

Preparing for the day of the Lord

7.19.2020

Amos Series

Amos 5:1–27 (CSB)

LAMENTATION FOR ISRAEL

Listen to this message that I am singing for you, a lament, house of Israel:

² She has fallen;

Virgin Israel will never rise again.

She lies abandoned on her land

with no one to raise her up.

³ For the Lord GOD says:

The city that marches out a thousand strong

will have only a hundred left,

and the one that marches out a hundred strong

will have only ten left in the house of Israel.

SEEK GOD AND LIVE

⁴ For the LORD says to the house of Israel:

Seek me and live!

⁵ Do not seek Bethel

or go to Gilgal

or journey to Beer-sheba,

for Gilgal will certainly go into exile,

and Bethel will come to nothing.

⁶ Seek the LORD and live,
or he will spread like fire
throughout the house of Joseph;
it will consume everything
with no one at Bethel to extinguish it.

⁷ Those who turn justice into wormwood
also throw righteousness to the ground.

⁸ The one who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns darkness into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who summons the water of the sea
and pours it out over the surface of the earth—
the LORD is his name.

⁹ He brings destruction on the strong,
and it falls on the fortress.

¹⁰ *They hate the one who convicts the guilty
at the city gate,
and they despise the one who speaks with integrity.*

¹¹ Therefore, because you trample on the poor
and exact a grain tax from him,
you will never live in the houses of cut stone
you have built;
you will never drink the wine
from the lush vineyards

you have planted.

12 For I know your crimes are many

and your sins innumerable.

They oppress the righteous, take a bribe,

and deprive the poor of justice at the city gates.

13 Therefore, those who have insight will keep silent

at such a time,

for the days are evil.

14 Pursue good and not evil

so that you may live,

and the LORD, the God of Armies,

will be with you

as you have claimed.

15 Hate evil and love good;

establish justice at the city gate.

Perhaps the LORD, the God of Armies, will be gracious

to the remnant of Joseph.

16 Therefore the LORD, the God of Armies, the Lord, says:

There will be wailing in all the public squares;

they will cry out in anguish in all the streets.

The farmer will be called on to mourn,

and professional mourners to wail.

17 There will be wailing in all the vineyards,

for I will pass among you.

The LORD has spoken.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!

What will the day of the LORD be for you?

It will be darkness and not light.

19 It will be like a man who flees from a lion

only to have a bear confront him.

He goes home and rests his hand against the wall

only to have a snake bite him.

20 Won't the day of the LORD

be darkness rather than light,

even gloom without any brightness in it?

21 I hate, I despise, your feasts!

I can't stand the stench

of your solemn assemblies.

22 Even if you offer me

your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

I will have no regard

for your fellowship offerings of fattened cattle.

23 Take away from me the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice flow like water,

and righteousness, like an unfailing stream.

²⁵ “House of Israel, was it sacrifices and grain offerings that you presented to me during the forty years in the wilderness? ²⁶ But you have taken up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, images you have made for yourselves. ²⁷ So I will send you into exile beyond Damascus.” The LORD, the God of Armies, is his name. He has spoken.

Introduction: Preparing for the Last Days.

A. The Word of God through Amos depicts a group of people who are excited for the last days but aren't ready for it. 5:18-24

1. They want God to show up.
2. They want God to set things right with their evil neighbors.
3. They want to be the only ones, and believe they would be exempt from judgment.
4. But God declares: Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord, for it will be a dark day for you.
 - a. It will come as a terrible shock, the imagery says.
 - b. It pictures a man who escapes a lion, only to come face to face with a bear.
 - c. Then surviving the lion and the bear, a snake bites him.
 - d. One terror after another until the final terror kills.

B. Jesus confronted this same attitude in people during His day.

1. Time and again Israel and even Jesus' disciples wanted Jesus to be the King they had hoped for.
2. They wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome, establish His kingdom, and then elevate them to their "rightful" place of privilege.
3. Instead, Jesus told them that the Kingdom and the Last Days would look a lot different than what they were asking for and, they were not ready for what was coming.

C. *I can't help but think that many Christians are praying for Jesus to return, but don't realize how unready we really are!*

1. 1 Peter 4:12–19 (CSB)

¹² Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. ¹⁶ But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. ¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

¹⁸ And **if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?**

¹⁹ So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.

2. Peter records a stark warning that "God judges His own house before He judges the houses of the world".

3. And, I am afraid, that when God cleanses His house, He will find many of his people not ready.

a. He may find His people busy, but busy with the wrong things.

b. He may find His people with a vision, but the wrong vision.

c. He may find His people engaged, but engaged with the wrong mission.

7. This was true in Jesus' day and in the days of the Prophet Amos.

8. Yet, God does not leave His people clueless about how to prepare for the Day of the Lord.

How do God's people prepare for the Days of the Lord?

1. We Prepare for the day of the Lord by grieving over our sin.

A. Amos 5 begins with a Lament or a dirge.

1. A Lament is a song or poem that expresses sadness and pain over a situation.
2. The first 3 verses is the beginning of a song that God is singing about what is happening.
3. God is saddened, He is angry, He is grieving and that is expressed powerfully in the phrase "Virgin, Israel".

B. The phrase "Virgin, Israel" is huge.

1. I didn't realize last week that this phrase is used in Amos along with Jeremiah.
 - a. In Jeremiah 31, the phrase has a redemptive tone to it.
 - b. Only God can take a prostitute and restore her virginity.
 - c. But this in Amos is a LOADED image with a ton of depth.
2. The depth of the meaning is this:
 - a. First, *The term "Virgin" depicts Israel's vulnerability as a girl or young woman without a husband to protect her.*
 - b. Second, Virgin depicts a life full of potential.
 1. The Potential of love and fruitfulness.
 2. The potential of family and blessing.
 3. When we look at a child and see a future of possibilities in front of them, that is the kind of imagery that this term expressed back in that day.
3. God is lamenting not only because Israel has been unfaithful to him, lamenting over what could have been.

C. Throughout Scripture, Israel is said to have been betrothed and married to God.

1. He promised to be their God, and she would belong to God.

2. Because of this Covenant nature, God had provided many blessings.

a. Part of that blessing was prosperity and the inhabiting of the Promised Land.

b. But God now declares that Israel lies abandoned in her land.

a. Because the land belonged to her BECAUSE IT FIRST BELONGED TO GOD, she now had no claim to the land.

b. The possession of the land was contingent on her relationship with God, and now she is being cast out.ⁱ

c. Until Israel recognizes this, and repents, she would lose access to what had been given to her.

d. Just as Adam and Eve could not stay in the Garden due to their sin; Israel would have to leave her land for a time because of her sinfulness.

3. The blessing, the future, the possibilities, the ministry, the relationship.

4. All of this has been thrown away (in a sense) because Israel shared with others what belonged only to God.

D. Amos 5 is an invitation to join God in grieving over her sin and repent.

1. Truth: We will never ask for forgiveness if we don't think we have done anything wrong.

2. Today, God invites us to see our wrongs and to receive forgiveness.

3. We have the opportunity to repent, to be changed, and to be restored.

4. Perhaps you find yourself not living the way you should.

- a. What can you do?
- b. First, Call your behavior what it is:
 1. Mistakes are mistakes, like mailing a letter without a stamp.
 2. Sin violates the image of God in you and in someone else.
- c. Once you have called it, repent.
 1. Change your attitude and change your behavior.
 2. Avoid that sin to the best of your ability.
- d. If/when you struggle, confess your struggle to God and to a friend.

2. We prepare for the day of the Lord by **seeking God**.

A. Israel was religious.

1. But she was worshipping the wrong gods in the wrong places.
2. Israel was worshipping everywhere, like Gilgal and Bethel.
 - a. There she was offering sacrifices that God had never asked for and giving offerings that God did not want.
 - b. **God's people were religious but without relationship.**
3. It is possible to look good on the outside and be dead on the inside.

B. Yet, God pleads for Israel in Verse 6 to "Seek the LORD and live".

1. God didn't want to exile Israel.
2. He was not enjoying the devastation that Assyria would bring.
3. **So God, in His mercy, warned Israel through the prophets of the impending doom but also the opportunity for salvation.**

C. What amazes me is that God was willing to give mercy to His people even though they refused mercy to others!

1. The accusations against the nations in Amos are aimed at the lack of mercy and justice flowing in the streets.
2. Verse 12 says that Israel oppressed the righteous, took bribes, and deprived the poor of justice.
3. If God's people would have turned to the Lord, God would have saved them and healed them.
4. Salvation was available, but Israel rejected it.

D. Brothers and Sisters, we cannot hold God guilty for our sin!

1. He has made salvation and new life available for you and I if we will embrace Him.
2. *Preparation for the Last Days requires us to get right with God and to stay right with Him each and every-day.*
3. I challenge all of us to seek God like never before.
4. It's possible that God is inclining His hear to hear the prayers of His people so that He can answer them. Psalm 116:2

3. We Prepare for the Day of the Lord by acting Righteously.

A. Righteousness is a very important term in the Bible.

1. Very simply, it means to be straight in living.
2. In the Old Testament, it refers to have a "right" or "above-board" relationship with both God and Man.
 - a. *You can't be righteous with God and terrible to your neighbor or fellowman.*
 - b. *No such thing as a righteous jerk.*
- b. That also means you can't have a great relationship with people but not have a relationship with God.
- c. Just as Jesus said the Greatest Commandment is to Love God and to Love our Neighbors, righteous people have solid relationships with both God and with humanity.

B. The People of Israel failed on both accounts.

1. Not only did they not worship God the way they were supposed to, their relationships with other people were terrible.

2. The only thing that talked in that day and time was money (sound familiar).

a. Money would buy your verdict in court.

b. Money determined if you were treated fairly or not.

c. Money determined everything about your existence.

3. God had intended for His People to use their wealth and blessings to bring justice and help to the poor, not to oppress them with it.

a. When God blesses, He blesses on purpose.

b. For all of us here today, who will you bless with the blessing?

c. Who will you share Jesus with?

1. Who will you share healing with?

2. Who will you share peace and strength with?

3. Who will you show compassion and mercy to?

d. *Don't withhold God's blessings from people because they don't look like you, talk like you, or act the way you think they should act.*

e. Instead, act righteously toward others.

C. *Where do I start?*

1. *Righteousness starts at home towards your spouse, parents, or kids.*

2. *Righteousness starts in your neighborhood.*

3. *Righteousness starts in your workplace.*

4. God will never send you if He can't trust you where you are.
 - a. Don't pray for opportunities in another church or another city if you aren't faithful here.
 - b. Don't expect to be an effective missionary in another country if you aren't effective in your neighborhood.
 - c. Don't expect to be given another platform of influence if you are squandering the one you are on now.
 - d. Righteousness starts where you are.

4. We Prepare for the Last Days by giving what God has asked.

A. Israel was really good at being religious.

1. They were singing songs, giving offerings, and holding sacred feasts.
2. One problem: **They were giving God what He hadn't asked for and withholding what God had required.**
 - a. Vs. 25: Was it sacrifices and offerings you presented to me during our forty years in the wilderness?
 - b. The answer is NO.
 - c. What God wanted from Israel during that season was her attention.
 - d. God wanted to be the focus, not merely the recipient.

B. The fruit, the giving of God's people, perverted what God intended.

1. Vs. 7: Those who turn justice into wormwood also throw righteousness to the ground.
2. "Wormwood (*artemisia absinthium*) is a plant that grows up to four feet tall and produces small yellow flowers in midsummer. It is known for its smell, which is a "pungent, bitter aroma." While

not poisonous, it is not recommended for eating. And, most importantly for this context, its taste is quite bitter".¹

- a. Justice was supposed to be sweet and good.
- b. Israel perverted it into something distasteful.

C. What does God want from me?

1. Many of us are looking for God's will for our lives.

- a. What we usually mean is "what task or what office am I called to?"
- b. Maybe you are in the process of discovering what specific area God wants you to serve in.
- c. But Amos lists a few things that God wants all of us to do.
- d. Whatever your office or calling, ALL of us are called to these things.

2. Vs. 14-15 says we are to "Pursue Good and not evil".

- a. WE are to hate evil and love good.
- b. We are to establish justice at our places of influence (city gate).
 1. In the old cities, the city gate was where business, both personal and legal, were conducted.
 2. It served as a local court where the men would gather and serve as both judges and witnesses.
- c. I encourage you to find "your city gate" your place of influence and in that place to do good and hate evil.
 1. Remember, righteousness starts at home.

¹ JoAnna M. Hoyt, [Amos, Jonah, & Micah](#), ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 178.

2. Justice begins where you are.

3. Don't drive to a faraway city to fight for justice and then come home and be a jerk.

4. Establish justice and do good IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

3. VS. 24. LET JUSTICE FLOW LIKE WATER and Righteousness like an unfailing stream (or can be translated as a torrent)

a. Israel had poured out religion, but had withheld justice and righteousness.

b. God wanted them to stop the religion, and pour out justice and righteousness.

c. In our day and time, justice has become a popular term but nobody knows what it is.

d. And those who are searching for justice are looking in all the wrong places, at all the wrong people, for all the wrong reasons.

e. **Justice is not a partisan issue, it is a prophetic issue.**

f. What would happen if all of the people who claimed to be Christians would stop pouring out opinions, hatred, fake news, vitriol, filth, and everything unChristlike and, instead, let Mercy and Justice flow?

Closing: Many people are talking about Jesus' returns and the last days.

A. But most of our preparation involves hoarding ammunition and toilet paper.

1. But what God wants from us is to demonstrate Christlike behavior.

2. Jesus came so that all people might have the opportunity to know Him and experience salvation.

3. Jesus then saves us so we can share real justice, mercy, and righteousness in our world.

B. But it is hard to share what we are running low on.

1. When you are running low on love, it's hard to love.

2. When you are running low on mercy, it's hard to treat people with mercy.

3. When you are running low on grace, or patience, or forgiveness it is hard to be righteous in your relationships at home or work.

4. When you are running low on Jesus, nothing else will satisfy.

C. Maybe, this week, you need to a fill up.

1. We do that, according to Amos, by seeking after God.

2. This morning, would you be so bold as to stand and together let us ask God to help us draw closer to Him than ever before.

a. Ask God to fill whatever cup in your life is running empty or low.

b. Ask God to show us how to be righteous and to flow in mercy at home and at work.

ⁱ In this lament the northern kingdom is described as בְּתוּלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, “virgin Israel.” The traditional understanding of the phrase is that the const. noun “virgin” is a “construct of apposition” (i.e., “virgin, [that is,] Israel”). The p 167 image depicts Israel as young and in need of protection, but more so that she is waiting for the consummation of a relationship. In the imagery of the Bible this refers to Yahweh’s relationship with her. He has chosen her and promised her, but she often plays the harlot (cf. Ps 106:39; Isa 1:21; Hos 4:12). Yet Yahweh still plans for a day when Israel will return to him (cf. Lev 26:44–45; Neh 1:9; Jer 3:7).

This “virgin” who has turned her back on Yahweh will be נִטְשָׁה, “jilted.” The verb נִטַּשׁ in the *niphal* describes being spread out (cf. Judg 15:9; 2 Sam 5:18, 22; Isa 16:8; 33:23), but it is often translated here as being “neglected” (NASB), “abandoned” (NET), or “discarded” (NIV). Such ideas are cultivated from the context. Israel was just referred to as a בְּתוּלָה, “virgin/young lady,” and the idea of a virgin nation being “spread out” indicates a lack of identity and protection. The one who Israel was to be in a relationship with has disowned her. She is disowned עַל־אֶדְמָתָה, “on/in her land,” meaning that the relationship with Yahweh is broken, and since her possession of the land is contingent on her relationship, she will lose the land. She is about to be cast out. For this reason, the translation of “jilted” fits the context well. Of course, this translation is used with an understanding of the wider context of the biblical story, in which Yahweh has never truly “jilted” Israel. Rather, Israel is the one who left Yahweh, yet Yahweh remains faithful and continually seeks to draw Israel back, and still does today. Mays (85) describes this as “personify[ing] the nation as a maid cut off before the consummation of her life, a girl violated by the ravaging assault of a military foe.” Similarly, Chisholm (2002, 390) describes it as “depict[ing] one who is ready to enter into full womanhood, only to have her life suddenly taken from her.” Many other commentators note similar descriptions.

The lament concludes with a statement that there is אֵין מְקִימָהּ, “no one to help her up.” The word translated “help” is a *hiphil* of קָיַם, “to establish.” p 168 This is more than the image of merely having someone help a person stand up. This is the idea of someone causing the fallen to become reestablished. Yahweh established Israel as a nation, but as judgment he has removed it.ⁱ