

### Introduction:

A little over a week ago, I was talking to Terry Francis, one of my best friends, and he shared all this information with me. I told him then, "This is too good, I'm stealing this." So, before I go any further, I have to give props to Terry, but this was just so good, I wanted to share it with you as well.

Prior to the 1900's, the average American ate about 5 lbs. of sugar per year.<sup>1</sup> In 1999, the average American ate 158 lbs.<sup>2</sup> In 1942, the average American consumed 60 12-oz. servings of cokes (if you're not from the South, that means pop, soda or carbonated beverage, not just Coca-Cola). However, in 1997, the average was 576 12-oz. servings of coke.<sup>3</sup> In the 1950s, the average American ate 4 lbs. of French fries per year. In 2001, we ate an average of 30 lbs. of the golden fried goodness.<sup>4</sup> Only 28% of Americans meet the USDA guidelines for daily fruit consumption. Only 32% meet the USDA guidelines for vegetable consumption. And only 11% meet the USDA guidelines for both.<sup>5</sup> This has caused a very interesting and counterintuitive phenomenon. The U.S. is one of the most overweight nations. However, despite that weight, we are also surprisingly undernourished. That is, we're feeding our bodies, but we're not nourishing our bodies.

Sadly, I fear our nation is probably eating spiritually about the way it is physically. Let's face it, we like our religion like we do our food—fast, easy, tasty, low on nutrients and sugar-coated. As a result, many are eating all the time, but slowly starving themselves to spiritual death. **Amos 8:11-13** presents a similar picture. God promised them a famine—not of bread and water, but of hearing the Word. This was not a punishment per se, but a natural consequence. That is, God wasn't saying, "Watch out, despite your best efforts I'm going to cause a spiritual famine." Rather, He was explaining their actions would cause this spiritual famine. In reality, it had already begun. God was simply warning that He would finish what the Israelites had started. I know our world largely claims to be religious, but is it really getting the spiritual diet it needs? What about us? We eat, but are we being nourished? Consider the undernourishment of Israel in the days of Amos and let's look at ourselves. Then we'll take a look at the answer for real nourishment.

### Discussion:

- I. The junk food that undernourished Israel?
  - A. Israel was undernourished because they dieted on religious corruption.
    1. Amos's prophecy harped on this theme above all others. The Israelites were going to be judged because they were not partaking of God's true religion. They had dumbed it down, twisted it, perverted it. They were constantly involved in religious activity but it did them no good because it was corrupt. Just as rotten food doesn't strengthen us but makes us sick, the Israelite religion was killing them from the inside.
    2. According to **Amos 2:11-12**, the Israelites commanded God's prophets to be quiet. Then **Amos 5:10** says they hated the one who gave good advice or spoke the truth. They didn't want to hear truth, they wanted to hear good things about themselves. Consider the practical example of this in **Amos 7:10-17**. Of course, the New Testament talks about this in **II Timothy 4:3**.
    3. While the Israelites followed a form of religion similar to the one God established, they had changed it. When Jeroboam split from Rehoboam in **I Kings 12**, he built altars in Bethel and Dan. God rebuked Israel for this false worship in **Amos 3:14; 8:14**. They were constantly religious. They worshipped all the time. But God said it was a waste in **Amos 4:4-5** because they weren't doing what God asked. Then God drove His point home when in **Amos 5:21-24** He said He hated even the religious things the Israelites did. Yes, they were religious, but their religion was corrupt.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.healingdaily.com/detoxification-diet/sugar.htm> (cited on February 12, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cspinet.org/new/sugar\\_limit.html](http://www.cspinet.org/new/sugar_limit.html) (cited on February 12, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> <http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/973023516.html> (cited on February 12, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.gladwell.com/2001/2001\\_03\\_05\\_a\\_fries.htm](http://www.gladwell.com/2001/2001_03_05_a_fries.htm) (cited on February 12, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/03/070319090511.htm> (cited on February 12, 2009)

4. We need to ask about ourselves? Is our religious service nourishing? Or are we spinning our wheels. Will God say of us that He hates our worship because we aren't really worshiping Him, but ourselves, doing what we want? Do our religion and our religious practices provide us with nourishment spiritually or corruption? Are we feeding on God and drinking from the streams of life giving water of His Spirit? Or are we turning to broken cisterns and rotting meat?
  5. Finally, the Israelites should have seen how useless what they were doing was. In **Amos 8:4-6**, they were not excited about their religious activity. It had become a checklist item to be hurried and finished so they could get on to what was important to them. This demonstrates a cycle. The corrupt religion is never in a vacuum. Rather, the religion becomes corrupted usually because the people are also feeding on other spiritual junk food. But as the religion becomes corrupted and empty of significance, they increase their other spiritual junk food. The cycle simply continues. Consider three other sources of junk food the Israelites consumed destroying their souls.
- B. Israel was undernourished because they dieted on self-reliance.
1. One statement in the book demonstrates a real problem for the Israelites. **Amos 6:13** shows the Israelites rejoicing in self-reliance. "Have we not by our own strength captured Karnaim for ourselves?" (ESV). Your translation may say they captured "horns" by their own strength. Horns were a symbol of strength and power. The Israelites were rejoicing that by their own strength they had taken the strength of others captive.
  2. Instead of relying on God, they relied on themselves. In this state, they determined they didn't need God. That's why in **Amos 6:10**, they didn't even want to say the name of the Lord. They were feeding on themselves, relying on themselves. No wonder their worship of God had been corrupted with self-will.
  3. Again, we must not just look to the past, but look at our present and future. Do we rely on self? Do we think God is just for the really hard times, but from day to day we're good on our own? Do we look around us and see all that we have accomplished by the strength of our own hands? Or do we acknowledge God in all we do?
- C. Israel was undernourished because they dieted on materialism.
1. **Amos 6:1, 4-6** demonstrates the materialism of many of the Israelites. They lay in beds of ivory. They stretched out on couches. They ate lamb and steak. They had time to sit idly around plucking on the harp or inventing new musical instruments. They drank wine from bowls and anointed themselves with oils. They were covered up in material goods.
  2. However, they did not mourn the ruin of Joseph. That is, they didn't even notice it. What ruin? They were in the lap of luxury. They counted themselves blessed. They saw their material goods as a blessing. God must be on their side because look at all they had. He would not allow them to be judged, He had granted them such blessing they must be on His good side. They were wrong. They were ignoring what was going on around them.
  3. Frankly, I fear this most for myself and our society. We have so much. We talk about all our blessings. We can easily have the idea because we are so financially blessed God must approve all we're doing. That simply isn't the case. If we're feeding on materialism, we can cloak it in talk of the blessings of God, but we're still going to starve spiritually because there is no eternal satisfaction or fulfillment that comes from material goods. We just can't take them with us into eternity.
- D. Israel was undernourished because they dieted on immorality.
1. **Amos 2:6-8** provides a dreadful picture of the Israelites. They sold the righteous and trampled the poor. A father and son used the same prostitute, lying down even by the altar, using garments for bedding they had taken from the poor when they loaned them money. They were immoral and even mixed their immorality with their religion.
  2. **Amos 3:10** says the Israelites didn't even know how to do what was right. Rather, they stored up violence and robbery in their strongholds. They didn't pursue the righteousness and good deeds of God. Rather, they pursued the selfish deeds of immoral wickedness.
  3. What about us? I'm sure we can say aren't as bad as all that. I mean, we've never committed adultery by the Lord's Supper table or anything. Yet, do we have to go as far as the Israelites to be undernourished like they were? How much of our mental diet comes from

watching, reading and listening to immorality? When we are entertained by sin, it will corrupt our hearts. Are we really different from the world or are we just making sure to keep an arm's length between us and the world? If that is all we're doing, then as the world moves, we'll follow right behind.

E. Israel was religious. However, they were starving spiritually and heading for a spiritual famine. They were feeding on junk food. We must not be like them. What is the answer? I wish I could say God gave them the answer and they followed it. But that is not so. Instead they just continued on in their malnourished ways until they were finally destroyed and captured by Assyria. However, we can look at another story and see a malnourished group of God's people who did turn around, who did return to life and strength. We find it in the story of king Josiah in **II Kings 22-23** and **II Chronicles 34-35**.

II. We need real soul food like Josiah.

A. Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was one of the wickedest kings of Judah and he led all of Judah to stray (**II Kings 21:9**). He was so wicked, God used him as the benchmark for why Judah would be judged and taken captive by Babylon (**II Kings 21:11-15**). Manasseh repented later in life (**II Chronicles 33:12**). However, the evil influence held sway throughout Judah and his son, Amon, followed his wickedness, not his repentance (**II Chronicles 33:21-23**). Amon's servants conspired to kill him and Josiah was made king in his place (**II Chronicles 33:25**). Josiah was eight years old when he became king (**II Chronicles 34:1-2**). He inherited a spiritually undernourished Judah that had followed after self-reliance, materialism, immorality and corrupt religion. However, Josiah changed things. He did what was right in the sight of God (**II Chronicles 34:2**). We learn from him how to turn things around and get back on the nutritional track of God's proper soul food.

B. He sought God.

1. In **II Chronicles 34:3**, Josiah began to seek God. He was sixteen years old. God had told the Israelites to do this in **Amos 5:4**, saying, "Seek me and live" (ESV).
2. Instead of self-reliance, self-will and self-worship, Josiah turned his back on the evils of his father and looked for God and God's ways. This is pretty amazing because we'll learn as we keep reading that he didn't know the Law yet. He didn't have the Jewish scriptures to tell him what to do. At this time, he simply did the best he could. He knew there was a God of Judah that he was to follow and he started trying to find Him.
3. We need to seek God. Instead of seeking popularity, instead of seeking entertainment, instead of seeking money, we must seek God. Instead of seeking for what is easy, what is cheap and what is pleasing to us, we must seek God.

C. He got rid of the junk food.

1. In **II Chronicles 34:3-7**, Josiah got rid of the idol worship through Judah, punishing those who had participated and led it. He even went up into the lands of Israel and took away the idolatry there (keep in mind, this is after Assyria had already taken Israel captive). According to **II Kings 23:15-18**, he fulfilled the prophecies of the time of Jeroboam and destroyed the altars at Bethel, the ones Amos repeatedly rebuked the Israelites for using.
2. To have spiritual life, we don't just add in some good food with the junk, we must first get rid of the junk food. The junk food will negate the nutrients of God's soul food.

D. He repaired the house of the Lord.

1. In **II Chronicles 34:8**, when Josiah was 26, he began to repair the house of the Lord. By itself, just reading this might not seem to have a transferable point for us. However, I can't help but think of **Haggai 1:5-11**, when God rebuked the Jews after they returned from captivity for building their own houses before building the house of the Lord. When Josiah turned to build the house of the Lord, he was putting God first. He was relying on God. Instead of simply building his own house, he built the house of the Lord.
2. We need to build the house of the Lord; we need to seek the things of the Lord first (cf. **Matthew 6:33**). To do this we need to rely on the Lord instead of ourselves or material goods. Even in **Amos 2:9-11**, God stressed this to the Jews. He was the one who had destroyed their enemies. They had not.

E. He fed on God's Word.

1. In **II Chronicles 34:19**, Josiah finally heard the word of the Lord. He was pricked and convicted. In **II Chronicles 34:30-32**, Josiah read the law to the people and made a covenant to follow the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord was to be their guide.
2. This is the ultimate soul food. God's word is described in various ways throughout the Bible.
  - a. It is the sword of the Spirit in **Ephesians 6:17**.
  - b. It is a two-edged sword in **Hebrews 4:12**.
  - c. It is a lamp in **Psalms 119:105**.
  - d. It is a mirror in **James 1:23**.
  - e. It is the rock in **Matthew 7:24-27**.
  - f. It is the seed of life in **I Peter 1:23-25**.
3. However, it is often connected with food.
  - a. It is pure milk by which we grow in **I Peter 2:2-3**.
  - b. It is described as milk and also solid food in **Hebrews 5:13-14**.
  - c. It is sweeter than honey according to **Psalms 19:10**.
  - d. It is the bread of life in **John 6:54-58, 68**.

### **Conclusion:**

If we want to be nourished, we must not pursue fun, games and entertainment. We must not try to figure out how to trick people into coming around and sticking around. We need to simply get into the Word, surrender ourselves to it. Feed on it. We need the soul food God offers. If so, then we like Josiah will avoid the wrath of God and instead receive His mercy and grace (**II Chronicles 34:23-28**). Don't be a junk food Christian. Rely on God's soul food and be nourished unto life and eternity in heaven.