

God says in vs. 22 that He will not accept their counterfeit religion. Be sure and read vss. 21-24!

Rather than great swelling sounds of music, God would rather see great swelling justice rolling from our hearts like a mighty raging river in a flood season. What a picture!

Because of her counterfeit ways the Lord was going to send Israel into captivity beyond Damascus, that is to Assyria (vs. 27).

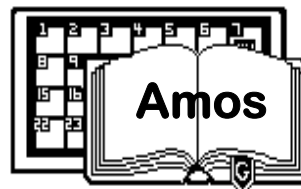
Some Lessons

1. We are all writing our own funeral sermon now.
2. True living is seeking after God (vs. 4).
3. God has revealed Himself as the Creator (vs. 8).
4. And He is the One who works in Providence (vs. 9).
5. God hates: injustice, oppression, impiety.
6. Ceremonialism destroys the true spirit of worship.
7. Righteousness has no substitute (vs. 24). We can't substitute 'sacrifices' for doing right!).

Do we come to the assembly to sing songs, pray a few words, hear a sermon, or do we come to *worship* the Lord God of heaven, our Creator and our Sustainer?

Do formalism and ceremonialism rob us of the real significance that worship ought to be?

-- Windell Gann



AMOS

Lesson # 3

Looking for God in All the Wrong Places

Text: Amos 5:1-27 (Read)

The Setting

This is the third of Amos' messages given at Bethel in the northern Kingdom. Under Jeroboam II the nation was wealthy but corrupt, religious but not spiritual.

This message was given in the form of a Lamentation, or a funeral sermon. Imagine Amos standing in the city square and saying, "Listen friends, while I preach your funeral sermon today!" Let's look at Israel's funeral sermon. It was designed to lead them to repentance. (5:1-13).

I. Seek God -- 5:1-13

Vss. 1-3. The "Virgin of Israel," referring to the city of Samaria and the northern kingdom, is declared to have "fallen." Its fall is so sure it is spoken of as having taken place already. This is known as the "prophetic tense." The term "fallen" is a word indicating a violent death, as in battle.

Vss. 4-6. If they would turn and *seek* the Lord they would live. [Q-1] But where was the place the northern kingdom worshiped?

God says, "You can't expect to find me there! I'm not to be associated with your golden calf and the rituals you perform at Bethel!"

[Q-2] Do you remember one of the excuses Jeroboam gave for erecting the altars in the northern kingdom? (See 1 Kings 12:28?)

Though they rationalized that Jerusalem was too far to go, they went even farther (to Beersheba, 60 miles south of Jerusalem) on pilgrimages to idolatrous shrines!

But in all this Amos is saying, "You are religious! But you are Seeking God in All the Wrong Places!" For these things Gilgal and Bethel will perish and go into captivity.

Lesson: Just being religious is not sufficient. One must be right with God, worshiping His way to be saved.

Amos calls for their repentance, "*Seek the Lord, and you will live!*"

Vss 7-9. In Israel, sweet justice had been turned into bitter injustice (wormwood). Amos tells them just who the One is that they should seek, the Creator!

[Q-3] What are the Pleiades and Orion? (Read vs. 8)

[Q-4] What is the "Message of the Stars?"

It is in God's providential power to bring destruction upon the mighty! Israel at this time was one of the most powerful nations in the world, but within thirty years she would be nothing. If God wills it, the most powerful nation can be brought to nought. Its armies and economy cannot save it if God wants to humble a nation!

Vss. 10-13. That rich arrogant nation could not stand having someone reprove them and who would stand up and demand justice. They "abhorred" him (stronger than hate). [We'll see in ch. 7 how a priest at Bethel challenged Amos' preaching.]

Amos gives a list of their sins. And it sounds so modern. One would almost think we're reading today's newspaper headlines when we read Amos. It shows us that the desires for sin and greed have not changed in 2700 years since Amos' day!

Read vss. 10-13. It's a powerful indictment! They trampled on the poor and extracted bribes before they would give justice ("because of such wickedness don't expect you will get to live in your lovely luxurious houses" -- and they didn't! vs. 3.)

God knew the sins of their nation. And we shouldn't think He's not aware of ours (vs. 12, God says "*I know.*")

The GOD they should seek is not at Bethel, but the Creator, the One who loves justice, and who knows!

II. Seek Good -- 5:14-17

Vss. 14-17. It appears that Israel maintained she was faithful to God, but this was just self deception. As a nation she needed to change her ways. [Q-5] What might be the result if she would turn? (See vs. 15).

Again in vs. 16 Amos returns to the funeral sermon motif. There would be so much weeping in the day of Israel's calamity they would have to call in inexperienced shepherds to act as mourners along with the professionals.

God's purpose in sending Amos is that perhaps they will repent and He will not have to send "the day of the Lord" upon them in retribution. The fact is that they did not and the Assyrian Captivity was not more than thirty years off.

Lesson: God doesn't want to have to punish his people, He gives them opportunity to repent and return. But when they just will not listen He must, in His holiness, punish sin and wickedness.

III. Something the Lord Hates (vs. 21) 5:18-25

Vss. 18-20. "The Day of the Lord" is a recurrent theme in the prophets. It speaks of a day of reckoning, of judgment, and it stands as a fore-picture of that Last Great Final Day of Judgment when Christ returns and all men stand before Him.

Israel looked for such a day for they thought it meant retribution on their enemies, but Amos declares it will not be a day of light, but of darkness for them.

Men will try to escape but will not get away from the calamity (vs. 19).

Vss. 21-27. [Q-6] Look in vs. 21, what does the Lord hate?

Is He against all religious assemblies per se?

No, but against their type of counterfeit worship! He is not opposed to prayers and sacrifices as such, but the way Israel was doing it. What a lesson for us! We might be singing songs and praying, but it could be something that the Lord hates if we are not doing it right! The right way is the Lord's way, and with the right heart that he demands.