shall we do? You know, these are men whose job is violence and coercion.

What shall we do? He said, do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation and all men used in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not, John answered saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water.

[24 : 26] But one mightier than I come of the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, whose fan is in his hand.

And he will throughly purge his floor and will gather the wheat into his garnet, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. In other words, John the Baptist, although he's saying, you know, make way for the Lord.

Prepare for the way of the Lord. Get yourself right with the Lord. Start putting away sin from your life. Start pursuing righteousness in your ordinary life, in your everyday life.

Whether you're a soldier or a tax collector or an ordinary member of the public or whatever.

Whatever you've got that you can share, share it. Whatever you can do to put away sin from your life, put it away.

Whatever you can do to bring your life more in line with God's teaching and commandments, do it. And don't do violence to anyone. You're going to start preparing for the way of the Lord.

[25 : 24] But at the same time, when people said, so are you the Messiah then? He said, oh, no, no, no, no, I'm not the Messiah. I can do nothing. I can tell you these outward things. But when he comes, he's going to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

He's going to separate out the wheat from the chaff. And he's going to gather the wheat into his garden and the chaff he'll burn with fire unquenchable. So God can see through all our outward facades.

And when the Lord comes and he gives of his spirit, he distinguishes between that which is mere outward form and that which is the love of the Lord in the heart.

And it is this love of the Lord in the heart that Amos is pleading with Israel to have. Don't mix it in superstition. Don't think, oh, well, because this place was holy once and I go to this place and I offer a sacrifice.

Or I go through this religious motion. Or I take this particular lucky charm or whatever. Then this will ward off evil spirits. The only thing of which evil spirits are afraid is Christ.

[26 : 31] They're not afraid of little amulets or little crosses or little lucky charms or anything like that. They're afraid of Christ. And if we have Christ in our heart dwelling there and if we have Christ upon our lips and if we are putting our trust in him, then they will not be able to overcome us.

They can overcome ourselves, but they can't overcome him. And if we don't have Christ in our hearts, the devil can't wear his plaything. He can do whatever he likes with us. We have no power against him, but Christ has all power.

And therefore, this is the distinction that we must have. Seeking the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Because simply inventing forms of religion, whether it is the superstition of the Israelites.

Or verse 21, I despise your feast days. I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. But he said, wait a minute. Surely the Lord is the one who instituted the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles and all these things.

That's not what he's saying. He ordained oats. But in northern Israel, remember, with the calves and with the false priests and the false festivals that they had made.

[27 : 41] These were things that men had made up. I hate, I despise your feast days. I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings in the media, I won't accept them.

Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your families. Take away from me the noise of thy songs. For I will not hear the melody of thy violets. And this, of course, is what the reformers, going back to Reformation again, would have said.

Well, if we want to make sure that we've got nothing that's man-made and superstitious in our worship, we have to just clear it all back to what does God give us in his word.

And although that might seem at times, you know, a draconian thing to do, yet it is the only way that we can be absolutely safe and solid.

God has given it. We know we can offer it back to him. If God has revealed it, then we know we can worship him in it and with it. The Lord delights in that which is his own.

[28 : 40] He delights in his people because they are his own. He delights in a worship that is truly his because he has given it and ordained it. We can't add in our own superstitious admixtures.

And we won't be right with God just by ticking boxes. But it will be perfectly right to go through these motions if they are expressions of our love and devotion to the Lord in its right place and context.

It's okay to have things that, you know, if you were going even to Beersheba or to Gilgal or to Bethel and say solemnly before the Lord, and remember this is where Jacob met with the Lord.

I'm not offering up sacrifices. I'm not going through special, you know, festival motions or doing anything ideologist. I'm just being quiet here and remembering this is where Jacob met with the Lord.

This is near for Abram. Set up his first altar. This is a place where the Lord met with his people. And we just pray the Lord would meet with his people there. Fine. If you did that in Beersheba where Abraham and Isaac had consecrated their couple and oath with their neighbors round about and had devoted themselves to the Lord and brother, that would be fine too.

[29 : 50] Likewise at Gilgal where the Israelites devoted themselves to the Lord. That's fine too. It's like if you were to go and visit places where perhaps, you know, the covenanters had witnessed for the Lord and where some of them perhaps had been martyred.

And you say, well, it's an amazing faith that they had. If only we had the strength and faith in the Lord that they had. That's fine. If it increases our hope and our faith in the Lord.

But if we're to say, oh, now I've touched this stone where so-and-so preached to the covenanters and that's going to be a holy thing. I've been to the place where so-and-so went to the gallows for the faith.

And so I've touched that stone now. And I've made a wee pilgrimage around all these places. So that's going to be worth something. No, actually it isn't worth anything. Unless it reminds you of the Christ and the faith which these servants have had.

If it focuses you upon the Lord that they serve, that's fine. If these things serve to honour the Lord and to further our relationship with them, then that's fine.

[30 : 55] But we can't pretend that they are buying us righteousness with God. We can't pretend that they are deepening our relationship with the Lord. God sees through everything that we have and that we do.

When he says, let judgment run down as waters, verse 24 there. If we think of, you know, if you take a wee trip into Targut or whatever, you'll pass various places on the hillside where the burdens, the streams are flowing down the mountainside and the rocks.

Now, if justice, judgment is flowing down like waters, what's happening when these waters are flowing down? Well, if there's been a lot of rain, then they're big gushy streams. If there hasn't been so much rain, they're perhaps still, you know, not quite as strong.

A bit less water in them perhaps. And if there's been a long dry spell, there'll be barely a trickle. But there will always be something. They will always keep on running. They will always keep flowing.

A stream will always keep flowing. A river will always keep flowing. It will always keep coming down the mountainside because it is always draining off the water that is there. It is a constant flow.

[32 : 02] Sometimes a big gush. Sometimes a little trickle. But it is always flowing. And if we are to do righteousness before the Lord, then it is something which we will always seek to do.

That will be the default position of our lives. We will seek always to be truthful. Always to be honest. Always to be faithful. Always to be diligent in the house of the Lord.

Always to be diligent about reading his word in our times of prayer. Because that's what's in us. Like the water flowing down the hillside. It is constant.

It is regular. It is always fresh. It is flowing down there from the hillside.

Always. An ongoing flow. It's ongoing. It's regular. It's constant. And it is fresh. Fresh water coming down. It's not soft water coming down. It's fresh water running down like waters.

[33 : 00] And righteousness as a mighty stream. Have you offered me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness for the years of the house of Israel? That's a rhetorical question. Yes, they have. They did.

We know they did. But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chion, your images. Chion is the same as Rimon, which is mentioned of Naaman, the Syrian, bowing in the house of Rimon with his master.

It's the same God, the God of the Syrians that they worshipped there. And the star of your God, which you made to yourselves. Now, borne the tabernacle. That implies they took a little shrine of these false gods with them throughout their days in the wilderness.

Yet there's no mention of these things there in the first five books of the Bible. Moses doesn't mention them doing that. But it may be implied here that the Lord saw all these times, even if Moses didn't.

The Lord knew what they were at. Or it could be that they had these false gods in their hearts. They bore it within their hearts, which they made to themselves. Therefore, you want idolatry?

[34 : 06] I'll send you into captivity with idolatry. I'll send you beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts. If this is what you choose, then you can have as much of it as you want.

If you want idolatry, you'll go into captivity with idolatry. If you want nothing to do with the Lord, you'll end up with an eternity with nothing to do with the Lord. But if you want the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, then as John said to the crowds, prepare the way of the Lord. Get ready for meeting with him. Get ready for his coming. Don't mix in superstition with it. As we approach this time of remembering the Lord's death, there is going to be no benefit in the sense of ticking boxes for all that we may do or the motions we may go through.

We don't get extra credit with the Lord for the number of services that we take or how many bits of bread we lift off the plate or whatever. But we do gain spiritual benefit if in each of these things prepared for our use.

We are seeking the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. That we are there because we have a desire to be there. That we want to prepare our hearts.

[35 : 21] That we want to, yes, repent of our sins and be conscious of our need for self-examination. That we want to humble ourselves maybe on the Thursday. We want to have that self-examination on the Friday.

We want to be solemnly prepared on the Saturday. We want to have that sense of holy joy and anticipation on the Lord's Day and Thanksgiving on the Lord's Day evening and on the Monday. If all these things are there and they ought to be and they won't be there by nature, we'll have to work at that. We have to prepare the way of the Lord. And we can't mix in superstition.

Even such holy things as an approaching communion season. We can't pretend that there's virtue in and of itself. The virtue is of the Lord.

The strength is of the Lord. The sacrifice is the Lord. And we remember what he did once and for all. Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me and ye shall live.

[36 : 22] Seek not Bethel, not into Gilgal, not past the Beersheba or Gilgal. They'll go into captivity. They'll come to nothing. Seek ye the Lord and ye shall live, lest he break out like a fire in the house of Joseph.

Seek ye him who made the seven stars of the Orion and turned the shadow of death into the morning and maketh the day dark with night that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth.

The Lord is his name. Let that which we approach now be that which we use aright to seek the Lord with all of our heart and all of our soul and mind and strength and the outward packagings which are there to help us and to be a benefit to us.

Let us not make more of them than they were ever designed to be. Let us not fear that they should somehow become a superstitious ticking of the box that will make us more right with God.

But they are a means prepared to us, an avenue through which we can approach to the Lord and seek him with all of our heart and so be prepared and so make use of what he has given and so receive that which is ultimately and only from him.

[37 : 42] we make ministries Ohhh so be everywhere... ... Sh apa !!!! Sh apa !!!! Sh apa !!!!

Sh apa te !!!! ■■■■■ m■ Shpe 911 Sh o Shuf Sh AM Sh Ass the