

### The Third Sermon Continued

#### Amos 5:18-27

**Amos 5:18-27** - *“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. <sup>19</sup> It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! <sup>20</sup> Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?*

*<sup>21</sup> “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. <sup>22</sup> Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. <sup>23</sup> Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*

*<sup>24</sup> But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.*

*<sup>25</sup> “Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? <sup>26</sup> You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols; the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. <sup>27</sup> Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus,” says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.”*

#### Background Notes

A concise outline of the book of Amos would be as follows: eight prophecies in chapters 1-2, three sermons in chapters 3-6, and six visions in chapters 7-9. Amos' first sermon was recorded in chapter 3, the second sermon in chapter 4, and the third sermon in chapters 5-6.

Notice that each sermon began with the introduction: *“Hear this word.”* The beginning of the first sermon in Amos 3:1 - *“Hear this word.”* The beginning of the second sermon in Amos 4:1 - *“Hear this word.”* And the beginning of the third sermon in Amos 5:1 - *“Hear this word.”*

Remember, all three sermons were given at Bethel, a shrine city in the northern kingdom of Israel. The royal shrine, with one of the golden calves idols set up by King Jeroboam I, was located at Bethel. Remember, after the United Kingdom split into two parts, Jeroboam I was the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel.

At the time of Amos, King Jeroboam II was in power in the north. The capital of the northern kingdom was Samaria, but there was a royal residence at Bethel as well. So King Jeroboam II may have heard Amos preach this sermon - and he wouldn't have liked it! But Amos was not afraid to boldly denounce the sins of the northern kingdom.

In this part of his third sermon, he openly denounced Israel's religious hypocrisy. Notice, in verses 25-26, that Israel's religious hypocrisy did not begin during the time of the kings. It began way back before the times of the Judges or before

they entered the Promised Land – in fact, it went all the way back to the Israelites' wilderness wanderings. *“Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves” (v25-26).*

The point of these verses is that - even though they had brought some sacrifices to the Lord - the people were practicing idolatry all the way back then, during the wilderness wanderings. In their travels through the wilderness, they carried God's Tabernacle – but they also carried the idols Sikkuth and Chiun! These false deities were associated with the worship of the starry heavens. This mixture of worship was religious hypocrisy, and it would be judged.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The day of the Lord is darkness for those involved in religious hypocrisy.

*“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?” (v18-20).*

The people were self-deceived. Even though they openly practiced idolatry at the golden calf shrine at Bethel, somehow they thought that they would be blessed when the Day of the Lord came. Nothing could be further from the truth! The Day of the Lord would not be light for the religious hypocrites - it would be darkness. It would be “out of the frying pan, into the fire.” It would be like escaping from the lion, only to run into a bear. Or it would be like running into the house and bolting the door thinking that you had escaped, but when you leaned your hand on the wall to catch your breath, a snake bit you. The Day of the Lord would not be blessing and light for religious hypocrites. It would be a day of darkness and judgment.

Where did these people get the idea that the Day of the Lord would be a day of light and blessing? One possibility is the prophecy of Joel. Joel was probably written about 80 years before Amos, and many of the people would have been familiar with his prophecy. Towards the end Joel's prophecy, judgment was predicted to come upon the foreign nations - but great blessing would come upon Israel on the Day of the Lord (Joel 3:18). Perhaps the religious hypocrites who listened to Amos preach thought that somehow Joel's prophecy meant they would be blessed on the Day of the Lord.

However, if they thought that, they had missed a good portion of Joel's prophecy. Joel not only spoke of the Day of the Lord as a day of blessing for Israel - but as a day of darkness and judgment for *unfaithful* Israel. Joel 2:1-2 says, *“Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. For it is at hand: day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.”*

Here's an important question: Was the Day of the Lord in the past - or is it still in the future? The answer to both parts of the question is "Yes!" There is an historical (or past) aspect to the Day of the Lord, and there is an eschatological (or future) aspect to the Day of the Lord.

It seems that the historical aspect of the Day of the Lord was primarily in view in chapter 5, because of verse 27: *"Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.*" In this verse Amos predicted the end of the northern kingdom of Israel that was to come at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, fell in 722 BC, about 35 years after Amos gave this prophecy.

What was true for the historical Day of the Lord for the northern kingdom will certainly be true of the eschatological, or future, or ultimate Day of the Lord. And the message can be applied to today as well. The Day of the Lord will be darkness and judgment for those involved in religious hypocrisy.

Listen to the words of judgment the Lord will speak to religious hypocrites in the future Day of the Lord: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* (Matthew 7:21-23). God hates religious hypocrisy. The Day of the Lord is darkness for those involved in religious hypocrisy.

## **2. The response of the Lord is rejection for those involved in religious hypocrisy.**

*"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments"* (v21-23).

The people were going through the motions of religion, but the Lord rejected their religious practices. Why? Because it was not true worship! But you may say – "Wait a minute! I thought the Lord ordained these offerings and feasts under the Mosaic Law!" He did - but the Lord wanted the sacrifices to be offered from a right and true heart of worship to the Lord. The people from the northern kingdom of Israel were worshiping pagan deities at the same time as they were falsely "sacrificing" to the Lord. And they were not worshiping the Lord in the place He had specified - at His Temple in Jerusalem.

Not only were they offering false worship to the Lord - they were involved in social injustice as well. They were taking advantage of the poor, the widows, and the aliens for their own financial gain. Their unrighteous lifestyle was evidence that they did not have true faith. As a result, Amos spoke words that are probably the best-known message in the book of Amos: *"But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream"* (v24).

***True faith should always work itself out into everyday righteousness!*** Practicing righteousness and social justice are evidences of a true and right heart towards the Lord. Otherwise, all religious practices are simply hypocrisy and just “going through the motions” of worship. “Going through the motions” of worship is false and insincere worship. This pretense of righteousness is unacceptable - it is rejected by the Lord. God hates religious hypocrisy. The Lord rejects those who are involved in religious hypocrisy.

## Practical Application

### Are you a religious hypocrite?

Is it possible that **you** are just going through the motions?

Remember the Pharisees at the time of our Lord? They thought they were righteous. They thought they were involved in true worship. But they actually were involved in religious legalism and hypocrisy. Listen to what the Lord said to them: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs that outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness... You serpents, you brood of vipers! How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”* (Matthew 23:27-28, 33).

Strong language? Yes. God hates religious hypocrisy.

Obviously there are degrees of religious hypocrisy - but don't think you're doing okay just because you're not as bad as the Pharisees! Are you hiding a less-than-righteous life behind a religious mask? Are you just pretending - just “going through the motions” of worship when you go to church?

Or are you truly born again, and worshiping the Lord from a true and right heart? True faith will manifest itself in everyday righteousness and in acceptable worship of the Lord from a true heart (Amos 5:24).

Examine your heart. Are you a religious hypocrite?