The Book of Amos

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study

**Chapter 5**

* **5:1-3– The Funeral Song**
* V. 1 *“Hear this word”* (3:1; 4:1) seeks to introduce yet another oracle of judgment against the nation of Israel. The word in v.1 is described as a dirge (Jer. 9:10, 17, 20; Ezek. 19:1) and is purposeful in drawing attention to the audience, that their rejection of God and lack of repentance in 4:6-13 leads to a mourning over the dead. The day of the LORD will be a cause for mourning.
* In v. 2 Amos expounds on the message of the dirge. *‘The* “virgin” *Israel is fallen, and she will not rise again.’* The use of the word *“virgin”* emphasizes a two-fold reality. Israel will come to a premature and tragic end. Israel’s sin never gave them a chance to achieve “adulthood”. It is also an ironic use of the word since Israel was supposed to be pure and innocent before God, yet they have played the harlot repeatedly (Jer. 14:17; 18:13).
* *“Amos sees Israel as a tragic young woman who is fallen and forsaken, no one coming to her aid. In rebelling against God, Israel is as helpless as a young woman among violent men”* (Guzik).
* She will be neglected in her land. The fact that Israel will be destroyed in their own land and not a foreign territory heightens the announcing of the dirge. They will be so helpless and weak; they won’t be able to lift themselves up and neither will there be anyone to help them up (Isa. 51:17-18).
* V. 3 speaks of the great defeat that Israel shall receive. 90% of the troops sent out to fight will be destroyed. They will be reduced to a mere remnant that will be able to tell the nations of the power of God and His wrath (Deut. 4:27; 28:62; Isa. 1:9; 10:22; Ezek. 12:16).
* **5:4-15– *“Seek Me that you may live”***
* The sounding of the dirge no doubt emphasizes the death and destruction that will befall Israel. They were living it up in their evil and sin, resulting only in pain and death (Rom. 6:23) and separation from God. Thus, this next section contrasts the reality of what God has to offer as opposed to man’s prodigal lifestyle.
* V. 4 emphasizes to Israel that God is the only way they will live. Their rituals and practices have brought them nothing but judgment and now Amos points them towards the only One who can save them and give them life (Deut. 30:1-8; 1 Chron. 28:9; Isa. 55:6-7; John 6:68). This call to seek the LORD would most obviously point out that they have not been seeking Him, much less serving Him. The judgment is already unavoidable. The idea is that so they are not completely destroyed forever they are to seek God.
* In. v. 5 they are not to seek God at Bethel, Beersheba or Gilgal. Having previously spoken of both Gilgal and Bethel (4:4) associating these places with Israel’s disobedience and idolatry, Amos encourages them to turn away from these places for God is not there. Beersheba is included this time around. It was a place associated with the patriarchs and their relationship with God (Gen. 21:33; 26:31-33; 46:1-5) but it later also became a place associated with idolatry (2 Kings 23:8). Notice that Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba are all associated with the worship of the LORD in Israel’s early history and now they have turned into centers of sin and idolatry.
* Gilgal and Bethel will be judged by God (Lev. 26:30-32). To seek God there would be the very opposite of what God wants them to do. There is a clever play of words in Hebrew with Gilgal and Bethel.
* In v. 6 they are again encouraged to seek the LORD as the only means of life. If the condition is not met, they will be consumed with fire (Deut. 4:24; Mk. 9:43-48; Heb. 12:29) and there will be no one who can quench it.
* V. 7 states that this fire will come upon those who pervert justice and diminish righteousness. Wormwood is a very bitter substance with a repulsive taste, often parallel with God’s judgment (Jer. 9:15). They take good and turn it into evil (Isa. 5:20). Seeking God will cause the people to know Him and know to do justice and righteousness.
* vv. 8-9 stresses God as creator and sustainer of all things. The point is to stress His power and might.
* In v. 8 He made the **Pleiades** (a name given to the cluster of stars seen in the shoulder of the constellation Taurus) and **Orion** (the name of a constellation consisting of about eighty stars). This is also pointed out in Job 9:9; 38:3.
* He turns deep darkness into day and darkens day into night (Job. 12:22; Job 38:12-13); calls forth waters and pours them on earth (Gen. 7:11-20; Job. 38:34, 37). All the works of God’s hands aren’t deity themselves, but He who made them and controls them is!
* Yahweh is His name! (The self-existing creator and sustainer of the universe: Ex. 3:13-22)
* In v. 9 the LORD brings forth destruction upon the strong and their fortresses. *“All human strength and all human means of might and protection cannot prevail against Yahweh”* (Rudolph).
* In v. 10 the gate of the city is where the public legal hearings took place. The one who would oversee this would be the judge or the arbiter. The people disdain the person whose job it is to do justice. This is furthermore paralleled by the rest of the verse stating they hate him who speaks with integrity. A people whose desire is to do evil, cheat for gain, oppress the poor and live in sin will hate any form of good and justice they stumble upon (Jn. 3:19-21; 8:45-47).
* V. 11 is a working out of the curses found in Deut. 28 and Lev. 26 because the people have sinned and done evil. Heavy rent, taxes on the poor all show how the luxurious Israelites desired every bit they could get from the poor. They will build houses and not live in them and plant vineyards and not drink their wine (Mic. 6:15; Zeph. 1:13). This is common prophetic language used to speak of the curses of the covenant because the people forsook God and did evil.
* In v. 12 the transgressions of the people are numerous and their sins great. The eyes of God are upon all men and He knows their thoughts and their deeds (Job 34:21-22). Amos names a few of the sins among which they are practicing: distressing the righteous (2:6-7), taking bribes (1 Sam. 8:3; Isa. 1:23) and turning aside the poor (2:7). The poor is turned away from the place where justice should be practiced.
* V. 13 may refer to the poor who should keep silent lest they experience more harm at the hands of their transgressors. It may also mean that this is an evil time where the wisdom of the wise do not prevail.
* vv. 14-15 are the key passages of this book. It summarizes what everyone needs to do in order to live and not die.
* In v. 14 this is the third time in the chapter the word “seek” is used in reference to seeking God. The emphasis is that the only resolution to sin is to seek God which is paralleled here by seeking that which is good and not evil (Psa. 34:12-16; Isa. 1:16-17; Mic. 6:8). God is good (Matt. 19:16-17). *“One finds the Lord, not in the observance of ritual, but in one’s undivided devotion to the moral dimension of human relations”* (Paul).
* The latter half of v. 14 would suggest that the people were under the impression that despite their sins and their evil the LORD was with them (Jer. 7:3-4; Mic. 3:11). Amos says the only way that is possible is if they seek Him and do good and not evil. God does not tolerate sin.
* In v. 15 they are once again called to hate evil and love good (emphasizing the opposite of what they were living) and establish justice in the gate (Rom. 12:9 Psa. 82:2-4; Jer. 7:5-7). The same energy and fervor they put into hating the poor and justice they must employ towards evil. Notice how Amos here places key importance of the conditional nature of God’s mercy. If and only if they do these things, then perhaps God will relent (Ex. 32:30; Joel 2:14; Jon. 3:9; Jer. 18:7-11).
* Concerning the conditional statement expressed in v. 15b: *“It expresses humility before a Sovereign God who is not under compulsion to show grace” (Smith).*
* The remnant of Joseph is a common phrase through the prophets that the LORD uses to describe those whom He has kept alive and will ultimately keep alive through whom the Messiah will come.
* **5:16-20– Descriptions of Judgment**
* vv. 16-17 finalizes the entirety of the section from 5:1-17 with the re-emphasis of a dirge which shows an inclusio.
* In v. 16 there is wailing and the shout of Alas! Alas! And the farmers and professional mourners are called to give witness to the devastation of Israel (Isa. 15:2-5, 8; Jer. 4:31; 9:18-20; Rev. 18:15-16).
* In v. 17 there is wailing in the vineyards because the LORD has passed through their midst (Ex. 12:12, 23; Jer. 48:43). The vineyards were places where celebration was the greatest and this will be completely reversed into a place of lamentation because of the judgment of the LORD.
* The LORD passed through Egypt to smite the firstborn of the Egyptians in fighting for Israel and now because they have forsaken Him, He will pass through their midst.
* In v. 18 the phrase, *“The day of the LORD”* occurs for the first time, in terms of chronology, in the OT scriptures. While it does occur for the first time, the people clearly understand this as a day of deliverance probably from the hand of their enemies.
* Amos says they are longing (phrase used of hunger and thirst) for the day. Contrary to what they are hoping for, Amos hits them with the reality that this day means disaster for them.
* The use of darkness and not light strongly demonstrates to them that the day of the LORD will be a cause for fear and not blessing, mourning and not joy (Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 10, 31). There will be disaster and not salvation (Zeph. 1:14-15). This phrase will become an integral part of apocalyptic language in terms of judgment and destruction.
* In v. 19 Amos uses the description of ferocious animals whose attacks are usually fatal. Such descriptions incudes that of a lion (1 Sam. 17:34; Hos. 13:7-8) and a bear (2 Kings 2:24). If one, by some great fortune, should escape the attacks of both these creatures, then he will come home and lean his hand against a wall and a snake will get him. All these examples are used to illustrate that there is no escape from the day of the LORD.
* In v. 20, the prophet once more alludes to judgment being darkness and not light, there will be gloom and no brightness (Isa. 13:10; Nah. 1:8). This verse ends with another literary inclusio.
* **5:21-26– Israel’s misguided worship**
* This next section of chapter 5 focuses on the misplacement of the peoples’ heart in worship. Given that they “worshipped” at Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba, one would conclude that this was a people who was sincere about their religion.
* In vv. 21-22 the offerings, festivals and their ‘solemn’ assemblies are despised by God (Prov. 21:27; Isa. 1:11-16; Jer. 7:21-23). The word solemn may give off the idea that they were sincerely trying to serve God but what they were doing was sincerely worshipping their idols and not God. The word that should be used of how they ought to seek God and worship Him, is used of their rituals and idol worship.
* For those reasons, God will not have anything to do with them, He utterly hates them and won’t look at them. They have taken sacrifices meant for good and turned them into abominations before God because of the evil intention of their hearts.
* In v. 23, their songs and melodies are also an abomination to God. He does not want to hear it. None of these acts of worship mentioned are unscriptural. The problem is their heart is far away from God (Isa. 29:13). God in a certain sense has closed His nose, ears and eyes from them.
* In v. 24 the contrast to what they are doing is to let justice roll down and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. They can only correct their deeds by doing justice and practicing righteousness for in these things God takes delight (Prov. 21:3; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:8: Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 45:9).
* Without righteousness and justice, all their rituals, religious sacrifices and worship sum up to a great sham.
* In vv. 25-26 further emphasis is placed on the reality that the people weren’t concerned about serving God but their idols they brought out of Egypt (Deut. 32:17-19; Neh. 9:18; Ezek. 20:16). God says they weren’t sacrificing for Him then and they aren’t doing it now (Zech. 7:5).
* In v. 26 Sikkuth (Shrine, Moloch, Saturn) and Kiyyun are mentioned. These are referring to their idols of some kind that they made their king and which they worshipped and they themselves made (Jer. 10:1-16). The rejected God as king (1 Sam. 8:7)
* **5:27– You will be exiled**
* In v. 27 because they have done these things, they will be exiled beyond Damascus (2 Kings 17:1-18). Amos purposefully never says where exactly they are going or who the enemy is because He is pointing to God’s power. God is in control of Israel’s affairs.