

Introduction

Universally, prophets directed people back to mosaic covenants as articulated in the Pentateuch (Stuart, p. 320). Amos, one of 12 Minor Prophets, urges Israel to receive his lament.

Not a professional prophet, (Ch. 7 v 14), he nevertheless calls to forsake idols, comprehensively repent and seek the Lord's mercy. In particular, their oppressing the poor while bathing in self infatuated sophistry, unless rectified, will certainly end in death or exile.

Theologically, Amos considers God's identity, covenants, individual or corporate responsibilities, ethical & divine tendency and eschatology in communicating obedience, blessing or curse (Barton, 2012, pp. 161-180).

Amos 5 is presumed original, but scholars suspect later modifications. Amos deliberately implements poetic, hymn or lament traditions, then reverses themes to expose hypocrisy (Stuart, 1987).

Exegesis

5 Listen, you people of Israel! Listen to this funeral song I am singing:

The prophet is God's heavy burdened spokesperson. Funeral songs denote thresholds with death where arguably, the scales of reproof are levied. The summons to listen to mourning songs was part of Israel's culture (Stuart p. 345).

*² "The virgin Israel has fallen,
never to rise again!
She lies abandoned on the ground,
with no one to help her up."*

Israel had never previously been subdued. Espoused as chaste virgin; she is now adulterate, worshipping the calves at Dan and Bethel. Its splendour now defunct, *never to rise* as kingdom again, the ten tribes exiled by Shalmaneser king of Assyria, to which calamity this prophecy refers. "The words of the lament itself point to the finality of the fall" (Simundson, 2005, p. 193)

*³ The Sovereign LORD says:
"When a city sends a thousand men to battle,
only a hundred will return.
When a town sends a hundred,
only ten will come back alive."*

A continuing spiral of attrition impacts battle ready troops, indices of sufficiency are audited.

*⁴ Now this is what the LORD says to the family of Israel:
"Come back to me and live!"*

Notwithstanding judgement, hopes of providing mercy to the remnant that might listen?

*5 Don't worship at the pagan altars at Bethel;
don't go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba.
For the people of Gilgal will be dragged off into exile,
and the people of Bethel will be reduced to nothing."*

Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba have historical and religious significance to forefathers, Abraham (Gen 21: 31-33), Isaac (Gen 26: 23-25) and Jacob (Gen 46: 1-4). (Simundson, 2005, p.195) Amos warns that further covenantal infidelity, mirrors fates like these recognized cities. An elegant, play on words.

*6 Come back to the LORD and live!
Otherwise, he will roar through Israel^[a] like a fire,
devouring you completely.
Your gods in Bethel
won't be able to quench the flames.*

Repeating reinforcement that life spiritual is only found in Him. Priests officiating calf worship can't avert divine vengeance.

*7 You twist justice, making it a bitter pill for the oppressed.
You treat the righteous like dirt.*

The association to wormwood, seems to be spoken to kings or those who often pervert the administration of justice, as in Amos 6:12.

*⁸ It is the LORD who created the stars,
the Pleiades and Orion.
He turns darkness into morning
and day into night.
He draws up water from the oceans
and pours it down as rain on the land.
The LORD is his name!*

Some scholars connect the preceding words, without a supplement, "you treat the righteous like dirt...who created the stars", speculating it of Christ, who is made unto us righteousness, through the creator of the heavens and the constellations within.

*9 With blinding speed and power he destroys the strong,
crushing all their defenses.*

Such as have been stripped of their armour and substance.

*¹⁰ How you hate honest judges!
How you despise people who tell the truth!*

Transparently wicked judges hated the prophets, who faithfully reproved them for perverting justice, even from the bench.

*11 You trample the poor,
stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent.
Therefore, though you build beautiful stone houses,
you will never live in them.
Though you plant lush vineyards,
you will never drink wine from them.*

Typically spoken to the princes and civil magistrates, stripping people of what little substance they had. Extortion curses future dwellings and the wine is never tasted.

*12 For I know the vast number of your sins
and the depth of your rebellions.*

Their sins were too numerous before an omniscient God.

*13 So those who are smart keep their mouths shut,
for it is an evil time.
Therefore the prudent shall keep silence at that time*

The prophets of the Lord are less prudent, they make it their business to reprimand the status quo.

¹⁴ *Do what is good and run from evil
so that you may live!
Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper,
just as you have claimed.*

If evil contradicts God's nature then run in the opposite direction, reassured that God will protect ones' flight.

¹⁵ *Hate evil and love what is good;
turn your courts into true halls of justice.
Perhaps even yet the LORD God of Heaven's Armies
will have mercy on the remnant of his people.*

Evil is pernicious, abominable unto God, We should hate evil, even with a perfect hatred; and "good" is to be loved for its goodness' sake, (Ps 97:10, Rom 7:15, 12:9). Some translations use 'gate' instead of 'courts' (ESV v 15) – either references gates where elders would dispense justice.

¹⁶ *Therefore, this is what the Lord, the LORD God of Heaven's Armies, says:
"There will be crying in all the public squares
and mourning in every street.
Call for the farmers to weep with you,
and summon professional mourners to wail.*

Reflecting the whole prophetic context - the misery will be witnessed throughout. Professional mourners might exude sophistry in lamentation, yet falseness offers no defence.

¹⁷ *There will be wailing in every vineyard,
for I will destroy them all,"
says the LORD.*

The grapes and vintage wines destroyed, the joy of the harvest will be sifted (see Jer. 48:32-33 for harmony).

¹⁸ *What sorrow awaits you who say,
"If only the day of the LORD were here!"
You have no idea what you are wishing for.
That day will bring darkness, not light.*

Is this a future reckoning? Perhaps Christ's coming, (Mal 3:1-2), or else the day of judgments upon a scoffing jeering manner, unlike congruent enquiry or reception such as Isaiah 5:19, 30 and Esther 8:16

¹⁹ *In that day you will be like a man who runs from a lion—
only to meet a bear.
Escaping from the bear, he leans his hand against a wall in his house—
and he's bitten by a snake.*

The proverbial expressions led Jewish writers seeing the lion and the bear as Laban and Esau, but are reminiscent of incursions by the Chaldeans, Persians and Grecians.

²⁰ *Yes, the day of the LORD will be dark and hopeless,
without a ray of joy or hope.*

Affirming the day of the Lord spoken of with no deliverance.

²¹ *"I hate all your show and pretense—
the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.*

It is plausible that the ten tribes imitated Jerusalem, yet the Lord rejects their vanity: so far from atonement, they are despised. (See Isaiah 1:11-14).

*22 I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings.
I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings.*

Even the peace offerings of the larger cattle herd are rejected!

*23 Away with your noisy hymns of praise!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.*

Whatever the worship, it is discordant.

*24 Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice,
an endless river of righteous living.*

Clearly the main message, through Amos; God rejects life, worship or identity not rooted in justice and righteousness.

25 "Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, Israel?"

This is poignant: the golden calf epitomised the 40-year wilderness. Sacrificing calves on altars is far worse.

26 No, you served your pagan gods—Sakkuth your king god and Kaiwan your star god—the images you made for yourselves.

The Pagan deities are actually named, based on celestial bodies - highly contentious rebellion.

27 So I will send you into exile, to a land east of Damascus,^[c] says the LORD, whose name is the God of Heaven's Armies.

It is likely given Syria was in alliance with Israel, folk might think to flee there, yet the predictive exile is far more remote, to the cities of the Medes!

Conclusion

'Amos' is essentially a mandate for reform: Israel prospered in contrast to Egypt, Babylon or Assyria, yet its burgeoning classes were sexually immoral, idolatrous and exploitative in nature. This melodic proclamation, aptly frames the ensuing catastrophe ahead of the Assyrian destruction of the kingdom in 722 B.C. (Simundson, p. 192-205 2005).

Amos 5 is extremely pertinent today. Our spiritual and governing elites appear tone deaf and exploitative. Yet according to *Church Times*: 56% more people have attended a church since 2018. Ironically, *Reform's* electoral success now accompanies this quiet revival. So perhaps mercy will pour as a river of the *righteous living*, after all.

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