

God is Not Fooled

Amos 5:14-15, 18-27
SS Lesson for 06/14/2015

Devotional Scripture: Gal 6:7-10

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Amos 5:24

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

GOD DESIRES GODLINESS (AMOS 5:14-15)

Seek good and not evil (14)

Seek good by being an example (Titus 2:7)

Seeking good is profitable for everyone (Titus 3:8)

Seeking good as part of being productive in our daily life (Titus 3:14)

Seeking good causes others to glorify God (1 Peter 2:12)

Seeking good is sharing with others (Heb 13:16)

Establish justice (15)

Justice that comes from righteous wisdom (Ps 37:30)

Justice that comes from the plans of the righteous (Prov 12:5)

Justice that comes from doing right (Prov 21:3)

Justice that comes from God to His chosen ones (Luke 18:7)

GOD WARNS OF COMING JUDGMENT (AMOS 5:18-20)

Judgment at the day of the Lord (18)

The Day of the Lord is a day of tumult and terror for those who are not prepared (Isaiah 22:5)

On the day of the Lord all His holy people will be glorified (2 Thess 1:10)

The Day of the Lord is near (Zeph. 1:7-9)

The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thes. 5:2)

Study and apply word so that we will persevere until the day of the Lord (Phil 2:16)

Judgment that is not expected (19)

Not expected by scoffers (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Not expected by the religious rulers (Jer 5:12)

Not expected by false teachers (2 Thess 2:1-3)

Judgment of the darkness of sin (20)

A judgment that will bring everything to light (1 Cor 4:5)

A judgment that judges men's secrets (Rom 2:16)

A judgment of the nations (Matt 25:31-33)

A judgment that judges what was done in the body (2 Cor 5:10)

GOD IS NOT FOOLED BY FALSE WORSHIP (AMOS 5:21-27)

False gatherings (21)

False gatherings where the people do not listen and are against God (Lev 26:27-31)

False gatherings that trample in God's House (Isa 1:12)

False gatherings that seek followers in evil ways (Matt 23:15-16)

False offerings (22)

False offerings from the wicked (Prov 21:27)

False offerings from people who carry out ungodly scheme (Jer 6:19-20)

False offerings from the disobedient (Hos 8:12-13)

False offerings from the sinful (Mal 2:11-12)

False music and singing (23)

False music and singing from the self-indulgent (Amos 6:5-7)

False music and singing from those who mistreat the poor and needy (Amos 8:3-4)

False music and singing from those who practice cheating and seeking dishonest gain (Amos 8:6-10)

False righteousness (24-25)

Righteousness that is false because it did not include mercy (Hos 6:6)

Righteousness that is false because of it being cast to the ground (Amos 5:7)

Righteousness that is false because of trying to establish it on our own (Rom 10:3)

False idolatry (26)

False idolatry is exchanging God's truth for a lie (Rom 1:25)

False idolatry must be avoided (1 Cor 10:14)

False idolatry is participating with demons (1 Cor 10:18-22)

Punishment of false worship (27)

Worship with rules of man (Matt 15:9)

Worship that is not done in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24)

Worship by those that do not keep a tight rein on the tongue (James 1:26)

Worship of idols (Ps 97:7)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM DAVID GUZIK

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches that regardless how much man may try, **God is Not Fooled**. The **study's aim** is to show that although we are not to keep the ceremonial law, we are nevertheless called to righteous living. The **study's application** is to live a consistent Christian life daily to honor the Lord God and not incur His discipline.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Amos 5:24

But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The possibility still existed, however, for individuals to separate themselves from their guilty nation (cf. Amos 5:4-6). If people would **seek good, not evil**, they might yet **live**. If they would go counter to the prevailing corruption—if they would **hate evil** instead of hating the righteous (Amos 5:10), if they would **maintain justice in the courts** instead of trampling it (Amos 5:11-12)—**then the LORD God Almighty**, the great suzerain Warrior would be their Defender instead of their Judge. He would indeed **be with** them, **just as** they were claiming **He** was. “The LORD is with us” was Israel’s ancient shout of assurance that their powerful God would fight for them in battle (Num. 23:21; Deut. 20:4; 31:8; Judges 6:12; Isa. 8:10; Zeph. 3:15, 17) and defend them in adversity (Pss. 23:4; 46:7, 11). But in the time of Jeroboam II this shout had become an empty slogan. Their assurance, Amos insisted, was a delusion. God was no longer “with them.” The guilty nation had been abandoned (cf. Amos 5:2). Their external prosperity was misleading; it had bred a false security (cf. 6:3; 9:10; Micah 3:11). In reality, there would be only a brief respite before their Sovereign would sweep them away in judgment.

If a handful, however, would turn and passionately seek the Lord, **perhaps** the great Suzerain would **have mercy on** that small repentant **remnant of** the Northern Kingdom, here called **Joseph** (see comments on Amos 9:8-15 for the fulfillment).

In this fourth message Amos declared that because of Israel’s religious hypocrisy “the day of the LORD” would be a day of exile rather than exaltation. Repentant individuals, however, could escape this disaster. See the comments under “C. The third message (Amos 5:1-17)” on the chiasmic structure of verses 18-27. **Woe** (*hōy*; cf. Amos 6:1) was ordinarily the wail of grief over the dead (cf. 1 Kings 13:30 [“Oh”]; Jer. 22:18; 34:5 [“Alas”]). Pronounced over the living, “woe” was a prediction of death (cf. Amos 6:1; Isa. 5:8-24; 10:1-4; Micah 2:1-5; see comments on Amos 5:1) or an interjection of distress in the face of present or coming calamity (cf. comments on Isa. 3:9; and comments on 6:5). The “woe” was addressed to those who were eagerly longing **for the day of the LORD**. Their earnest desire, Amos warned, was ill-founded, for **that day** would be a day of **darkness, not light** (cf. Amos 5:20). In Israel’s thinking, “the day of the LORD” was to be the time of God’s culminating vengeance against her enemies, the day when their mighty Sovereign would fight on their behalf (Isa. 34:1-3, 8; Jer. 46:10). On that day, she thought, He would turn His wrath on the wicked nations, punishing with disaster and death those who had threatened His people (Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1-3). On that day Israel would be permanently secured from danger, and exalted among all nations of the earth (Isa. 24:21-23; Joel 3). Amos’ hearers eagerly anticipated that day. They did not realize, however, that its horrors would fall, not only on the nations, but also on them. Israel mistakenly believed that their Sovereign was “with” her (see comments on Amos 5:14), and that on His day of conquest He would eradicate her enemies. The truth, Amos declared, was that Israel herself had become God’s enemy. Her continual sins against His covenant had made her one of the adversaries. “The day of the LORD,” therefore, would not be the expected day of happiness. It would be instead the Suzerain’s day of vengeance against the rebels within His kingdom (cf. 8:9-10; 9:1-10). Their experience on that day would be like that of **a man running from a lion** who then meets **a bear**. Somehow

eluding this second threat, he managed to flee to **his house** where he **rested his hand on the wall** in exhaustion and relief. But there, in the supposed safety of his home, a poisonous **snake** bit **him**. Similarly Israel would find no haven from God's judgment. **The day of the LORD**, Amos repeated (cf. Amos 5:18), would be a day of **darkness, not light** (Joel 2:1-2, 10-11; Zeph. 1:14-15), a day of **pitch-dark** gloom, **without a ray of brightness** or hint of hope. The Old Testament prophets spoke of another brighter "day of the LORD," a day after the exile, when a chastened and impoverished remnant returned to the land, a day when God will restore His people's fortunes and turn their hearts toward Him (Jer. 30:8-11; Hosea 2:16-23; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:11-20).

God's burning anger was directed mostly against Israel's religious hypocrisy. He hated, He despised (the repetition indicates vehemence and passion) their **religious feasts**—the three pilgrimage festivals of Unleavened Bread, Harvest (Weeks), and Ingathering (Tabernacles) which were celebrated annually at the sanctuary (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18-24; Lev. 23; Deut. 16:1-17). He could not **stand** (lit., "smell") the offerings of their **assemblies**. **Though** they continually brought Him **burnt offerings** (Lev. 1) and **grain offerings** (Lev. 2), He would **not accept them** as legitimate sacrifices. **Though** they brought **choice fellowship offerings** (Lev. 3), He would **have no regard for** or awareness of **them**. He loathed every part of their religious worship (see comments on Amos 4:4-5). In verses 23-24 the verbs "away" and "let... roll" are singular, whereas in verses 21-22 the pronouns "your" and "you" are plural. This indicates a shift from national accusation (Amos 5:21-22) to individual invitation (Amos 5:23-24). God appealed to individuals to take **away** the burdensome **noise of their praise songs**. He would **not listen to the** accompanying **music of their harps**. Having shut His nostrils (as noted in Amos 5:21b, "stand" means "smell"), He would also stop His ears. Instead of ritual and performance, God wanted a relentless commitment to **justice** and **righteousness**. He wanted a passionate concern for the rights of the poor, a concern that would **roll on like** an ever-flowing **river... like a never-failing stream** that did not run dry. God wanted a day-to-day life of surging integrity and goodness. Only this outer evidence of inner righteousness could offer the Israelites the possibility of survival in the day of the Lord (cf. Amos 5:6, 14-15). God returned to His denunciation of Israel's religious hypocrisy by reminding them that their sacrifices and rituals had been an affront to Him throughout their history. From the very beginning their worship had been falsely directed. It was often not to Him, but to a golden calf, to the sun, moon, and stars, and to Molech and other false gods that many of them brought **sacrifices and offerings** during their **40 years in the desert** (cf. Stephen's reference to Amos 5:25-27 in Acts 7:39-43). Since then their worship had further degenerated as they began to honor "heavenly bodies" (Acts 7:42; 2 Kings 21:3-5; 23:4-5; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; Zeph. 1:5), in violation of their covenant Law (Deut. 4:19; 17:3). They **lifted up the shrine of** their false deity (their **king**), raised **the pedestal** on which their **idols** perched, and held high **the star** symbol of their **god**. The words "shrine" and "pedestal" could be translated as "Sakkuth" and "Kaiwan" (cf. NIV marg.), foreign deities associated with the starry heavens, especially the Planet Saturn. Because of this idolatry and hypocrisy in their worship, God said He would **send Israel into exile beyond Damascus**, toward the direction of Assyria (cf. Amos 4:3). The horror of "exile" was more than the ruin of defeat and the shame of capture. For Israel, it meant being removed from the land of promise, the land of God's presence. Exile, in effect, was excommunication. Yet this was the judgment of their sovereign **LORD**, the mighty Suzerain whose covenant they had spurned (see 3:13 for comments on **God Almighty**).

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The son was confident that he could get away with what was forbidden. The secret joy was suddenly interrupted by his mother's stern command: "Stop jumping on the furniture!" How did she know? She was not in the room, and she could not see what he was doing. The fun-loving boy decided to turn it into a game. The object was for him to undertake an action in one room, and his mother, in a different room, was to try to guess what he was doing. He was impressed: time after time she guessed correctly. Similar accounts have given rise to the statement that "a mother has eyes in the back of her head," or so it seems to children who are

apprehended while being happily disobedient. Mothers do not need to see jam on faces or catch hands in cookie jars to be aware of wrongdoing. Even so, fooling a parent is possible, and confessions in family gatherings many years later make for good entertainment. To attempt to fool God, however, is another matter. It makes no difference whether the inappropriate action is undertaken in the dark, on vacation, or when no one seems to be watching—because God always is. The nation of Israel was infamous for the times throughout its history when the covenant was renewed and then broken—again and again. God knew, and from his heavenly courts he sent messages through his prophets to tell the covenant people as much. Perhaps they thought God did not know or did not really care. But he did.

The year was about 760 BC when God sent Amos from Judah to the northern nation of Israel to proclaim a warning. The previous study showed how Amos pronounced God's judgment on nation after nation, and then he came to the eighth nation: Israel. Amos reminded the people there that God had chosen them from among all the nations of the earth (Amos 3:2), but their actions did not demonstrate gratitude for this divine favor. In the seven centuries since the time of Moses, Israel had violated often its commitment to God. The pattern that emerged was for God to discipline his people because he loved them, and for the nation to repent when the situation became critical (see the book of Judges for examples). Although God punished, he would always forgive, wouldn't he? Amos's mission included challenging the distorted views of the people in that regard. They regularly performed the religious rituals that were prescribed in their covenant with God, but they also worshipped other gods. This violated the first of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3). In addition, the high standards of morality that the Lord had established gave way to gross immorality. The people's arrogance about their favored status caused virtue to vanish from private and public lives. The opening words of the Charles Dickens classic *A Tale of Two Cities* accurately describe the situation in Israel: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. What the people saw as "the best of times" God saw as "the worst of times." He was making his final appeal to a favored nation. Historical hindsight tells us that captivity at the hands of the Assyrians was less than 40 years away by the time Amos preached.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God Desires Godliness (Amos 5:14-15)

14 Seek good and not evil, That you may live; So the Lord God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken.

15 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.

Seek good and not evil (14)

Seek good by being an example (Titus 2:7)

7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness

Seeking good is profitable for everyone (Titus 3:8)

8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Seeking good as part of being productive in our daily life (Titus 3:14)

14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

Seeking good causes others to glorify God (1 Peter 2:12)

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Seeking good is sharing with others (Heb 13:16)

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Establish justice (15)

Justice that comes from righteous wisdom (Ps 37:30)

30 The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.

Justice that comes from the plans of the righteous (Prov 12:5)

5 The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful.

Justice that comes from doing right (Prov 21:3)

3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

Justice that comes from God to His chosen ones (Luke 18:7)

7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

God Warns of Coming Judgment (Amos 5:18-20)

18 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.

19 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!

20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

Judgment at the day of the Lord (18)

The Day of the Lord is a day of tumult and terror for those who are not prepared (Isaiah 22:5)

5 The Lord, the Lord Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains.

On the day of the Lord all His holy people will be glorified (2 Thess 1:10)

10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The Day of the Lord is near (Zeph. 1:7-9)

7 Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. 8 On the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. 9 On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.

The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thes. 5:2)

2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Study and apply word so that we will persevere until the day of the Lord (Phil 2:16)

16 as you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

Judgment that is not expected (19)

Not expected by scoffers (2 Peter 3:3-4)

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Not expected by the religious rulers (Jer 5:12)

12 They have lied about the Lord; they said, "He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.

Not expected by false teachers (2 Thess 2:1-3)

we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

Judgment of the darkness of sin (20)

A judgment that will bring everything to light (1 Cor 4:5)

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

A judgment that judges men's secrets (Rom 2:16)

16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

A judgment of the nations (Matt 25:31-33)

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

A judgment that judges what was done in the body (2 Cor 5:10)

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

God Is Not Fooled By False Worship (Amos 5:21-27)

21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

24 But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.

25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"

26 You also carried Sikkuth your king And Chiun, your idols, The star of your gods, Which you made for yourselves.

27 Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus," Says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.

False gatherings (21)

False gatherings where the people do not listen and are against God (Lev 26:27-31)

27 "If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, 28 then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. 29 You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. 31 I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.

False gatherings that trample in God's House (Isa 1:12)

12 When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

False gatherings that seek followers in evil ways (Matt 23:15-16)

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

False offerings (22)

False offerings from the wicked (Prov 21:27)

27 The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable — how much more so when brought with evil intent!

False offerings from people who carry out ungodly scheme (Jer 6:19-20)

19 Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law. 20 What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me."

False offerings from the disobedient (Hos 8:12-13)

12 I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien. 13 They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat, but the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins:

False offerings from the sinful (Mal 2:11-12)

11 Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. 12 As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty.

False music and singing (23)

False music and singing from the self-indulgent (Amos 6:5-7)

5 You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. 6 You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. 7 Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.

False music and singing from those who mistreat the poor and needy (Amos 8:3-4)

3 "In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies — flung everywhere! Silence!" 4 Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land,

False music and singing from those who practice cheating and seeking dishonest gain (Amos 8:6-10)

6 buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. 7 The Lord has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done. 8 "Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt. 9 "In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. 10 I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.

False righteousness (24-25)

Righteousness that is false because it did not include mercy (Hos 6:6)

6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Righteousness that is false because of it being cast to the ground (Amos 5:7)

7 You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground

Righteousness that is false because of trying to establish it on our own (Rom 10:3)

3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

False idolatry (26)

False idolatry is exchanging God's truth for a lie (Rom 1:25)

25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

False idolatry must be avoided (1 Cor 10:14)

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

False idolatry is participating with demons (1 Cor 10:18-22)

18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Punishment of false worship (27)

Worship with rules of man (Matt 15:9)

9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

Worship that is not done in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24)

21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Worship by those that do not keep a tight rein on the tongue (James 1:26)

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Worship of idols (Ps 97:7)

7 All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols — worship him, all you gods!

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from David Guzik

A. Seek the LORD in a time of impending judgment.

1. (1-3) Coming exile and captivity.

Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: 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. 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.

a. **The virgin of Israel has fallen:** Amos sees Israel as a tragic young woman who is **fallen** and **forsaken**, no one coming to her aid. In rebelling against God, Israel is as helpless as a young woman among violent men.

i. **Virgin** depicts the vulnerability of Israel and the special sadness that accompanies her death, as though she should have had a whole life of live and fruitfulness before her. (Hubbard)

b. **The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left:** Amos predicts that things will be so bad for Israel that when the enemy comes, a city that would have before sent out **a thousand** soldiers will now only send out **a hundred**. Only a handful of ragged, war-weary men will be left of Israel's proud army. (McComiskey)

2. (4-9) An invitation to seek the LORD.

For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: Seek Me and live; 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. 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; you who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth! 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. He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress.

a. **Seek Me and live:** When Israel was ripe for judgment, the key to survival was to simply **seek** the LORD. However, we can't **seek** the Lord unless we **do not seek** places of disobedience and self-will (exemplified by **Bethel** and **Gilgal** and other rival centers of worship).

i. **Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba** were once places associated with great privilege and spiritual heritage. **Bethel** was the place where God met Jacob (Genesis 28:11-19, Genesis 35:1-7). **Gilgal** was the place where Israel's spiritual reproach was rolled away in the days of Joshua (Joshua 5:1-12). **Beersheba** was connected to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 21:22-33, 26:23-33, 46:1-5). Now these were places of *vain, empty worship*.

ii. There is a play on words in the phrase **for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing**. It doesn't come across in the English translation, but in Hebrew it is a clever pun.

b. **You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest:** Amos again confronts the corrupt legal system of Israel. **Justice** had been thoroughly spoiled, and **righteousness** was as good as dead.

c. **He made the Pleiades and Orion:** Amos explains *why* God is worthy to be sought, and *why* He can deliver Israel from their coming doom. He can do it because He is the God mighty and wise enough to make and uphold the starry constellations in the sky, and to manage the creation.

i. This means that God is strong enough to save, but also plenty strong enough to bring judgment (**He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress**). If the **strong** and the **fortress** can't stand before God's power, no one can.

3. (10-15) The cause, the curse, and the cure.

They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly. 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. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate. Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. 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.

a. **They hate the one who rebukes in the gate:** Amos tells us the *cause* of coming judgment - the terrible way that the people of Israel treat one another, especially how the strong take advantage of the weak. The weak has no voice **in the gate**, is robbed by oppressive **taxes**. The rich take advantage with **bribes** and pay off the system to drive **the poor from justice**.

i. The **gate** was the law-court in ancient cities. Israel's courts were so corrupt that they silenced the poor and righteous. The effect of this culture of injustice was that **the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time** - godly and righteous people did not speak out either fearing retribution or knowing it would do no good.

ii. Judicial decisions for each community were taken at the gate of the city, where the heads of families and other elders assembled to hear witnesses, arbitrate disputes, decide controversies and generally dispense justice. The space on the inner side of the gate together with rooms or alcoves in the gate area itself were used as courtrooms. (Hubbard)

b. **Though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them:** Amos tells us Gods *curse* for Israels wickedness. Though the wicked in Israel gained fancy **houses** and **vineyards** from their oppression of the poor and railroading of justice, the gains were only temporary. God will evict them from their dishonestly gained **houses** and **vineyards**.

c. **Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you:** Amos proclaims Gods *cure* for Israels sin. They must begin to simply **seek good and not evil**. They must transform their corrupt courts and **establish justice in the gates**.

B. Wailing and woe upon Israel.

1. (16-20) Wailing and woe in the day of the LORD.

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. In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you, says the LORD. 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?

a. **They shall call the farmer to mourning, and skillful lamenters to wailing:** This refers to the Jewish practice of hiring professional mourners to wail at a funeral. Amos describes judgment so widespread that there was a shortage of **skillful lamenters**, so they had to hire **the farmer to mourning**.

i. Because the Prophet Amos as a farmer, he often relates the judgments of God to how they affect the farmers of Israel.

b. **For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light:** In their religious ritualism, the people of Israel still claimed they longed for **the day of the LORD**. Amos rightly warns them that they don't know what they are asking for because **the day of the LORD** will bring them judgment, not mercy. They will end up worse off than before, it **will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him!**

i. The illustrative parable makes it clear that darkness and light do not speak here of wickedness and righteousness but of disaster and safety. (Hubbard)

2. (21-27) Israels religious ceremonies will not save them from the wailing and woe to come.

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. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. 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. Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

a. **I hate, I despise your feast days:** This would have amazed - and offended - those in Israel who heard Amos say this. They told themselves that they were really honoring God and pleasing Him by their observance of the **feasts** and **sacred assemblies**, but God was offended by their religious ceremonialism, disconnected from the heart and justice towards one another.

i. Amos expresses the same idea Jesus did in Matthew 5:23-24: *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* Israel thought their **feast days**, their **sacred assemblies**, their **burnt offerings**, their **grain offerings**, their **peace offerings**, and their **songs** were nothing as long as there was no **justice** or **righteousness** in their dealings with others.

b. **Let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream:** It is easy to separate our religious ceremonies from the way we treat others, and to think that God should be happy if we give Him His due without regard to **justice** and **righteousness** towards others. God won't have it. He says, Keep your annoying religious ceremonies, and **let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.**

i. A momentary flow of justice and righteousness will not do; these virtues are to keep on in the social order like a stream that does not dry up with summer heat. (McComiskey)

c. **You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves:** Apparently, these were pagan deities Israel brought with them from Egypt into the Promised Land. God reminds Israel that though they sacrificed to Him in the wilderness, they also hung on to their idolatry. It didn't please Him then and it doesn't please Him now.

i. The NIV translates **Sikkuth** and **Chiun** as *shrine* and *pedestal*. It's simply a difficult passage to translate. The Septuagint has *Moloch* for **Sikkuth** and *Rephan* (an Egyptian deity related to the planet Saturn) for **Chiun**.

d. **Therefore I will send you into captivity:** Israel's extreme sin merited an extreme correction, nothing less than exile and **captivity**.

(Adapted from URL:<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/view.cgi?bk=29&ch=5>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Perhaps you've heard this old saying: Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. That's often a good axiom to adopt regarding our dealings with others. But God does not take such a position toward us, since he cannot be fooled even once. How amazing to see, then, people living as if God can be fooled or at least not caring about what they are doing. Taking advantage of others is nothing new; it happens often today. Elaborate rationalizations are created to justify such behavior. Such rationalizing may fool others, but it never fools God. The genuine follower of Christ pursues good for all, loves to do so, and actively seeks opportunities in that regard. Considering all that God has done for us, how can it be otherwise?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. The Lord's special presence among people is determined by their commitment to Him and His standards (Amos 5:14-15)
2. To presume upon God's mercy is to guarantee sorrow in the Day of Judgment (vss. 18-20)
3. Religious practice is detestable to God if it is not accompanied by just conduct (vss. 21-22)
4. Words of praise cannot offset a lack of justice (vss. 23-24)
5. Those who refuse to honor God inevitably fall into idolatry (vss. 25-26)
6. God's kindness and patience toward us does not preclude judgment if we continue in sin (vs. 27)