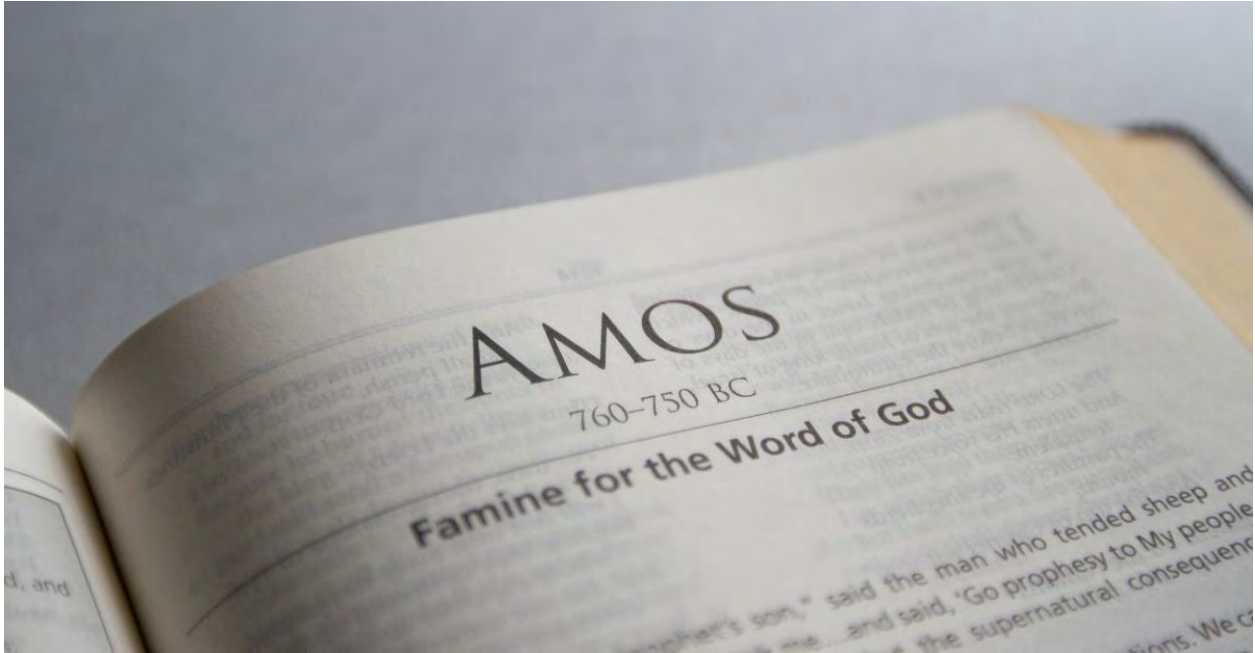


AMOS 5

WRONG PURSUITS



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Amos 5: Wrong Pursuits
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The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Amos 5: Introduction

Anything we pursue in life requires time and energy. Want to graduate from college? Make good use of your time and energy to complete all your assignments. Want to have a good marriage? Be a success in your chosen line of work? Have lots of friends? Yeah, you're gonna have to work at all those pursuits.

It takes time and energy to pursue our pursuits, including those which keep us from the Word and will of God. The people of Israel had many different pursuits with which they filled up their time and spent their strength. They simply chose to seek these rather than the Lord. Like people today, they could not gin up a lot of enthusiasm for seeking the Lord, His goodness, His justice, and His righteousness.

And that would be tragically too bad for them.

We hope you will find this study of the book of Amos to provide abundant stimulation for your walk with and work for the Lord.

For His glory and praise!

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1 A Lamentation for Israel

Pray Psalm 35.17-21.

Lord, how long will You look on?
Rescue me from their destructions,
My precious *life* from the lions.
I will give You thanks in the great assembly;
I will praise You among many people.
Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies;
Nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause.
For they do not speak peace,
But they devise deceitful matters
Against *the* quiet ones in the land.
They also opened their mouth wide against me,
And said, “Aha, aha!
Our eyes have seen it.”

Sing Psalm 35.17-21.

(Creation: [The Spacious Firmament on High](#))

How long, O LORD, will You sit by? O rescue my soul, or I shall die!
Thus praise and thanks I'll give to You with all who hold You dear and true.
The wicked would rejoice with glee, and gloat in triumph over me.
They speak no peace, their words are lies; they seek our destruction before their eyes.

Read and meditate on Amos 5.1-3.

Preparation

1. What did Amos “take up” against Israel?
2. What did he foresee happening to them?

Meditation

God does not delight in the destruction of His enemies. He takes no joy in disciplining His people. Like Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem, God loves His people with an everlasting love. But the nation of Israel had proved that it was not God's people. And the judgment to come evoked these words of lamentation from the prophet.

Only a tenth of the nation—that is, a very small remnant—would survive the coming judgment (v. 3). The rest would fall and no longer exist as a people. They would be forsaken by God, having their heritage, and there would be no one to raise them up again (v. 2). The destruction of Israel would be complete.

Why this word here? God has spoken harshly, even angrily against His people in preceding chapters. He hates sin (cf. v. 15), and He wanted Israel—and us—to know that. Yet He loved Israel, even in their rebellion, and their impending captivity gave Him no joy. All heaven rejoices with the Lord over one soul who comes to faith in Jesus Christ. But there is no gloating in heaven and no glee in God when people invoke the consequences of their sin upon their heads.

The Man of Sorrows endured the cross to carry away the sins of God's people. God took no pleasure in judging His Son, but He takes great pleasure in the fact that, because of Jesus, we are members of His household, His people, His inheritance.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

How glorious that “we are members of His household, His people, His inheritance.”

In warning, Amos’ lamentation included this phrase concerning Israel, “There is no one to raise her up” (Amos 5.2). But for those under the judgment of God, as everyone is, there remains hope of something, and Someone to make us members of His household. A better solution. A saving resolution to sin. So that we need not have a lamentation like this said for us.

“Now when Jesus had come into Peter’s house, He saw his wife’s mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. So she arose and served Him” (Matt. 8.14, 15). The NKJV has as its first rendering, “she served them”; but other manuscript texts read “Him”. I think “Him” is the better choice when we read it in the context of what Jesus said to Martha: “And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things (e.g. “serving them”). But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her”—sitting at Jesus’ feet and learning from Him; and serving Him (Lk. 10.41, 42).

Like Peter’s mother-in-law, we are not without Someone who will raise us up. Jesus. No matter how dire the situation seems, or is, He is with us to raise us up—now and later. “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion’, says my soul, ‘therefore I hope in Him!’” (Lam. 3.21-24).

Jesus said to numerous people, on many different occasions, “Follow Me”. He says the same to us today: “Follow Me”. And I will raise you up.

No need to fear that we will be forsaken, for we are told: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13.5).

There is just one tiny caveat/addendum to that promise, and it is this: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.” In other words, Keep the Law of God. Love and serve Him only. And He will be with us always, will never forsake us, and will raise us up.

Let’s not get stuck on the disobedience loop that tripped up the Israelites. History repeats itself, make no mistake, and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13.8). He can accomplish these same judgments against us, should we choose them. But why would we? We can see the handwriting clearly on the wall. Or can we?

The finger of God wrote this as a judgment against Belshazzar: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of each word:

MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.

PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5.22-28).

And what was Belshazzar’s transgression? “The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.”

“I AM the LORD, that is My Name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images” (Is. 42.8).

The Lamentation for Israel need not be ours. But to avoid it, we must serve God and glorify Him. Only.

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will

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they exist and were created” (Rev. 4.11).

To be members of Your household, Your people, and Your inheritance.

Reflection

1. Why was Israel unable to know the blessings of God? Why did they fall under His judgment?
2. God has not changed. Should we expect His discipline if we depart from Him? What might that look like (Heb. 12.3-11)?
3. We need the encouragement of our fellow believers to stay on the path with Jesus. Whom will you encourage today?

The convincing, awakening word must be heard and heeded, as well as words of comfort and peace; for whether we hear or forbear, the word of God shall take effect. The Lord still proclaims mercy to men, but they often expect deliverance from such self-invented forms as make their condemnation sure. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Amos 5.1-3

Pray Psalm 35.22-28.

Pray for revival throughout the churches of the Lord. Pray that the enemies of the Church would be silenced and dispersed and that great renewal and awakening to Jesus will sweep the world.

Sing Psalm 35.22-28.

(Creation: [*The Spacious Firmament on High*](#))

Stir up, O God, and wake to my right; defend my cause with all Your might,
And judge me in Your righteousness; let not my foes bring me to distress.
Let shame, dishonor be their gown who would Your holy ones bring down.
Let all who would themselves exalt be humbled, shamed, and brought to naught.

Let all rejoice triumphantly who would our vindication see.
Let them exalt the LORD above who love the ones that Jesus loves.
And let our tongues declare Your praise, and worship Jesus all our days.
Let those whom You are pleased to bless forever declare Your righteousness!

2 Seek the Lord

Pray Psalm 115.4-8.

Their idols *are* silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

Sing Psalm 115.4-8.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Idols made by men's own hand—ever to Your Name be glory—
see nor hear nor understand: Ever to Your Name be glory!
They neither feel nor walk, nor can they speak or talk;
all those who serve them fall: But unto Your Name be glory!

Read Amos 5.1-9; meditate on verses 4-9.

Preparation

1. What was Israel not to seek?

2. How did the Lord describe Himself?

Meditation

The sovereign power of God is great and awesome. He made both Pleiades and Orion—one of the smallest star clusters and one of the largest. Pleiades displays in the southern sky, Orion in the northern. This device is called a merism, a statement of opposites intended to encompass the whole. In fact, here we have a double merism (small/large; south/north). God might as well have said that He made all the stars. It's just more poetic and memorable to say it as He did.

He brings the new day; He ushers in the night. He evaporates water from the sea and deposits in on the earth. He Who can do this can ruin every strong man and pour fury upon every fortress. The LORD is His Name.

And yet this all-powerful, all-sovereign God calls us to seek Him—not to seek vain idols, like Israel did, but to seek Him, to know, love, and serve Him. Twice in our passage God promised life to those who seek Him and threatened devouring fire for those who prefer idols instead. God shows Himself to those who seek Him for justice and righteousness. Those who do not shall “come to nothing” and “go into captivity”.

Why does God keep saying this, one way or another, over and over? Because we need to hear it by as many means as possible, again and again. Let's not kid ourselves: We can neglect our great salvation as easily as Israel did (Heb. 2.1-3). Only the grace of our all-powerful, all-beautiful, always faithful God keeps us where we need to be—seeking Him and His glory (Ps. 27.4).

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Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

These verses are full of life-saving verbs.

We are told by God to “seek Me and live”, and “seek the LORD and live” (Amos 5.4, 6). Seek Him and live.

We are also told what He has done, and can do: He made, He turns, He makes, He calls, He pours, and He rains (Amos 5.8, 9). Power to create and to destroy.

Even if the Creation is all we know of Him, it can and should force us to our knees in adoration and respect

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handwork.
Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.
Their sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps. 19.1-4).

As a prelude to his words on the galaxies, and God’s creative power, Job observed:

“God is wise in heart and mighty in strength.
Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?”

Then his exposition of verbs, on what God can, and will do:

“He removes the mountains, and they do not know when He overturns them in His anger;
He shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble;
He commands the sun, and it does not rise;
He seals off the stars;
He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea;
He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south;
He does great things past finding out, Yes, wonders without number.”

Then an action question to humanity:

“If He takes away, who can hinder Him?
Who can say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’” (Job 9.4-12).

Most rational people have respect for authority. Yet do we have respect for God’s?

He is a God of action and will not tolerate evil indefinitely:

“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (Hab. 1.13).

For safety’s sake we must first and foremost respect His authority:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11.33).

Amos warned the people, and us, not to plumb the depths of these “unsearchable judgments” and “ways past finding out”. We can read about them, we can believe in them, but we do not want to come face to face with them. We really don’t. “The LORD is His Name” (Amos 5.8).

“The LORD will be awesome to them,
for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth;
people shall worship Him...” (Zeph. 2.11).

Seek, obey, and follow Him. Verbs worthy of doing.

Reflection

1. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to seek the Lord?

2. When should we seek the Lord? Should we ever stop seeking the Lord? Explain.

3. What should you expect as you seek the Lord?

While they refuse to come to Christ and to seek mercy in and by him, that they may live, the fire of Divine wrath breaks forth upon them. Men may make an idol of the world, but will find it cannot protect. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 5.1-6*

Pray Psalm 115.1-3, 9-18.

Pray that the Lord will enable you to seek Him and His glory in everything you do today.

Sing Psalm 115.1-3, 9-18.

(Plainfield: [Nothing but the Blood of Jesus](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, "Where is their God on high?"
You rule us, LORD, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

All who trust in Jesus yield—ever to His Name be glory—
find in Him their help and shield: Ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the LORD! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious LORD —ever to Your Name be glory—
will attend us evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, LORD, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase—ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace: Ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

3 Hating the Wrong Things

Pray Psalm 106.6, 48.

We have sinned with our fathers,
We have committed iniquity,
We have done wickedly...
Blessed be the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 106.6, 48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

We have sinned, just like our fathers; we have done iniquity.
Just like them, our hearts have wandered; we have acted wickedly.

Refrain

Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!
Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

Read Amos 5.1-15; meditate on verses 10-15.

Preparation

1. What did Israel hate?
2. What should Israel have hated?

Meditation

Israel's basic problem was not only that they loved all the wrong things; they also hated things they should have loved.

Like godly elders, ruling in the gates of the city according to the Law of God. Israel hated that and would not abide rebukes for sin from any of these judges (v. 10). Those who spoke uprightly to them—prophets—they hated. And why? Because those meddling prophets and judges got in the way of their sin! How can you take advantage of the poor, demand exorbitant taxes from landowners, and take bribes here and there when elders and prophets are warning you from the Law of God?

And how can you indulge in stone houses and pleasant vineyards when you trample down the poor before you trample out the grapes? Well, you can't have busy-body preachers and do-gooders telling you you can't have what you want, can you?

These transgressions were not paltry matters; they were “mighty sins” (v. 12). Afflicting the just with undue taxes, taking bribes to get what you want, turning away justice from the gates of the city: They hated all the wrong things. Because of the evil of the times, prudent men said nothing (v. 13).

But it was still not too late to repent (vv. 14, 15). Israel would have to recalibrate their affections, hating what they should hate and loving what they should love, and bringing back just laws to the gates of the cities. And even then, there were no guarantees (“It may be...”), so mighty were the sins of the nation. But to a remnant, God would show grace, though that grace would be a long time coming.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time” (Amos 5.13).

Let’s read about the prudent, shall we?

“The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps” (Prov. 14.15).

“The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning” (Prov. 16.21).

“A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov. 22.3).

There is a place in the Kingdom for the prudent.

Is God protecting His people from the hatred and abhorrence the wicked feel for them? (Amos 5.10)

Does He know that the wicked are too far gone to even hear the words of the righteous?

Does that time ever come?

Jesus said at a certain point in His ministry: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matt. 7.6).

God is saying to the wicked: “I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins; afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate” (Amos 5.12). I know this about you.

Paul’s words on topic were this: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time...” (1 Tim. 2.1-6). The prudent speak quietly through their righteous behavior (Prov. 28.4).

Whether it is prudent at this point in the life of the righteous—to deal with the wicked verbally, or not—there are truths and commandments to be kept either way.

Let’s read about those, shall we?

“Seek good and not evil, that you may live;

so the LORD God of hosts will be with you...

Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate” (Amos 5.14, 15).

Whatever. “It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant...” (Amos 5.15).

Either way, the prudent say: “Hallelujah!”

Reflection

1. Should Christians hate anything? How does Psalm 97.10 counsel us in this matter?

2. “Hate evil,” says the LORD. How would God know that you hate evil?

3. How does God reach the people in your Personal Mission Field with His grace? What does that entail?

Evil times will not bear plain dealing; that is, evil men will not. And these men were evil men indeed, when wise and good men thought it in vain even to speak to them. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 5.7-17*

Pray Psalm 106.44-48.

Call on the Lord to revive His people and renew His churches all over the world, that His grace may flow to the world for a great awakening to faith.

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Sing Psalm 106.44-48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

Look upon us, LORD, with favor, see us in our sore distress!

Hear our cries, with love surround us; turn again to heal and bless!

Refrain

Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!

Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

Save us, LORD, from every nation; gather us from all our ways.

And we to Your Name will offer glorious thanks and endless praise!

Refrain

4 Be Careful What You Pray For

Pray Psalm 7.9-11.

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end,
But establish the just;
For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.
My defense *is* of God,
Who saves the upright in heart.
God *is* a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.

Sing Psalm 7.9-11.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still, My Soul*](#))

Bring to an end the evil of the wicked,
but let Your righteous ones established be.
You are my shield, my soul will not be stricken;
test heart and mind, my true Defender be.
You are a righteous Judge in every way,
angry at wicked people every day.

Read and meditate on Amos 5.1-20; meditate on verses 16-20.

Preparation

1. What did the people desire?
2. What did God promise them?

Meditation

In Egypt, the judgment of God passed *over* the people of Israel and *through* the land of Egypt. As the people of Israel read in chapters 1 and 2 of Amos, the judgment of God was going to pass *by* them to afflict all their enemies. “Bring it on!” the people must have cheered in response to this news. “Let the day of God’s judgment come!”

But now God insisted that He would pass by His people no more, but would “pass through” Israel with a judgment so thorough that everyone from the wealthy, to the high society ladies, to people in the streets, farmers, professional mourners, the poor and oppressed, children and old people, and nearly all the rest of the people would know the wrath of God moving in their midst (vv. 16, 17).

It would be a dark day of woe and destruction (vv. 18, 19). The people who gladly heard the prophet as he railed against the enemies of the Lord, and who doubtless could hardly wait for that day of judgment to occur (v. 18), would now see that judgment turned against themselves, and there would be no escape. No escape and no hope. The light of God would depart the people, leaving them in captivity in the depth and darkness of their own sins.

And, yes, God still judges His people like this. Is it possible we’ve spent so much time praying and cheering against our (political, international, cultural) enemies that we’ve missed the part that finds us, like Israel, in the crosshairs of God? And is the Church headed for a season when things will be dark, very dark, with little or no light from the Lord?

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Who remembers the children's book, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, by Michael Rosen?

In it the children say, "I'm not scared/What a beautiful day!", but then...mayhem.

The scene portrayed by God reminds me of those children's run home. Only in Amos' book they "fled from a lion" only to be met by a "bear"; and when they breathed a sigh of relief, having gladly arrived home, and leaned against the wall for support, "a serpent bit" them!

They maybe should have been scared. For sure, the children of God should've been. "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...is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5.18, 20).

And this is not just the doom and gloom of the Old Testament we should be aware of—the same kind of warnings are throughout the New. Here is an example:

"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?" (2 Pet. 3.8-12).

With God, the message is always the same. He does not wish for anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance. However, when given the opportunity, and His grace has been spurned, then all should be aware of the judgment. That dark day, with no brightness in it.

God sent His Son Jesus, to save us from His wrath.

Jesus said of Himself, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10.10).

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Is. 9.2).

All this grace and abundant love from God has been showered upon those who do not spurn it.

We, deserving of the terror of the bear hunt and its dire consequences, have been freed from it.

We dare not long for the "day of the LORD" for our enemies.

We must have hearts like God's heart, to be merciful towards those who are perishing.

After all, He had mercy upon us (Rom. 5.8).

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise" (Prov. 11.30).

Reflection

1. Jesus said we should pray for our enemies (Matt. 5.44, 45). What do you think we should pray for them?
2. If we pray for them, should we tell them we are praying for them? Explain.
3. How do you expect God to use you by His grace today?

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The Lord is ever ready to be gracious to the souls that seek him; and then piety and every duty will be attended to. But as for sinful Israel, God's judgments had often passed by them, now they shall pass through them. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 5.7-17*

Pray Psalm 7.1-8.

Pray that God will lead His Church to repentance, revival, and renewal, and that the enemies of God's people may be humbled and many of them brought to salvation in Jesus.

Sing Psalm 7.1-8.

(Finlandia: [*Be Still, My Soul*](#))

O LORD, my God, I trust in You: O save me!

Deliver me from all who seek my life.

If in my hands, You find iniquity,

or any evil, any wicked strife,

then let my foe pursue and overtake me,

and without honor I shall surely be.

Arise, O LORD, rise up in wrath to save me!

Let rage and judgment fall upon my foes!

From all who know You let abundant praise be;

rise up on high; the wicked curse with woes.

O Judge of all, judge now my righteousness

and my integrity, approve and bless.

5 Worship and Life

Pray Psalm 50.16-21.

But to the wicked God says:
“What *right* have you to declare My statutes,
Or take My covenant in your mouth,
Seeing you hate instruction
And cast My words behind you?
When you saw a thief, you consented with him,
And have been a partaker with adulterers.
You give your mouth to evil,
And your tongue frames deceit.
You sit *and* speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother’s son.
These *things* you have done, and I kept silent;
You thought that I was altogether like you;
But I will rebuke you,
And set *them* in order before your eyes.”

Sing Psalm 50.16-21.

(Austrian Hymn: [*Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*](#))

“All of you My Word despising, who are you to claim My grace?
Praise may from your lips be rising, but you scorn Me to My face.
You approve of all transgressions, scheme against your mother’s son!
I will crush your vain aggressions and destroy what you have done.”

Read and meditate on Amos 5.1-24; meditate on verses 21-24.

Preparation

1. So, how did God really feel about Israel’s worship?
2. What was the problem with their worship?

Meditation

Obviously, the people of Israel were very religious. They kept feast days. Held sacred assemblies. Made burnt offerings and grain offerings and peace offerings. They could sing with the best of ‘em and had all the right instruments to keep the beat and stir the hearts of worshipers. We can see them now, hands waving in the air, smiling faces, bodies moving with the beat. What great worship!

Yeah, Israel had it all. And God considered all of it a waste of time. He hated and despised their worship. He refused to accept their offerings. He regarded their lively music as just so much noise. All these externals thrilled and satisfied the people and gave them a true sense of religion. But it was all worthless in the eyes of the Lord.

And why? Because, like the worshipers God called out in Psalm 50, Israel’s worship was disconnected from life. The people of Israel did not worship and honor God with their lives, as we have seen. They oppressed the poor, let the wealthy have their way, taxed and overtaxed the people to support their lavish lives. In short, there was no justice and no righteousness flowing through the nation of Israel. The mighty stream of God’s grace and truth had run dry. The worship of the people was done more to impress God rather than honor Him.

But God would have none of it. Justice and righteousness are both the fruit and the fertile soil of true worship. All other worship is vain.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

We are certainly not left to wonder how God feels about their worship:

“I hate” and “I despise” it, He stated. In fact, “I do not savor” anything about it (Amos 5.21).

Even though you offer Me what you think is worship, “I will not accept, nor regard” it (Amos 5.22).

And about the faux worship “noise”? “Take it away from Me” (Amos 5.23).

Do we ever stop to wonder how God feels about our worship?

What does God like about His children’s worship of Him? “Justice” and “righteousness” (Amos 5.24).

Hold the hypocrisy.

God said to Micah: I have shown you, O man, what is good. And here is what I require of you:

Behave justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Me (Mic. 6.8). No hoopla required.

The prophet Samuel spoke to Saul about his disobedience and hypocritical worship:

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,

He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Sam. 15.22, 23).

God really and truly does not like disobedience.

And He particularly doesn’t cotton to us, being pleased as punch with ourselves, because we did it our way!

“But the hour is coming,” Jesus said, “and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4.23, 24). Worship His way.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3.16, 17).
Worship His way.

“Seek Me and live” (Amos 5.4).

“...seek the Lord...for in Him we live and move and have our being...” (Acts 17.27, 28).

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5.25).

“But let justice run down like water,

And righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5.24).

His way to worship and life. This He will accept and savor.

Reflection

1. What would you say are the Biblical foundations or standards you use in worshiping the Lord?

2. How does your worship—weekly and daily—connect with your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

3. Why is worship so important to God? Why is it so important for us to get it right?

*[T]he Israelites deceived themselves, for they believed that God was pacified by their sacrifices: he declares all these to be useless; not only, as I think, because they themselves were impure; but because all their sacrifices were mere profanations. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Amos 5.21-23**

Pray Psalm 50.5-15, 22, 23.

Read through these verses in listening prayer. Review your practice of worshiping God—personally and together with your fellow believers. Listen as you review each facet of worship. Where does the Lord commend you? Where does He urge you to change or improve? Sum up your time in prayer, giving thanks to the Lord for helping you worship Him.

Sing Psalm 50.5-15, 22, 23.

(Austrian Hymn: [*Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*](#))

“Gather now My children holy, those bound close to Me by blood.”

Let the heav’ns declare His glory, for the LORD Himself is Judge:

“Hear, My people, I will charge you; I alone am God, your God!

I will bring a solemn charge to gain you to Me for your good.

“Not for rituals I accuse you—let your worship to Me rise.

Naught to Me is any use, Who dwells in glory in the skies.

All is mine throughout creation; I your help do not require.

Offer Me no vain oblation, hear what I from you desire:

“Sacrifice of thanks now render; pay to God your solemn vows;

let the troubled, each offender, seek Him in the midst of woes.

In the day of strife draw near Him; He will hear, and He will save.

Honor God, rejoice, and fear Him, give to Him your grateful praise.

“Reckon this, My sinful people, lest My wrath consume you whole:

None shall thwart Me when I seek to crush and break your sin-stiff soul.

He who thanks to Me addressing, follows after what is good,

He shall know the way of blessing coming from the hand of God.”

6 God and Idols: No

Pray Psalm 80.12-15.

Why have You broken down her hedges,
So that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit*?
The boar out of the woods uproots it,
And the wild beast of the field devours it.
Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.

Sing Psalm 80.12-15

(St. Theodulph: [*All Glory, Laud, and Honor*](#))

Now You in wrath have spoken and bruised Your chosen vine.
We languish, LORD, are broken by wrath, deserved, divine.
Once more, LORD, hear our pleading: return and heal this vine!
Look down on us, so needy, and show Your love divine!

Read Amos 5.1-27; meditate on verses 25-27.

Preparation

1. What did Israel do in the Wilderness?
2. What will God do as a result?

Meditation

The people of Israel were idolaters from the beginning. They saw the way God delivered them from Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. They received His Law and devoted themselves to obey it. They ate from His table every day during their wilderness wanderings, and they observed His Presence with them in the fire and cloud, as well as in the tabernacle.

But God wasn't enough for many of them. They clung to their hand-made idols and household deities—Sikkuth and Chiun and probably others. They fixed their trust on these idols even as they gave God the offerings He required. They claimed to be part of the people of God, but they were instead people devoted to idols.

Idols they wanted, and idols God would give them. Their captivity “beyond Damascus” would eradicate all the last vestiges of the worship of God, and they would assimilate the idols and wicked practices of their neighbors, their identity as God's people lost forever. The God of hosts will not be mocked by being made to play second fiddle to false idols.

That was true then, and it's still true today. What idols do we trust in more than the Lord? Good political outcomes? A secure retirement? Plenty of free time—including Sundays—to pursue our recreational interests? Stuff? Fun? Sikkuth? Chiun? Who's the star god in our secret pantheon?

God will not tolerate worshiping Him and clinging to idols. No, He will not.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Some may remember the ridiculous public service announcement, during the Cold War of the fifties, that in the event of a nuclear attack we were to duck and cover under our school desks. To be safe. Right.

When God starts asking questions it seems a good time to “duck and cover”, equally as ineffectual as seeking protection from a piece of furniture; however, taking notice of the impending cataclysm is a worthy activity.

When Adam and Eve sinned, and tried to hide from God, Adam was asked these two questions: “Where are you?” and “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen. 3.9, 11). Duck and cover, Adam.

When Job was struggling with his desire for an explanation from God about his suffering, God asked him: “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

“Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?” (Job 38.2; 40.2).

And in between those two verses are a plethora of others to put him in his place. Duck and cover, Job.

And then here, through Amos, God questions the children of Israel:

“Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years...?” And “you also carried Sikkuth...and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves” (Amos 5.25, 26).

Yep. Duck and cover, children.

Here is the truth of the matter. God cares about us, no doubt. He cares enough to send His Own Beloved Son, Jesus, to take the penalty for our multitude of sins. But we are just people. We are not now, nor ever will be, God. And He says to us, when we get confused about Who is in charge:

“Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me’? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’” (Is. 29.16).

“Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?

Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?” (Is. 10.15)

“Woe to him who strives with his Maker!” (Is. 45.9) Indeed. That’s us: duck and cover!

“Did you?” “Therefore I will.” (Amos 5.25, 27).

And no desk can protect us from that.

Simple solution, though: Obey God. Worship His way. Keep His Law.

Love Him first and foremost—no idols attached (Matt. 22.37-40).

“Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.

He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and

for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (Ps. 107.19-21).

That’s us too: safe (Lk. 15.7, 10).

Reflection

1. What are some things that can lead us to take up idols for our happiness in life?
2. How can we arrest those things? Or even better, keep them from ever being a problem?
3. Obedience to God is an everyday little thing. Explain. How would you counsel a new believer to cultivate such obedience?

The people of Israel copied the crimes of their forefathers. The law of worshipping the Lord our God, is, Him only we must serve. Professors thrive so little, because they have little or no communion with God in their duties. They were led captive by Satan into

Amos 5: Wrong Pursuits

idolatry, therefore God caused them to go into captivity among idolaters. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 5.18-27*

Pray Psalm 80.1-7.

Pray for revival—for yourself, your church, churches throughout your community, and churches all over the world. Ask the Lord to help you cast off any idols that possess more of your trust and hope than He does.

Sing Psalm 80.1-7

(St. Theodulph: [*All Glory, Laud, and Honor*](#))

O God of grace, restore us, and shine on us Your face!
O save us, LORD, work for us; renew us by Your grace!
Give ear, O gracious Savior, Who leads us as Your flock:
Stir up Your pow'r and favor, our King and LORD and Rock!

How long will You ignore all Your people's fervent prayer?
Shall bitter tears fall ever? O LORD, renew Your care!
Our neighbors mock and scorn us, they laugh at our distress.
Renew, O LORD, and turn us, look down on us and bless!

7 Pursuits

Opening Prayer: Psalm 14.1-3

The fool has said in his heart,
“There is no God.”
They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.
The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.

Sing Psalm 14.1-3

(St. Anne: [O God, Our Help in Ages Past](#))

The fool within his heart proclaims, “There is no God at all!”
His deeds are wicked, filled with shame who on God will not call.

No good in such as these is found; corruption fills their breast.
God from His heav’nly throne looks down, their hearts and ways to test.

Read Amos 5.1-27; meditate on verses 4, 6, 14, 24.

Preparation

1. What kinds of “pursuits” were the people of Israel following?
2. What did God call them to seek?

Meditation

Like people in every age, those in Israel were engaged in a wide range of pursuits. A quick review of Amos 5 shows us what occupied their hearts, minds, time, and strength: false deities (vv. 4, 5); injustice and unrighteousness (v. 7); release from God’s Law (v. 10); self-aggrandizement (v. 11); unbridled sin (v. 12); farms and vineyards (vv. 16, 17); religious shows (vv. 21-24); and, again, false gods (vv. 25, 26).

Anything we pursue in life requires time and energy. Want to graduate from college? Make good use of your time and energy to complete all your assignments. Want to have a good marriage? Be a success in your chosen line of work? Have lots of friends? Yeah, you’re gonna have to work at all those pursuits.

It takes time and energy to pursue our pursuits, including those which keep us from the Word and will of God. The people of Israel had many different pursuits with which they filled up their time and spent their strength. They simply chose to seek these rather than the Lord. Like people today, they could not gin up a lot of enthusiasm for seeking the Lord, His goodness, His justice, and His righteousness.

And that would be tragically too bad for them.

Many Christians today are so busy with their many pursuits that they don’t have much time for the Lord. Too busy thinking about this, that, and the other; too much of their time wasted in vain pursuits; so tired and worn out that they can’t find the strength to pray or seek the Lord in His Word. But they’ll be in church, yes

indeed, and telling themselves that's all of God they need to pursue. Wrong.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Seek Me and live.”

“Seek the LORD and live.”

“Seek good and not evil that you may live” (Amos 5.4, 5, 14).

The transitive verb *seek* means: to try to locate or discover; to search for; to endeavor to obtain or reach; to go to or toward. The word vibrates with activity. One does not sit idly by whilst seeking.

We must actively seek the LORD in His Word, through keeping His Law, through prayer, through living by the power of the Holy Spirit, through turning away from sinfulness, and turning to righteousness. Vigorously and intentionally.

David pled with God to aid him in seeking:

“Hear, O LORD when I cry with my voice!

Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

When You said, ‘Seek My face,’

my heart said to You, ‘Your face, LORD, I will seek.’

Do not hide Your face from me;

do not turn Your servant away in anger;

You have been my help;

do not leave me nor forsake me,

O God of my salvation” (Ps. 27.7-9).

“Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;

let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him;

and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Is. 55.6, 7).

Jesus taught, regarding seeking Him and the Holy Spirit:

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you;

Seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds,

and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Lk. 11.9, 10, 13).

Paul taught concerning seeking God:

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3.1-3).

When we seek Him and live, then from us will flow justice and righteousness—not unlike a waterfall or a mighty stream. And in that, God will find great delight, and will bless us with peace in Him.

“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places...” (Is. 32.16-18).

Actively and vigorously seek the LORD and live!

Through the power of the asked for, sought after, and found Holy Spirit:

Let justice and righteousness roll down mightily!

Amos 5: Wrong Pursuits

Let God delight in you (Prov. 11.20).

Reflection

1. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to seek the Lord?
2. What are some things that can keep you from seeking the Lord?
3. Do you think believers should try to seek the Lord together? Explain.

While they refuse to come to Christ and to seek mercy in and by him, that they may live, the fire of Divine wrath breaks forth upon them. Men may make an idol of the world, but will find it cannot protect. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Amos 5.1-6*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 14.4-7

Pray that your pursuits may be the ones God calls you to seek. Wait on the Lord in silent prayer, asking Him to reveal any vain pursuits in your life.

Sing Psalm 14.4-7

(St. Anne: [*O God, Our Help in Ages Past*](#))

None understands, none seeks the LORD; they all have turned aside.
Deception leads them from God's Word who have His grace denied.

The workers of iniquity consume God's sheep like bread;
they trust not in the LORD, and He shall fill their hearts with dread.

For Jesus with the righteous stands, though they be put to shame.
He holds them safely in His hands who shelter in His Name.

Restore Your Church, let Zion sing; our captive hearts release,
that we may Your salvation bring, rejoicing and in peace.

Amos 5: Wrong Pursuits

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. With what pursuits did the people of Israel fill up their time and spend their energy? What was wrong with this?
2. What was God expecting them to seek? How would they have done that?
3. How did God respond to the worship they actually did offer Him? Why did He respond this way?
4. What idols can interfere with our worship of God today? How can you know if any such idol has found a place in your life?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from this section of the book of Amos?

For Prayer:

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