

### The Third Sermon to the Northern Kingdom

#### Amos 5

**Amos 5:1-7** – *“Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel. <sup>2</sup> The virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land. There is no one to raise her up.*

*<sup>3</sup> For thus says the Lord God: “The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.”*

*<sup>4</sup> For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: “Seek Me and live; <sup>5</sup> but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba, for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing.*

*<sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel - <sup>7</sup> you who turn justice to wormwood and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!”*

#### Background Notes

The prophet Amos did not have a pleasant ministry. In fact, compared to his life before God called him, his days as a prophet were very unpleasant. Before his call to the ministry, Amos was a successful businessman. Amos 7:14: *“I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit.”* Amos was a businessman who enjoyed a pleasant lifestyle, but God called Amos out of his secular employment to be a foreign missionary.

Amos lived in the little town of Tekoa. Tekoa was not far from Bethlehem in the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord directed Amos to travel about 25 miles north to Bethel, in the northern kingdom of Israel, to prophesy and pronounce judgment - never a pleasant ministry. Even though 25 miles doesn't sound very far from home, Amos was a “foreign missionary” because he crossed over an international boundary. Amos left his home country of Judah and traveled to Israel, the northern kingdom.

Remember – in 931 BC the United Kingdom of Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. King Jeroboam I, the first king of the northern kingdom, set up his own system of idolatrous worship, including a false priesthood. He had two golden calf shrines erected - one in the far north at Dan, and one at the southern end of his kingdom at Bethel. The Lord called Amos to go to Bethel to preach and to prophesy - and to pronounce God's judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel.

The year was about 760 BC (give or take a few years), and King Jeroboam II was now in power. The golden calf shrines were still located at Bethel and Dan. Although the city of Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, the

king also had a royal residence at Bethel. In Amos 5 we find the beginning of the third sermon of judgment that Amos preached near the idolatrous shrine at Bethel.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Idolatry will not go un-judged.

*“The virgin of Israel has fallen; she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land. There is no one to raise her up” (v2).*

Why was Israel called a “virgin” here? It was not because of her moral purity, but because up to this point in her history she had not been conquered. But before long she would be conquered - and she would never rise again. When Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, the northern kingdom fell for good. The ruins of the city of Samaria still exist, and can be visited today.

The national entity that returned from the captivity in Babylon was not the northern kingdom of Israel – it was the southern kingdom of Judah. Members of all twelve tribes were represented in the Jews who returned from Babylon in 538 BC, but it was the nation of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem that was rebuilt, not the northern kingdom of Israel.

The present state of Israel is a rebirth of the kingdom of Judah, not the northern kingdom of Israel. The believing remnant of the last days will come out of this present secular state of Israel, in preparation for the return of the Lord. Then one new nation under Christ will be formed, and it will be composed of Jews from all twelve tribes. (Read Ezekiel 37 for more details.)

So when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, it was conquered for good, never to rise again. Notice how devastating the overthrow was (v3). Sometimes an army can suffer huge losses and still recover, but 90% is the kiss of death.

Why did God allow the northern kingdom to be overthrown? One of the major reasons was idolatry (v4-5). The three places mentioned here – Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba were all idolatrous shrine cities.

- Gilgal was the place where Israel had entered the Promised Land under Joshua so many years before, and it was from Gilgal that the people would go out in captivity.
- Beersheba was a city in the far south of the kingdom of Judah, well known in the lives of the Patriarchs. But now people from the north were crossing the border, going right past the true Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, to make pilgrimage to the idolatrous shrine.
- Bethel was the royal shrine of the northern kingdom – and that was where Amos pronounced God’s judgment. In verse 5, Amos used a “play on words” to denounce Bethel. The name “Bethel” means “*house of God.*” But “Bethel” became “Beth Haven,” which means “*house of nothing*” or “*house of trouble.*”

In verse 6, any individual in the northern kingdom was invited to escape God's judgment by turning to the Lord. The northern kingdom was called the "house of Joseph" because Ephraim, the largest tribe in the north was one of Joseph's sons. A number of godly Jews did escape the judgment by migrating south to the kingdom of Judah so they could worship the Lord at His true Temple. As predicted by Amos, the northern kingdom was conquered because idolatry will not go un-judged.

## 2. Injustice will not go un-judged.

**Amos 5:8-17** - *He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth. The Lord is His name! <sup>9</sup> He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress. <sup>10</sup> They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.*

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. <sup>12</sup> For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate. <sup>13</sup> Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time.*

*<sup>14</sup> Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil, love good. Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, says this: 'There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing. <sup>17</sup> In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you,' says the Lord.*

The people of the northern kingdom of Israel were not only guilty of idolatry - they were guilty of injustice as well. Things were so bad that, instead of listening to upright people, the judges hated those who rebuked them "in the gate" (v10). The gate of the city was where the judges of the towns held court - and they abhorred those who spoke truth and righteousness "in the gate."

Does this sound familiar? People who speak uprightly in our own nation today are jeered at, mocked and ridiculed. Sometimes they are literally hated. For example, a Christian university student who speaks out against the sin of fornication is despised and abhorred.

Verses 11-12 tell us that the leaders and the wealthy in the nation were unfairly taxing the poor. They were taking bribes so they could build bigger houses and buy vineyards for themselves. But God would not allow this injustice to go un-judged. Amos prophesied that they would not enjoy their houses and vineyards much longer (v11). It wouldn't be long before there would be grief and wailing in those beautiful stone houses and lush vineyards. There would be so much death that farmers would have to join the professional lamenters or mourners (v16-17). Why all this judgment? Because injustice will not go un-judged.

Notice - in verses 14-15 Amos appealed to the people once again, asking them to turn from their wicked ways. If they would turn, perhaps the Lord would be gracious to the “remnant of Joseph.” But the end of verse 15 indicated that there would be very little response to this gracious offer, because the nation was so far away from the Lord.

Only a relatively small portion of the people heeded the warning and responded to the grace of God. A few people turned from their wicked ways and moved south to seek the Lord at His holy Temple. The rest of the nation was ripe for judgment – just as our own nation is ripe for judgment today. The Lord hates injustice and injustice will not go unpunished.

## Practical Application

### **Don't forget that you're dealing with the God of the universe!**

Look back at verses 8-9: *“He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning, and makes the day dark as night. He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth. The Lord is His name!”*

What do star formations and floods have to do with social injustice? Did these verses seem out of context when we read them? What's the point? Amos' point was that Israel was not dealing with a power that they could arbitrarily manipulate, or control, or ignore. They were not dealing with some small, finite “god.” No, they were dealing with ***the God of the universe!*** He created the stars. He controls night and day. He determines when floods will take place.

As Israel was to remember Who they were dealing with, so should we. The good news for believers is - we can be sure that all idolatry and all social injustice, then and today, will be judged. We're dealing with the God of this universe, and thus we know that ultimately righteousness will reign.

The bad news for unbelievers is - you cannot hide, and you cannot escape the judgment of God. God is omniscient. He knows everything, including all your thoughts and actions. Furthermore, God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once. Even though you can't see Him, He is there observing you and everything you do - even in private. Thirdly, God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. He not only has the right to judge in this moral universe that He has created, but He has the unlimited power to do so. You will not escape God's judgment.

If I were you, I'd take God's gracious offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ - today, before the judgment falls.

### ***Don't forget - you're dealing with the God of the universe!***