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C0921 – May 27, 2009 – Amos 6:1-14 – The Day Of Calamity

Chapter 6 is a pretty hard chapter to teach because it leaves a grand question; “Just who is responsible for the downfall of the nation Israel?” If you read the chapter with that question in mind I think you’ll come away with a better understanding of history. So as we walk through the verses tonight I want you to approach it from that angle, “Who is responsible for the downfall of the nation?” And we’ll try to sort it out at the end.

So let’s start in vv 1-3. Vv 1-3 begins a Woe Oracle primarily aimed against the failed national leadership. Leadership is key and good leadership is essential to any organization. And, by good, when we say that as Christians, we’re not meaning some abstract standard of goodness out there that man decides, we’re talking about what God has said is good, not what man thinks. So let’s read.

¹Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria, The distinguished men of the foremost of nations, To whom the house of Israel comes. ²Go over to Calneh and look, And go from there to Hamath the great, Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater than yours? ³Do you put off the day of calamity, And would you bring near the seat of violence?

Now, verse 1 begins the Woe Oracle. That word **Woe** in the Hebrew is the signal and it means it’s bad. And most of what Amos had to say was bad. Just like when you get in the Book of Revelation and you come to the three woes, that’s bad. Amos was a prophet of doom and when he says **Woe** to so and so and if you’re so and so you better brace yourself because it’s about to be rough

treatment. Here he says **Woe** is divided into three groups. First, **Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.** **Zion** stands for Jerusalem, this is the southern kingdom. So he leads off in a prophecy of doom against his own kingdom. Amos was from the south. And there is a certain class of people who are **at ease**, which in Amos always refers to the wealthy upper class who have luxurious palaces inlaid with ivory, beautiful divans with satin pillows. They are living the high life and they are relaxed and unconcerned as they sit on their porches and sip their fine wine. They're self-indulgent and they're complacent. And they're in big trouble. They don't know it yet but their time is coming. Second, he comes to his main target. **Woe...to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria.** **Samaria** was the capital of the northern kingdom. Samaria was the center of corruption in the northern kingdom. Turn back to chapter 3, verse 9, and remember, this is in the first of the three covenant lawsuits and when the witnesses are called to come and see for themselves who is called? "Ashdod," which is the chief city of the Philistines and "the land of Egypt." Alright, he says, "Assemble yourselves [Philistines and Egyptians] on the mountains of Samaria and see the great tumults within her and the oppressions in her midst." Why does Amos call the Philistines and the Egyptians to see this spectacle? Why not the Babylonians or the Assyrians? It has to do with the two things they're called to see. What nation in the OT was most well-known for causing great tumults? The Philistines. They were always making terrorist incursions from the lowlands of Gaza into Israeli villages and keeping the whole place gripped with fear. That's what terrorism always causes, fear and instability in society. So they are called to see the kind of terror techniques the northern kingdom has invented because now the Philistines are second rate in comparison. They have something to learn now from the real kings of terror. And second, who does the OT say are the lords of oppression? Obviously Egypt. For four hundred years the Hebrews themselves had to live under the oppressions of Egypt. So it comes with a real slap in the face that Amos says come on up Egypt and see some real oppression. You thought you guys knew how to oppress, you haven't seen a thing. You have to sort of adapt yourself to the way these prophets present their case. It's not very nice what they say and it would really make people angry...but frankly, that's the only way to get through the thick skulls of people in rebellion. They're not going to listen to nice flowery words, you have to knock them between the eyes. So I want you to pay attention to that when you read the prophets rebuke, which we might add, is the Lord's rebuke. So, the second group is those who think they

have **security** up in Samaria. From the human side of things **Samaria** was a **secure** location. It was surrounded by mountains and easy to defend with a strong military. So they thought, we don't have a problem, we've got security. Oops, problem. God has access to all people in all places. Security is only found in God, whom they are in rebellion against and where are you going to hide from Him. God said, hey look guys, if you want security, obey My law and I'll give you security. But if you disobey My law I'm going to remove the security and foreign armies are going to invade. So, you better get the key issue worked out which is loyalty to Me, heart loyalty, not just religious ritual, not just ceremony, but real heart orientation to God.

Now the third group Amos aims the **Woe** at are **The distinguished men of the foremost of nations**, that's Israel, **the foremost**. Remember, they were having a national ball as of late. Jonah had prophesied to Jeroboam II that the borders would be extended and they were, they grew in size as a nation and they grew in economic prosperity. But the **distinguished men** of that nation are in a load of trouble. The **distinguished or notable men** are the leadership of the northern kingdom. These are the men running the show. Some of them are the elites of society who have power because they're wealthy, others are judges, and others are political advisors. But they all serve somehow as the leaders of the nation Israel **To whom**, Amos says, **the house of Israel comes**. In other words, the common Israelite comes to these men for counsel, for advice, for justice of which they were doing little to nothing. They didn't care for the house of Israel. They cared about themselves.

Now verse 2 could be taken a couple of ways, **Go over to Calneh and look, And go from there to Hamath the great, Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are [you] better than these kingdoms, Or is their territory greater than yours?** I translate that **you** rather than **they**. The way I take this is Amos is challenging the national leadership of Israel to go over to these foreign cities in these foreign nations and compare their kingdom to these other kingdoms. **Are you better than them?** That's a moral challenge! Go look and see if the ethics, values and law in your kingdom are better than the ethics, values and law in their kingdoms. I think you'll find they are not. You who had the revelation of God and you're not better than they are. You should be better, but you're not better. That's a very troubling statement. Why were they no better? Because they'd

abandoned the word of God. They were in rebellion against God's word as the standard. They made man's word the standard. They'd become autonomous. Man is ultimate, just like all the other nations. So can you expect to find any difference? Of course not. I think, of course, of the church in comparison with the world. Are our morals much better than the world's? Divorce rate isn't much different. Most of the time you can't tell much of a difference. Rather than building a counter culture we've either capitulated to the culture and just went along with whatever the world says or we accommodate to the culture and try to re-interpret the Bible to support cultural norms. Rarely have Christians said we're going to build a counter-culture that's distinct from the world. We're no different than they are and we're no better than they are. And yet we have the word of God. What does it say about us if we don't follow the word of God? That we're no different than the northern kingdom. That our church leaders are no different than their national leaders. They've given into the world and they haven't led us in the way of righteousness. When the leaders don't stand up anymore then you can forget it because people follow leaders and when the leaders fail to follow the word of God wherever it might go then the people also fail to follow the word of God wherever it might go. So it was in the northern kingdom.

Second question he asks, **is their territory greater than yours?** Again, the answer must be no. Israel had a much larger territory than all these other kingdoms, which meant they had more resources. But did having more resources make them better than the surrounding kingdoms? Evidently not. Christians too have much greater resources than the world system. What do we have that they don't have? We have Christ in us, the Lord of glory. We have the word of God. We have the Spirit of God in us who is greater than he who is in the world. That alone should make us different than and greater than the world. Yet sadly we have not made use of all the resources God has given us. If we had we'd build a biblical culture and yet only in small pockets of society have we done this and actually capitalized on what God has provided out of His grace.

And so he's challenging, go over and see yourself whether you're any better than these other kingdoms. And so he asks, verse 3, **Do you put off the day of calamity?** Those kingdoms could not put off military defeat so do you think you can? You had the word of God and you were just as bad as them. How then do you think you can put off the day of calamity? That's a reference

to the “day of the Lord” from chapter 5, verses 18-20, when a man sees a lion and he runs from the lion and then he runs into a bear and he runs from the bear and then exhausted he makes it inside his home and he leans on the wall and a poisonous snake comes out of a crack in the wall and bites him. The day of calamity is inescapable. The leaders of the nation should have been putting off **the day of calamity** by leading the people in the way of the Lord. That was their job. They were failing miserably. They weren’t putting it off, they were hastening it. They were therefore leading the people toward discipline. **And would you bring near the seat of violence?** The national leadership was a disaster and they were held responsible for **bringing near the** divine discipline. As the leaders go so go the followers. I fear many who lead the church do the same thing. Not only do they fail to lead by example but they fail even to expound what the example should look like from the word of God. Leaders of the church think more today of innovating and re-engineering the Church rather than discovering how to recover the Church Jesus Christ established. It’s not the job of the church leadership to change what Jesus Christ said, it’s not the job of church leaders to update Christianity, by default saying that what the Lord Jesus Christ said is outdated. To say that they know more than Jesus Christ. These words are not written *to* us but they are written *for* our learning and church leadership today. We need to take a serious look at what Christ established and follow His mandates rather than inventing a new thing. That’s rebellion not submission.

Now, in vv 4-7 if you wondered what kind of lifestyle the national leadership were living try this on for size. **⁴Those who recline on beds of ivory And sprawl on their couches, And eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall, ⁵Who improvise to the sound of the harp, And like David have composed songs for themselves, ⁶Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls While they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph.** How is that for leadership? We’d say this is opulence. This is self-indulgence. I see no genuine care for the people. I see all self-satisfaction. They have all the finest things in life but not a care in the world for anyone else. Verse 4 begins by saying they **recline on beds of ivory**. And that’s not a reference to their sleeping quarters but to eating in a reclined position. This was not the traditional posture for dining in that time but a new development that came with their wealthy status. By the first century it was the traditional posture.

You see it at the Last Supper, but in the day of Amos it signaled a laxity and complacency among the leaders who should have been concerned for the people and leading them in repentance and seeking God. **And sprawl on their couches**, another reference to their laxity and complacency. They **eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall**. The **midst of the stall** describes the location where calves were kept for fattening. In other words they ate only the finest meats. They were high class diners. Chapter 4 called the women cows of Bashan because of the luxurious requirements. They eat nothing but the choicest of meats.

Verse 5, great luxury is almost always accompanied by the sound of music, They **improvise to the sound of the harp**, or better, they sing frivolous songs **to the sound of the harp**. It's difficult to know what is meant precisely but it is not appropriate whatever it is. It seems to be saying that the words come forth as the music of the harp dictates. In other words, the way the harp was being played led them to sing frivolous words. **And like David have composed songs for themselves**. **David** was a king and they have made themselves out to be **like David**. But David composed songs for whom? Not for himself but for God. They have **composed songs for themselves**, a very large difference. They wrote songs to satisfy their own fleshly appetites. By way of application how might we write songs appropriate to worship God? First of all they should not be written to satisfy fleshly appetites. And second of all they should not be written to glorify man. They should be written to glorify God. That means in the final analysis the emphasis is on God and not on man. It is very true that there are more and more songs that focus on how man feels and what man does for God rather than on God and who God is and what God has done for man. Quite the reverse in emphasis and I think a criteria for judging lyrics. They made songs **for themselves**. It had little to do with God and therefore in that sense they were very unlike King David, they only made themselves out to be kings like him.

Verse 6, more of their banqueting lifestyle is described. **Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls**. Now we drink wine from small glasses, they drank them from large bowls, sacrificial at that. They were costly bowls made of expensive metals and highly ornate and obviously in such quantities they were getting drunk. And while they do this **they anoint themselves with the finest of oils**. The finest oils refer to the finest cosmetics of the day.

They lived in a hot climate and after washing you would cover the body with oil (like modern day lotion) which would nourish and protect the skin from the hot climate in Israel. The modern parallel would be the women lavishing themselves in the finest cosmetics of the day and constantly pampering the flesh in a grand display of opulence, covering themselves from head to toe with perfumes. Is there any concern for the oppressed? Or is it all about self, self satisfaction, self-indulgence, and self-service? Is this what the Lord intended by His Law?

And then the key phrase of it all is brought forth with the adversative force. **Yet they have not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. Joseph,** as in chapter 5, verse 1 refers to the northern kingdom. While they lived lives of self-indulgence they paid no attention to the spiritual condition of their land. They're all sprawled out, drinking wine, eating choice meats, playing frivolous music, applying cosmetics and the land is in spiritual ruin. They should have been grieving but they were partying. The land was a spiritual wasteland and they are not sick with grief. They should be. The background for Amos writing this is in Gen 37. And I hope you see from this that this farmer was well-attuned to his OT. He says to himself, you know, I've seen this situation before, I've read it in my OT when I read about Joseph. Gen 37:23 is the history of Joseph when he was sold into captivity by his own brothers. Watch how it unfolds. ²³So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; ²⁴and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it. ²⁵Then they sat down to eat a meal." Just look at that, their brother who has this special tunic daddy gave him, they're jealous of him so they take everything he has and they strip him down naked and they throw him in a pit in which he will surely die and now that they've stripped him of everything he has they sit down and eat a meal. What had the leadership of the nation Israel done? Hadn't they done the same thing? Weren't they banqueting at the expense of the poor whom they had stripped of all their possessions? Just as the brothers were not concerned at all for Joseph so the leaders of the kingdom were not concerned at all for the people. They were living it up at their expense. Amos sees this and he says you should be grieving but just like Joseph's brothers you did not. You had a party. Turn over to Gen 42:21. Here's a little more information about what happened the day they threw Joseph in the pit. ²¹Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the

distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen;” Apparently as they put Joseph down in the pit he was pleading with them, please don’t do this thing, this is your own flesh and blood and they saw the distress he was in and yet they would not listen. And so Amos very cleverly makes an analogy between Joseph and his brothers and the nation Israel and its leaders. Joseph is like the nation in deep spiritual distress and his brothers are like the leaders of the nation who could care less. They’d rather sit down and have a fine meal, dress up real nice, listen to some music and get drunk on a bowl of wine. What kind of leadership is this? It's poor leadership.

Do we do this? Do we see brothers and sisters in Christ in utter ruin, being trampled upon by others and we look the other way, fill our lives with self-indulgences to stamp out the remembrance of these people? I fear I do and I fear many of us do. We’d rather just indulge ourselves and not have pity over those who are in deep spiritual distress.

Verse 7, **Therefore**, and it has been noted by scholars that whenever Amos uses the word **Therefore**, whatever follows is very troubling and it is. **Therefore, they will now go into exile at the head of the exiles.** Look at that. Now the leaders of the nation when they are in chains are being led into exile. They who are foremost of the nations (v 1) shall be the foremost **of the exiles.** You always hear that the first shall be last and the last will be first. Not in this case, here the first shall be first. **And the sprawlers banqueting will pass away.** All the big partying **will pass away**; all the luxurious feasts, all the drinking, all the reclining.

Verses 7-11 contrast with vv 4-6. If v 4-6 describe great luxurious living then vv 7-11 great defeat and death. **⁸The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, the LORD God of armies has declared: “I loathe the arrogance of Jacob, And detest his citadels; Therefore I will deliver up *the* city and all it contains.” ⁹And it will be, if ten men are left in one house, they will die. ¹⁰Then one’s uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out *his* bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, “Is anyone else with you?” And that one will say, “No one.” Then he will answer, “Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned.” ¹¹For behold, the LORD is going to**

command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.

Verse 8, **The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself**, for whom greater can He swear by? There is none so He swears on His own immutable nature. **the LORD God of armies has declared: “I loathe the arrogance of Jacob.** That word **loathe** is a bit weak, it’s the word I abhor, I hate the **arrogance** or “pride” of **Jacob**. Pride cometh before the fall. **And I detest his citadels.** The **citadel** we think of as a military fortification but in Amos it refers to the great palaces inlaid with ivory containing couches of fine wood inlaid with ivory, the luxurious dwellings purchased at the expense of the poor. **Therefore the city and all it contains** will fall, rather “each and every” city. This is not just Samaria, the Hebrew doesn’t have the article **the** before **city**, it should be translated **each and every city** of the northern kingdom. And so once again the word **Therefore** is followed by words that cause trembling. This is a very different picture than the former. Before they were feasting in great luxury, after they are dying in a great plague.

And it will be, verse 9, if ten men are left in one house, they will die. The converted perfect here is saying that in the future military attack maybe ten men are going to hide in a house to try to escape the enemy and if they do then in the aftermath **they will die**. We’re not told exactly how but the commentators think and I think the text points this direction too. After the armies have passed through there are so many dead corpses around that a plague will erupt and in the aftermath, even those who hid **will die** from disease.

Verse 10 gives the details. **Then one’s uncle, or his undertaker, will lift him up to carry out his bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, “Is anyone else with you?” And that one will say, “No one.” Then he will answer, “Keep quiet. For the name of the LORD is not to be mentioned.”** Now the **uncle** is a kinsman, a near relation and he is the only one that’s left and he has to come to the house to make funeral preparations for the bodies in the house. Or it could be **his undertaker** it says, but the Hebrew construction indicates not one or the other but that they are one and the same person. The kinsman is the undertaker. So that’s one point you want to make in the text. Another point you want to make is that the **undertaker** literally means the

“burner.” The kinsman is coming to take the corpse and burn it in the fire and not just simply bury it in the ground. Burial in the ground was the acceptable funeral practice except in certain cases when for example certain sexual sins were committed by the person or you read of someone like Achan or Saul who rebelled strongly against the Lord. But the Jews thought it an abomination to burn the body. They realized that the body was made by God and even though fallen and sinful it was not to be cremated. The Jews argued from Gen 3:19 that since man was made from the dust and would return to dust, they said this was a process man was not to intervene in in any way. So as in Amos 2:1 it was considered sinful to cremate and that’s the way both the OT and NT look upon it. I often get questions related to cremation and I don’t instruct you what to do but I can tell you that in the Scriptures it is not looked upon favorably, it has never been the practice of the truly orthodox people in the Bible, it was not the case with the body of Jesus Christ. It was the practice of the pagans and personally I don’t want it. You can just put me in a pine box with wooden nails and six guns at my side. But I leave it to you for your own decision. I have always thought that the body is not intrinsically evil, if it were then it couldn’t be resurrected. But the Lord sees fit to resurrect our bodies so they must be important. I don’t think if you cremate someone God’s not going to resurrect them or anything like that of course, just that the Bible points to a natural process. I’d go further to say the embalming and all of that is just as out of line biblically. The body is to be left alone and buried. In America, as in most cultures, we have some peculiar burial customs and it’s become big business. So this is a strange text in the Hebrew since they didn’t cremate because here they do cremate and we think the reason is because there’s so much death that disease has begun to spread and they are forced to burn the bodies to try to stop the plague. So when the kinsman comes he **will lift him up to carry out his bones from the house, and he will say to the one who is in the innermost part of the house, “Is anyone else with you?”** And this is the survivor who is hiding in the innermost part of the house who is afraid to come out lest he be poisoned by the plague **And that one will say, “No one.” Then he will answer, “Keep quiet.** And then he says. **For the name of YHWH is not to be mentioned.”** Hush, make no mention of the name of YHWH and we’re not told exactly why they are to remain silent but it may be that the pagan philosophy at the time was that if you mentioned the name of a god then the god would respond to you. And if this is the case then the man is saying, don’t mention the name YHWH because then YHWH will know that you have

survived and He may send the plague upon you. So just stay quiet, don't mention His name.

And then the further explanation for why they should remain quiet, **For behold, the LORD is going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.** The Lord is sending total devastation and if He knows you're still alive He may send death to your door. So it's very sobering in that even the Israelites by this time are willing to admit that this is the Lord's doing. The Lord is their chief enemy. And He is the one who is **going to command that the great house be smashed to pieces and the small house to fragments.** In other words, every house in the northern kingdom whether great or small, upper or lower class, it's going to be demolished.

Finally, verses 12-14 we read of the absurdity that one could escape disciplinary wrath. **¹²Do horses run on rocks? Or does one plow them with oxen? Yet you have turned justice into poison And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood, ¹³You who rejoice in Lodebar, And say, "Have we not by our *own* strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?" ¹⁴"For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD God of hosts, "And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the brook of the Arabah."**

There are some strange thing said here, **Do horses run on rocks?** Literally a "steep cliff." Of course not, it's an absurdity. **Or does one plow the sea with oxen,** there's another pointing of the word **them** in the Hebrew it could be **sea, s-e-a,** or it could be **them** and refer to the rocks. In either case it's an absurdity. Oxen don't plow seas and they don't plow rocks. No one does such things, **Yet you have** committed a moral absurdity Amos is saying, **you have turned justice into poison[wood] And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.** We've heard it before and we'll hear it again. They were not issuing **justice** in the courts, they were poisoning the courts; nor had they upheld the **fruit of righteousness,** but have **turned it into wormwood** or "bitterness." Absurd as it is it is what they had done. They had turned their backs on the word of God in the covenant and this was as absurd as running a team of horses along the edge of a cliff. They did not see the danger. They were frivolous with the word of God. They took it lightly

what He had said. They disregarded this part and that part. They played games. The word of God was not respected or submitted to or learned. It was cast out.

¹³**You who rejoice in Lodebar** which means “a thing of nothing.” Here are the great boasters in the society. You who rejoice in a thing of nothing and say, **“Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?”** They were taking all the credit for these military victories. Look at what we did by our own hands. We are so great and so mighty. Where is the thankfulness of heart to the Lord for His work on their behalf. They take all the credit for themselves. I wonder how many times we see a victory in our own life and we take all the credit and we pat ourselves on the back because we’re so great. And we never think to thank the Lord, we think only of what we have done.

The judgment in v 14, **“For behold, I am going to raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel,”** you thought you won those battles in your own strength and now I’m going to send a nation against you. That’s a terrifying thought. For the Lord to say to His own people, His covenanted people from whom His lovingkindness will never depart, that He is going to raise up a nation that is not His people and bring them **against...**His people. That’s as terrifying thought as I can imagine. **“And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath To the brook of the Arabah.”** Hamath was far to the north where their boundary under Jonah was expanded, in 2 Kgs 14:25 it is called Lebo-Hamath. **Arabah** was far to the south and composed the southern border. So the whole of the land would come under the Lord’s armies which in this case turns out to be the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III in 722BC.

Now, let’s close with the question we started with. “Who is responsible for Israel’s destruction?” Some of you might say, well, it was the failed leadership - the leaders of the nation Israel. Vv 3 and 6 brought the judgment on themselves because they did not following the word of God and they did not grieve over Joseph. Another one of you might answer, well, in v 8 the whole nation Israel is held responsible when the Lord says, “I abhor the arrogance of Jacob.” They’d become prideful and their pride cometh before the fall. They should have been seeking God but having sought their own religious system, with their own festivities, their own rituals, their own ceremonies, they

brought about swift destruction on themselves. It was the people's fault. Or you might say, well it was the Assyrian's. The Assyrians had a bigger army, they had better weapons and Israel's defeat is due to the Assyrian army. And then one of you who is very biblical in orientation might say, actually it was the Lord who in v 8 gave up the city. And it was the Lord in v 11 who commanded the destruction. And you might cite Amos 3:6 where it says, "If a calamity occurs in a city has the Lord not done it?" And after all four answers had been given I would say you're right, all four of you are right. It is the age old difficulty of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. God is sovereign and ultimately everything that happens in history can be traced back to Him and the order He established at Creation. But at the same time the responsibility for the Fall, evil and suffering is unquestionably laid on man. But even the space-time historic Fall is in the plan of God.

None of you in the end is going to be able to say, Lord I was a failed leader because of You. He didn't coerce you to fail. That was your choice. Every man does what he wants to do. None of you is going to be able to excuse your responsibility before God by blaming it on God or anyone else. We all have to answer to Him. If you're an unbeliever then you have to answer for why you have not lived up to the light which you have received. If you are a believer then you have to answer for why you did not use the resources the Lord gave you. So, let's learn the lesson of divine sovereignty and human responsibility once more and live up to the light we have received. Seek God and live.

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