

Amos continues recording the word of the LORD concerning the coming judgment of Israel's sins. The verses in our lesson focuses on the sins of idolatry and injustice toward the poor and helpless. The LORD ends the prophesy with the promises of blessings in the future kingdom of the LORD when the Jews will be permanently returned to the land that God gave to them where they will experience abundant prosperity.

Amos 5

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

The LORD presents the only thing that Israel can take to preserve themselves in the face of the coming judgment. If they turn back to Him with a desire to be obedient then they will live. Otherwise, destruction is in their future.

5 But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beer-sheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought.

Beth-el, Gilgal and Beer-sheba were once centers of worship with a great spiritual heritage but by Amos' time they had degraded into places of empty worship at best. Much like in Jesus' day, the priests and worshipers went through the motions without genuinely worshipping the LORD from the heart or repenting of their sins. The LORD warns that the places mentioned would not escape the coming judgment.

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 Beth-el.

"Seek the LORD, and ye shall live" – The LORD repeats the statement from v. 4. Instead of going through the motions of empty religious rituals, Israel should instead seek the LORD Himself so that they can avoid judgment.

"lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour *it*, and *there be* none to quench *it* in Beth-el" – The alternative is to suffer the judgment and wrath of the LORD which would consume them like fire. The "house of Joseph" refers to the nation of Israel, with Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim being the fathers of the two largest tribes in Israel. No one in Beth-el (or the other centers of worship) had the power to stop the LORD from pouring out the wrath of His judgment on Israel, so Israel needed to repent and seek the LORD before it was too late.

7 Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, 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: 9 That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

"Ye who turn judgment [justice] to wormwood [bitterness], and leave off [to cast aside] righteousness in the earth" – The LORD addresses those in Israel who pervert justice. The oppressed look for justice in the courts but they only find bitterness. Righteousness gets cast aside into the dust of the earth rather than being exalted as the goal to be attained.

"Seek him that maketh the seven stars [Pleiades constellation] and Orion" – Israel worshiped the stars along with the other false gods they served. The LORD says they ought instead to be seeking Him, the One Who created the stars that they have been worshipping.

"and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night" – The "shadow of death" refers to the darkness of night. Israel should seek the One Who created and controls the cycles of day and night.

"that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth" – Another display of the greatness of the LORD is the fact that He causes the waters of the sea to evaporate and then rain upon the land. This is something that the false gods could not do.

"The LORD is his name" – The LORD reminds Israel of His name, the One that does all these things just mentioned.

"That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress" – The LORD will give strength to the "spoiled" (those who have been victimized by the strong and had things taken from them) so that they can take revenge against those who have oppressed them, even those hiding inside a fortress.

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

The LORD describes the general attitude of Israel toward prophets and other men of God who stand in the gates of a city and cry out against sin and preach righteousness. Israel hated and detested these men, rebelling against their words rather than listening and repenting.

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.

"Forasmuch therefore as your treading *is* upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens [taxes] of wheat" – The LORD now describes other reasons for His judgment upon Israel. They "tread upon" the poor (taking advantage of them) and require them to pay an unfair percentage of what little wheat they have.

"ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them" – Because of this, even though they build for themselves nice houses of hewn stone, the LORD will ensure that they will not be able to dwell in them.

"ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them" – Also, they will not be able to enjoy the fruits of the vineyards that they have planted. The LORD will cause them to suffer the consequences of their sinful behavior.

Amos 8

4 Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,

The LORD is making an announcement to those in Israel who take advantage of the poor and helpless people of the land so that they are unable to make ends meet.

5 Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

The attitude of these under the LORD's judgment shows their continuing desire to make money at other's expense. They are impatiently waiting for the first day of the month (the new moon) and the sabbath, days on which no business is to be done, to be over so that they can engage in their business of making money. Their plan is to make as much money as possible, even to the point of cheating their customers, by measuring out small amounts of grain ("making the ephah small") for a high price ("making the shekel great") and using scales that do not weigh the customer's order fairly ("falsifying the balances by deceit").

6 That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?

These people are willing to charge exorbitant prices to the poor and even taking his shoes as payment, all for an inferior product. The refuse referred to the chaff and other non-grain parts of the wheat stalks that was not properly removed. They allowed this refuse to remain mixed with the grain, adding to its weight and causing their customers not get their full money's worth.

7 The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.

These greedy and dishonest businessmen may have thought that they were getting away with their dishonest deeds, but the LORD promised that He would not forget what they have done nor would He let them escape punishment.

11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. 13 In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.

They are rejecting the word of the LORD now but when judgment comes they will want to hear from the LORD in an attempt to be rescued from the consequences of their sin. When that time comes, the LORD will be silent and unavailable, which He describes here as a famine for the word of God.

14 They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again.

"They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth" – The "sin of Samaria" was idolatry. Shortly after the nation split into the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, Jeroboam, the king of Israel created two golden calves, one set up in Dan and the other in Bethel. Their purpose was to give the people of Israel an alternative to traveling to Jerusalem in Judah to worship (1Kings 12:26-29).

"and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth" – Beer-sheba was another center of idolatry, but this one was in southern Judah.

"even they shall fall, and never rise up again" – The LORD is addressing those who have put their trust in these idols and worship at these places. These idols will not help them escape the LORD's judgment and the downfall of these worshippers of false gods will be permanent.

Amos 9

11 In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old:

As is often the case in the OT prophetic writings, after the LORD has proclaimed judgment, He then describes the future blessing of the faithful and those who repent. This description seems to refer to the blessings of the future kingdom when He will have the temple in Jerusalem rebuilt on the site where the first temple was built that had been planned by David.

12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.

"The remnant" are those Jews who belong to the LORD that are scattered in Edom and throughout the other heathen nations of the world. The LORD will bring them back to their land where they can worship at the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

13 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

Poetic language is used here to describe the prosperity of Israel in the kingdom. Harvests will be so bountiful that reaper will still be trying to reap the harvest when the plowman is ready to plow for the next season. The treader of grapes will not yet be finished before the sowers of seed enter the vineyard. "Sweet wine" (fresh grape juice) will run so freely that it will seem as if the hills are melting.

14 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

God will bring Jews from all over the world back to the land where they will rebuild the "waste" (destroyed) cities and live there. They will be able to work the land and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

15 And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.

When the LORD brings Israel back into their land, they will permanently dwell there. Christ will be on the throne and no enemy will drive Israel from the land that God has given them. Unlike today, they will be safe under His care.