

Amos 5 - Heresies, Idols and the Coming Judgment of Samaria (Northern Kingdom)

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Amos 5

(3) Certainty of Israel's judgment: funeral dirge (Amos 5:1—6:14)

(A) Mourning because of God's impending judgment (5:1-3)

(a) Dissemination of the nation (5:1)

1 Hear this word which I am taking up for you as a **song of mourning**, house of Israel:

1 Hear this word which I take up for you as a dirge, O house of Israel:

1 "Hear this accusation that I am bringing against you: 'A dirge, house of Israel:

1 Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel.

- This section is a "proleptic funeral lament" in which God announced, through Amos, the end of the northern kingdom

- "...song of mourning" - *qinah*, a lament that was sung at the funeral of a friend, relative or prominent person (Cf. 2 Sam 1:17-27; 3:33-34; 2 Chr 35:25)

— The prophets used the song of mourning genre to prophesy the death of a city, a people or a nation (Cf. Jer 7:29; 9:10-11,17-22; Lam; Ezek 19; 26:17-18; 27:2-32; 28:12-19; 32:2)

— Amos announced Israel's death at the height of its prosperity under Jeroboam II

— Amos' audience hearing this lament would be as jarring as reading one's own obituary

(b) Dissemination of Israel's army (5:2-3)

2 She has **fallen**, she will not rise again— The virgin Israel. She lies unnoticed on her land; There is no one to raise her up.

2 She has fallen, she will not rise again— The virgin Israel. She *lies* neglected on her land; There is none to raise her up.

2 Fallen is Israel the virgin—never to rise again! She is abandoned on her own land, with no one to raise her up.'

2 The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is forsaken upon her land; there is none to raise her up.

- "Virgin Israel" in the prime of her beauty and glory, "has fallen" fatally; she will never rise to her former position again

- No one came to her aid, not even Yahweh (Cf. Judges 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is 2:6)

3 For this is what the Lord GOD says: "The city which goes forth a thousand *strong* Will have a hundred left, And the one which goes forth a hundred *strong* Will have ten left to the house of Israel."

3 For thus says the Lord GOD, "The city which goes forth a thousand *strong* Will have a hundred left, And the one which goes forth a hundred *strong* Will have ten left to the house of Israel."

3 "For this is what the Lord GOD says: 'The city that is sending out a thousand will have a hundred left; The city that is sending out a hundred will have ten left of the house of Israel.'"

3 For thus saith the Lord GOD; The city that went out by a thousand shall leave an hundred, and that which went forth by an hundred shall leave ten, to the house of Israel.

- Israelite cities would send 1000 soldiers against Israel's enemy, only to see only 100 survive; smaller town that would send 100 soldiers would only see 10 survive

(B) Reasons to seek the Lord (5:4-15)

(a) Seek God instead of cultic worship (5:4-5a)

4 For this is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "**Seek Me** so that you may live.

4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, "Seek Me that you may live.

4 "For this is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: 'Seek me and live,

4 For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

- "...Seek Me" - *darash*, to seek, to search after; God invited individual Israelites to seek Him so they might live

— Even though national judgment and death were now inevitable, individuals could still survive

— Announcements of impending judgment almost always allow for the possibility of individual repentance (Cf. Jer 18:1-10)

(b) Seek God because of His sovereignty (5:5b-9)

(i) Sovereignty over judgment (5:5b-7)

5 "But do not resort to **Bethel** And do not come to **Gilgal**, Nor cross over to **Beersheba**; For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity And Bethel will come to nothing.

5 "But do not resort to Bethel And do not come to Gilgal, Nor cross over to Beersheba; For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity And Bethel will come to trouble.

5 but don't seek Bethel. Don't go to Gilgal, and don't pass over to Beer-sheba. Because Gilgal will surely go into captivity, and Bethel will come to nothing.

5 But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought.

- The Israelites should not seek the Lord at the popular Israelite shrines at Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba; these were important places of worship previously, but now God had called His people to worship Him at Jerusalem

6 "Seek the LORD so that you may live, Or He will break through like a fire, **house of Joseph**, And it will consume with no one to extinguish *it* for Bethel,

6 "Seek the LORD that you may live, Or He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, And it will consume with none to quench *it* for Bethel,

6 'Seek the LORD and live! Otherwise, he may break out like a fire in the house of Joseph and devour Bethel, and there will be no one to extinguish it.

6 Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

- Amos, as well as the LORD (v4), invited the Israelites to seek *Yahweh* by doing good and refraining from evil so that they might live (Cf. v14-15)
- "...house of Joseph" - Ephraim and Manasseh (sons of Joseph) = Northern Kingdom (Obadiah 18; Zech 10:6); Ephraim was the northern kingdom's leading tribe

An Accusation of Legal Justice

7 For those who turn justice into **wormwood**, And throw righteousness to the earth."

7 For those who turn justice into wormwood And cast righteousness down to the earth."

7 Those of you who are making justice taste bitter, and who have thrown righteousness to the ground:

7 Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth,

- Verses 7-9: The loftiest of inspired poetry...

- "...wormwood" - *la-enah*, a bitter tasting and poisonous root (Deut 29:18)

- The reason for *Yahweh*'s consuming judgment of Israel was that the Israelites were turning sweet justice into something bitter, and were throwing righteousness to the ground with disrespect

— These figures picture the Israelites' total contempt for what was right (Cf. Prov 1:3; 2:9; 8:20; 21:3; Is 1:21; 5:7; 28:17)

— Right conduct was the proper action, and justice was the result, but the Israelites had despised both in their courts. Instead of the judicial system functioning like medicine, healing wrongs and soothing the oppressed, the Israelites had turned it into poison.

(ii) Sovereignty over creation (5:8)

8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion, And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day *into* night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, **The LORD is His name.**

8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day *into* night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The LORD is His name.

8 Seek the one who fashions the Pleiades and Orion, who turns the deep darkness into morning, who darkens day into night, who calls out to the waters of the sea, pouring them out onto the surface of the earth— the LORD is his name.

8 Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth 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:

- Since *Yahweh* had made "the Pleiades and Orion" two of the constellations of stars, here representing billions of galaxies, He could just as easily bring His will to pass on earth

- Since Yahweh brings light out of darkness and darkens the day at night, He could change the fate of Israel from prosperity to poverty
- Since God also calls the "waters of the sea" to form clouds, and then in blessing empties them on the land ("surface of the earth"), He can just as easily pour out judgment on the land as well.
- "...The LORD is his name" - YHWH, the covenant God of Israel
- His power should make us respect and serve Him. This is as valid today as it was 2700 years ago (Deut 10:12; Joshua 4:24; Matt 10:28)

(iii) Sovereignty over the strong (5:9)

9 *It is* He who makes destruction flash upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress.

9 It is He who flashes forth *with* destruction upon the strong, So that destruction comes upon the fortress.

9 It is he who is raining sudden destruction upon the strong like lightning, so that ruin comes upon the fortress.

9 That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

(c) Seek God because of Israel's sins (5:10-13)

(i) Injustice (5:10)

10 They hate him who rebukes in the gate, And they despise him who speaks *with* integrity.

10 They hate him who reproves in the gate, And they abhor him who speaks *with* integrity.

10 They have hated those who are presenting their cases in court, detesting the one who speaks truthfully.

10 They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.

- Amos now cites other reasons for coming judgment...

- The Israelites hated people who reprovved evildoers in the city gate of Samaria, where the court convened, as well as witnesses who spoke the truth

— When influential people in a society despise the truth, there is little hope that it will remain stable and secure

(ii) Self-enrichment at the expense of the poor (5:11-12)

11 Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor And take a tribute of grain from them, *Though* you have built houses of cut stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted beautiful vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.

11 Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor And exact a tribute of grain from them, *Though* you have built houses of well-hewn stone, Yet you will not live in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine.

11 'Therefore, since you trample the poor continuously, taxing his grain, building houses of stone in which you won't live and planting fine vineyards from which you won't drink—

11 Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.

- These wicked people imposed high rent and taxes of grain on the poor in order to keep them as dependent tenants on the land (Ex 23:2,6)

- The oppressors used this illegally obtained income to build themselves luxurious homes — The Lord promised that He would make it impossible for these evil people to live in their fancy houses and enjoy the fruits of their vineyards

12 For I know your offenses are many and your sins are great, *You* who are hostile to the righteous *and* accept bribes, And turn away the poor *from justice* at the gate.

12 For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, *You* who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.

12 and because I know that your transgressions are many, and your sins are numerous as you oppose the righteous, taking bribes as a ransom, and turning away the poor in court—

12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.

- *Yahweh* knew the many "offenses" of His covenant and the great "sins" that these perverters of justice committed

— They had distressed the righteous by their unrighteous conduct, accepted bribes from the wealthy, and they had made it impossible for the poor to get fair treatment in the courts

(iii) Silence in the presence of evil (5:13)

13 Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps quiet, because it is an evil time.

13 Therefore at such a time the prudent person keeps silent, for it is an evil time.

13 therefore the prudent person remains silent at such a time, for the time is evil.

13 Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.

- Amos is not condoning silence in the face of evil; he is simply describing the evil times, not a prescription for right behavior

— He's saying that if a person at this time wanted to look out for his own best interest, he would remain silent

(d) Seek God because He is gracious to those who... (5:14-15)

(i) Seek good not evil (5:14)

14 Seek good and not evil, so that you may live; And so may the LORD God of armies be with you, Just as you have said!

14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said!

14 'Pursue good and not evil, so that you may live, and this is what will happen: The LORD God of the Heavenly Armies will be with you, as you have been claiming.

14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken.

- Again the prophet urged the Israelites to pursue good rather than evil so they could live (Cf. v4-6)

— Then the sovereign, (Lord) God of armies would truly be with them, as they professed He was even as they practiced their injustice (Cf. Num 23:21; Deut 20:4; 31:8; Judges 6:12; Is 8:10; Zeph 3:15,17)

— He would become their Defender rather than their Prosecutor (Cf. Rom 12:9)

(ii) Establish justice (5:15)

15 Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the **gate**! Perhaps the LORD God of armies Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

15 Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the LORD God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

15 Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in court— perhaps the LORD, the God of the Heavenly Armies, will be gracious to the survivors of Joseph."

15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

- They should "hate evil," "love good," and "establish justice in the gate

— If they did, perhaps then the sovereign God of armies would be gracious to the faithful remnant in the Northern Kingdom and deliver them

- "...gate" - a metonym for the courts

(C) Mourning because of God's impending judgment (5:16-17)

(a) The mourners (5:16-17a)

16 Therefore this is what the LORD God of armies, the Lord says: "There is mourning in all the public squares, And in all the streets they say, 'Oh no! Oh no!' They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to mourning rites.

16 Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, "There is wailing in all the plazas, And in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to lamentation.

16 Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of the Heavenly Armies, the Lord, says: 'There will be dirges in all of the streets; and in all of the highways they will cry out in anguish. They will call the farmer to mourning and those who lament to grieve.

16 Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing.

- Everyone would mourn the conditions of divine judgment, not just the professional mourners, even the poor farmers

(b) God's coming is the cause of mourning (5:17b)

17 "And in all the vineyards *there is* mourning, Because I will pass through the midst of you," says the LORD.

17 "And in all the vineyards *there is* wailing, Because I will pass through the midst of you," says the Lord.

17 And in all of the vineyards there will be mourning when I pass through your midst,' says the LORD."

17 And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD.

- The vineyards were often places of joy and merriment, but would be full of mourning, along with the streets

- God promised to pass through the midst of His people, not to bless them, but to blast them with punishment

— God passed through Egypt with similar devastating results (Cf. Ex 11:4-7; 12:12-13)

(D) Two concluding woes (Amos 5:18—6:14)

(a) Concerning the false security of religion (5:18-27)

(i) False security regarding the Day of the Lord (5:18-20)

18 **Woe** to you who are longing for **the day of the LORD**, For what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light;

18 Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, For what purpose *will* the day of the Lord *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light;

18 "Woe to those who are craving the Day of the LORD! How is it to your benefit, this Day of the LORD? It's a day of darkness to you, and not light.

18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.

- "Woe" - announced coming doom

- "...the day of the LORD" - in Scripture is any day in which God intervenes in history in a dramatic way. It is in contrast to man's day, in which events seem to rock along without any evidence of God's activity.

— When the prophets announced a coming "day of the LORD," they were referring to a time when God's hand would be obvious in human affairs because He was doing something unusual

— Former prophets had spoken of a day in which *Yahweh* would conquer His enemies and the enemies of His people, and establish His sovereign rule over the world (Deut 33:2-3; Joel 3:18-21)

— The Israelites knew that this was going to be a time of great divine blessing, but Amos informed them that it would at first be a time of divine chastisement. It would be a time of "darkness" rather than "light" (Cf. Jer 46:10; Joel 3:1-17; Zeph 3:8; Zech 14:1-3). God would judge His people before He blessed them.

19 As when a man flees from a lion
And a bear confronts him,
Or he goes home, leans with
his hand against the wall,
And a snake bites him.

19 As when a man flees from a lion
And a bear meets him,
Or goes home, leans his hand
against the wall
And a snake bites him.

19 It will be like a man who runs from a lion,
only to encounter a bear;
or who comes home,
leans his hand against a wall,
and a serpent bites him!

19 As if a man did flee from a lion,
and a bear met him;
or went into the house,
and leaned his hand on the wall,
and a serpent bit him.

- The coming day of the Lord would mean inescapable tragedy for Israel

— The Israelites may have thought they had escaped one enemy, but they would have to face another

20 *Will* the day of the LORD not *be* darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it?

20 *Will* not the day of the Lord *be* darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it?

20 Will not the Day of the LORD be darkness,
and not light— pitch black at that,
without a ray of sunshine?"

20 Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness,
and not light? even very dark,
and no brightness in it?

- Rhetorically, Amos stated that the coming day of the LORD would be a day characterized by "darkness" and "gloom" (despair), rather than by bright sunlight (joy; Cf. Joel 2:1-2,10-11; Zeph 1:14-15).

A brighter part of the day of the LORD was also coming (Cf. 9:11-15; Jer 30:8-11; Hosea 2:16-23; Micah 4:6-7; Zeph 3:11-20), but first a dark part would appear. The Israelites wanted to hasten the good aspects of the day of the LORD, but they wanted to forget

about the bad aspects of it. This prophecy found partial fulfillment when the Assyrians overran Israel and took most of the people into exile in 722 BC. The later Tribulation period for Israel, which will precede her millennial day of blessing—which other prophets revealed—will be similar to what Amos predicted here, but I think it was not what God was foretelling here. The Northern Kingdom's invasion was a foreview of what will happen to all Israel in the Tribulation.

(ii) False security regarding religious ritual (5:21-26)

21 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your festive assemblies.

21 "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.

21 "I hate—I despise—your festival days, and your solemn convocations stink.

21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

- The Israelites enjoyed participating in the religious "festivals" and "assemblies" in which they *professed* to worship God

— It's not certain how faithfully the apostate residents of the northern kingdom observed the Jewish feast days, so not sure if these are the "festivals" and "assemblies" Amos refers to here, or other ones

— Nonetheless, God hated the Israelites' worship assemblies because the people were not worshipping from their hearts (Cf. "I hate," "I reject" and "not do I delight" sums up how much God detested this type of worship.

22 "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fattened oxen.

22 "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.

22 And if you send up burnt offerings to me as well as your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I consider your peace offerings of fattened cattle.

22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

- Burnt offerings and grain offerings were voluntary; they expressed the worshipper's personal dedication to the Lord and the dedication of their works to the Lord (Lev 1-2)

- Peace offerings were also voluntary, and expressed appreciation for the fellowship that God had made possible for His redeemed people (Lev 3)

— All three of these offerings were sweet-smelling to the LORD, and were primarily offerings of worship, rather than offerings to secure atonement for sins committed

— God said that, because the worshipers did not offer with genuine worship, He would not "accept" (lit. smell) or take any notice of any of these offerings, which represented all the others (Cf. 4:4-5)

— In v21-22, the plural pronouns "you" and "your" in Hebrew indicate that God was addressing the whole nation

A Call for Individual Repentance

23 "Take away from Me the noise of **your** songs; I will not even listen to the sound of **your** harps.

23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.

23 Spare me your noisy singing— I will not listen to your musical instruments.

23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

- "...your" [2x] - the singular pronoun indicates that the call is for individuals to repent

- God told His people to take away their songs they sang when they worshipped from His ears because they were only noise to Him

24 "But let justice roll out like waters, And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

24 "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

24 "But let justice roll on like many waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing river.

24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

- Dr. Martin Luther King quoted this verse in his "I Have A Dream" speech

- Instead of feasts and fasts, instead of offerings and sacrifices, instead of singing and playing musical instruments, the LORD said He wanted justice and righteousness (Cf. v7)

— Instead of a constant stream of blood flowing from sacrifices, and an endless torrent of verbal and ritual praise from His people, He wanted justice and righteousness to flow without ceasing

— The Israelites were inundating Him with rivers of religiosity, but He wanted rivers of righteousness; God is not pleased by acts of pomp and grandeur but by wholehearted devotion and complete loyalty.

Another Accusation of Religious Hypocrisy

25 "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, house of Israel?

25 "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?

25 "Was it to me that you brought offerings and gifts in the desert for 40 years, house of Israel?

25 Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

- The Lord now returned to explain further what He did not want (Cf. v21-23)
- With another rhetorical question (Cf. v20), the Lord asked if His people really worshipped Him with their animal sacrifices and grain offerings while they were in the wilderness for 40 years

26 You also carried along **Sikkuth your king** and **Kiyyun, your images**, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

26 You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.

26 And you carried the tent of your king— and Saturn, your star god idols that you crafted for yourselves.

26 But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.

- God answered His rhetorical question from v25 with: No!

- "...Sikkuth your king" - probably refers to Sakkut, the Assyrian war god also known as Adar

- "...Kiyyun, your images" - probably refers to the Assyrian astral deity also known as Kaiwan or Saturn

- Stephen quotes this verse in Acts 7:42-43 from the LXX, which interpreted these names as references to pagan idols

— Amos is pointing out that Israel had always mixed idolatry with worship of Yahweh, so Israel's worship had been hypocritical throughout their history

(iii) Resulting exile (5:27)

27 Therefore I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of armies.

27 Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

27 So I will cause you to be taken captive beyond Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is God of the Heavenly Armies.

27 Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

- Quoted from LXX (with interpretive paraphrase) by Stephen in Acts 7:42-43

— Stephen substituted Babylon for Damascus because he was speaking after the Northern Kingdom had been scattered beyond Damascus by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and after Judah had been carried beyond Babylon in 586 BC. Both were fulfilled.

— The people of the Northern Kingdom were carried even beyond Babylon to the far corners of the Assyrian Empire...

